



**BLUE SHIELD**

25th anniversary

Protecting Heritage in Crisis

**SPECIAL NEWSLETTER**

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## Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to write this short introduction to this edition of the Newsletter of the Czech national committee of the Blue Shield prepared in relation to the Blue Shield General Assembly. The General Assembly had been, of course, scheduled to take place in Prague in November 2020, preceded by a three-day training course for national committees of the Blue Shield. As we know, because of the Global Pandemic, that 'face-to-face' or 'in-person' event had to be replaced entirely by a 'virtual' or 'on-line-only' event that took place in August 2020. I find it fascinating how we have all learnt a new lexicon of terminology allowing us to understand the Covid-19 world in which we now live. I cannot let this opportunity pass without passing on my enormous gratitude to Jana Souckova and her team in the Czech Republic for putting so much effort into preparing an exciting programme for the General Assembly and for doing such a wonderful job in identifying venues and support for both the General Assembly and training course. I very much hope that we will be able to visit you in the not too distant future.

We were required to hold a General Assembly in 2020 under Dutch Law – which governs the Articles of Association of the Blue Shield Movement. That Law has now changed and from this year we must hold a General Assembly every twelve months. Out of necessity, the 2021 General Assembly will be a fully virtual one. However, although yet to be finally decided by the Board, I think we may take advantage of our new virtual skills and only hold an in-person General Assembly every three year – to coincide with the date when a new Board must be elected. Such action cuts down on costs considerably, simultaneously (as I write this a few days before the COP-26 Conference in Glasgow) significantly reducing the Movement's carbon footprint.

The above planned three-day training course has also been moved on-line and by the time we meet in our virtual world for the General Assembly, national committees will have completed Block 1 of the course. Two further Blocks will be delivered in the first half of 2022. While this format loses the face-to-face interaction that has always been a major part of such training events, the significant benefit is that we hope that many more people will be able to follow the training.

We had planned to produce this newsletter in hard copy for participants at the General Assembly, but its on-line availability will now make the articles far more widely available. The

articles show how some colleagues in the Czech Republic work to protect cultural property and they make fascinating reading. On a personal level, I reflect on the climate crisis and realise that our work to protect cultural property for armed conflict and natural and/or human-made disaster is becoming even more relevant. Even if, and sadly I see little likelihood of this happening, the world's leaders meeting in Glasgow commit to *and deliver* measures that will directly address the rise in temperature that drives climate change, its influence is already being felt and will inevitably have a major impact of cultural property. And with climate change will, equally inevitably I fear, come an increase in armed conflict. We, and our successors will not lack work to do.

I hope those of you who have taken part enjoyed Block 1 of the training course and I hope you all participate in the virtual General Assembly and 25th Anniversary Conference.

My best wishes

**Peter G. Stone**  
**President The Blue Shield**

# Cultural Property Protection and the work of the Blue Shield

**Peter G. Stone<sup>1</sup>**

**President The Blue Shield**

## Introduction

As heritage professionals we all know why the protection of cultural property (CP) is important. But not everyone else shares our views: for thousands of years armies were often paid by allowing them to loot indiscriminately and military commanders gave little attention to trying to protect CP. Equally, as the humanitarian sector grew during the last century a clear decision was made to distinguish between the protection of people and their CP.

However, for at least 2,000 years military theorists have argued that allowing CP to be destroyed is bad military practice as it alienates defeated populations and frequently provides the first reason for renewed conflict. Slowly, over the centuries, CP protection (CPP)<sup>2</sup> was introduced into what we now refer to as international humanitarian law (IHL) culminating in the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954HC)<sup>3</sup> that followed the devastation of much European CP in the two World Wars. Together with its two Protocols of 1954 and 1999 the 1954HC is the primary piece of international legislation regarding CPP. In the Second World War (WW2) the 'Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives' Unit was created in Allied forces and these 'Monuments Men (and women)' made enormous efforts to protect CP in all theatres of the war.<sup>4</sup>

Sadly, the Unit was disbanded at the end of the war and little was done regarding CPP until after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Many of the problems faced by Coalition forces in 2003 stemmed from

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Stone is the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Property Protection & Peace at Newcastle University, UK. He is responsible for the choice and presentation of views contained in this article and for opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organisation. He was elected as the President of the Blue Shield in August 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Such protection is, following the terminology of the 1954 Hague Convention, usually referred to as 'cultural property protection' or CPP and this term is used in this contribution.

<sup>3</sup> <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=2A07EB0EAA5CECACCC12563>

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas, L, 1995. *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War*, New York, Vintage Books

the political decision to drastically limit the number of troops deployed and the failure of those planning the invasion to understand the importance of CP to local communities, and thus to insist on enough troops to ensure its protection.<sup>5</sup> A further, uncomfortable, contributing factor was the loss of the close relationship between the military and heritage communities that had existed during WW2. If the military was unaware of the importance of CP some blame needs to be placed with the heritage community. Attempting to raise such awareness a few months before the invasion was too little, too late.<sup>6</sup> This overlapped with the heritage community's failure over the same period to position CPP as a key component of the humanitarian sector. The Blue Shield exists to rekindle, develop, influence, and maintain this relationship with the military and across the humanitarian sector.

## The Blue Shield

The Blue Shield<sup>7</sup> was created in 1996 by the 'founding four (FF)' heritage organisations (for Archives, Museums, Monuments and Sites, and Libraries) and restructured in 2016. It is an International NGO, frequently referred to as the 'cultural equivalent' of the Red Cross, established under Dutch Law, dedicated to the protection of heritage in the event of armed conflict and following natural/human-made disasters and currently has some 30 national committees (NCs). We do not yet claim such an equivalence with the Red Cross but rather suggest we are building the foundations where such a reality will be possible in the next 50 or 100 years. The Blue Shield is an independent, impartial, neutral, professional, organisation that respects cultural identity and understands the need to build partnerships to deliver good CPP. The NCs and FF elect a President and four individuals to serve on its Board alongside four representatives of the FF. This Board and a small Secretariat, currently based at and funded by Newcastle University, UK through its UNESCO Chair in Cultural Property Protection and Peace, are together referred to as Blue Shield International, or BSI. The Blue Shield is:

*"committed to the protection of the world's cultural property and is concerned with the protection of cultural and natural heritage, tangible and intangible, in the event of armed conflict, natural- or human-made disaster".*

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: the American military adventure in Iraq*, (London, Penguin 2006); Lawrence Rothfield, *The Rape of Mesopotamia: Behind the looting of the Iraq museum*. (Chicago, University Press 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Stone, P G, 2005. 'The identification and protection of cultural heritage during the Iraq conflict: a peculiarly English tale'. *Antiquity* 79: 933–43.

<sup>7</sup> <https://theblueshield.org/>

The Blue Shield always prioritises the protection of people over the protection of their CP but argues that the two are intertwined and almost indivisible. CP is the tangible and intangible link to the past that helps to provide individuals and communities with a sense of place, identity, and belonging, giving people a reason for living. It defines who they are (and of course, and not infrequently contentiously, who they are not); who belongs, and who does not; who is included, and who excluded. In recent conflicts, e.g., in the former Yugoslavia and the Middle East, the heritage of particular communities has been specifically targeted alongside attacks on civilians in attempts to not only eradicate a population but also evidence of their existence by destroying their tangible CP. If we are to protect people during armed conflict, we must acknowledge that we also need to protect their CP.

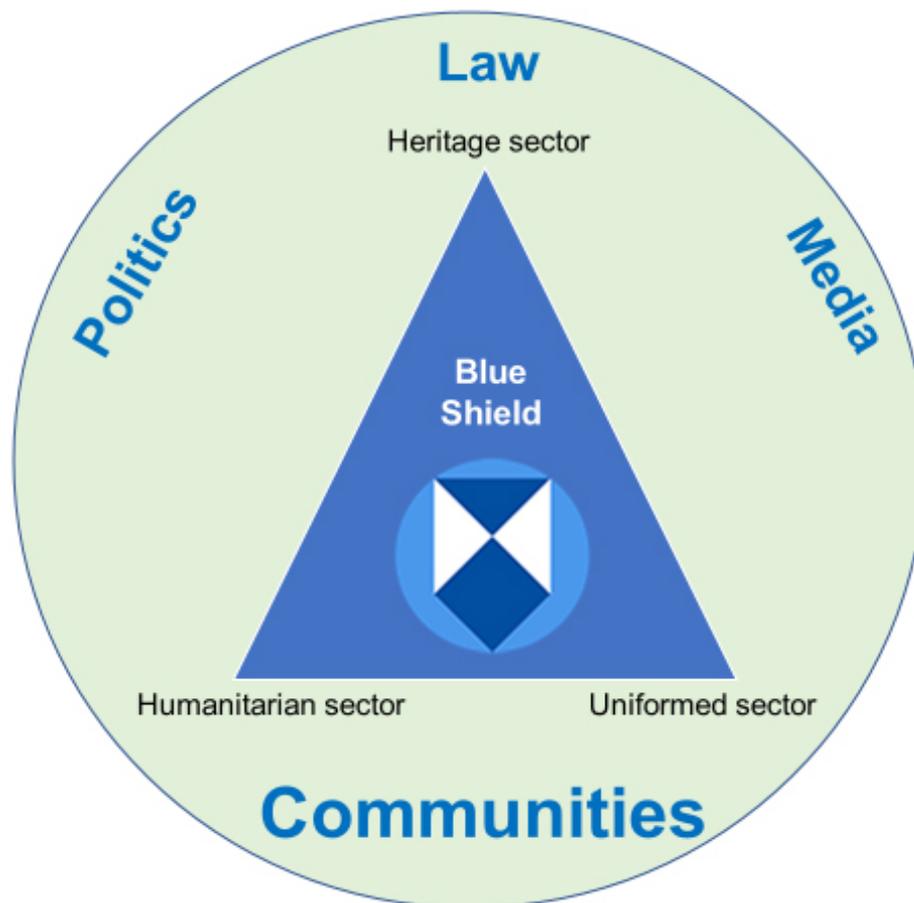
BSI co-ordinates and sets the framework within which national committees act and itself delivers work internationally. While the primary context for the Blue Shield is IHL, and, in particular the 1954HC, it works more generally within the context of the UN and UNESCO's cultural conventions and wider cultural protection strategy. It is also informed by international initiatives such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

### **The need for partnership**

The issue is not unique to the heritage sector. Allowing, or inadvertently or unnecessarily causing, the destruction of CP can undermine military mission success or post conflict/disaster humanitarian work, whereas incorporating CPP can help achieve successful outcomes. Good CPP requires a partnership to be built between the heritage, uniformed (including armed forces, police, customs, and emergency services), and humanitarian sectors working to the same overarching goal of providing the environment for the growth of sustainable, peaceful, communities.

The Blue Shield recently signed formal partnership agreements with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and NATO as early steps in co-ordinating and working with a range of humanitarian and military organisations to integrate CPP into their work. These 'professional' sectors must acknowledge that they work within, and are constrained by, a context set by politicians, the law, and the media. This context is also inhabited by varied international, national, and local (and, on occasion, indigenous) communities. This relationship can be visualised as a triangle with the three sectors at its points and the Blue Shield as the space

within, where the sectors can meet and develop an understanding of the value and importance of CPP, surrounded by its wider context which influences and constrains the actions of those within the triangle:



There are four key points to understand if this visualisation is to be successful. First, the dialogue in the triangle must be addressed in a spirit of mutually beneficial diplomacy and practice. Second, the heritage sector needs to accept that purely heritage opinions and aspirations may not be of immediate relevance to the other sectors: CPP needs to be presented in such a way as it fits the existing agendas of the other sectors and not be presented as an irrelevant, additional responsibility. In this way CPP can be presented as an intertwined, contributory activity. Third, the heritage sector must acknowledge the constraints under which the military and humanitarians work. Finally, to be effective, a partnership must be developed *in peacetime*, working at the long, medium, and short term.

BSI has broken down the organisation's work into six areas of activity (Co-ordination; Policy Development; Proactive protection & risk preparedness; Education, training, & capacity building; Emergency response; and Post-disaster recovery & long-term support) to give a framework

within which BSI and NCs work, and which present a coherent agenda for the organisation. NCs are encouraged to prioritise these six areas to suit their own national situation through a standardised annual planning and reporting cycle<sup>8</sup>. To help focus these areas of activity BSI has also identified eight particular threats to heritage in armed conflict (Lack of planning; Lack of military/humanitarian awareness; Collateral and accidental damage; Specific [or deliberate] targeting; Looting, pillage, and spoils of war; Deliberate reuse of sites; Enforced neglect; and Development) that should significantly lower the overall risk to heritage in conflict<sup>9</sup>.

A lot has been done since 2016. We have helped train military personnel from countries including Austria, Australia, Fiji, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the UK, and the USA. Current activity includes [a] raising awareness of our work through publications, lectures, and other media work; [b] working with NATO on a standardised template for CP that should not be damaged during conflict, contributing to NATO exercises by introducing CPP issues, and supporting the development of a NATO CPP Policy; [c] continuing training, first started in 2013, with the UN Peacekeeping deployment in Lebanon, the Lebanese Armed Forces, and the Directorate General of Antiquities that was recently tested in reality following the 2020 explosion in Beirut; [d] working with the UN Peacekeeping School in Ireland to develop a training course on CPP specifically designed for peacekeepers; [e] building the capacity of national committees; and [f] developing working relations with the Humanitarian sector.

To make the next step we need to find funding to establish a small central team to build on the work of the current 1.5 staff funded by Newcastle University. Such a team would give us significantly increased training and influencing capability in our work with politicians, international agencies, the military, and humanitarian sectors. We want all countries to ratify and, crucially, *properly* implement 1954HC and Protocols and for all States Parties to the 1954HC to have a national committee of Blue Shield. We need to build and transmit a coherent, effective message that CPP is not a distraction, but a responsibility and a potential contributor to mission success for all potential partners as it helps to build stable, sustainable, peaceful communities. And yes, we will become the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross as CP is too important to human society not to be better protected.

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<sup>8</sup> [International Board Activities – Blue Shield International \(theblueshield.org\)](https://www.theblueshield.org/)

<sup>9</sup> [Threats to Heritage – Blue Shield International \(theblueshield.org\)](https://www.theblueshield.org/)

# The Value of the Blue Shield from the Point of View of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic

**Vlastislav Ouroda**

**Deputy Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic**

The preservation of cultural heritage is one of the two core activities of the Ministry of Culture. Good care for the material documents of the past begins with ensuring their security in the broadest sense, i.e. adequate climatic conditions as well as fire safety and protection against theft.

Historical monuments and museum collections are fundamentally important constituents of our cultural identity. They enable continuous learning about who we are, and what our place and contribution are in the cultural diversity of a dynamically changing world. This diversity of cultures and nations on a global scale is essentially reflected in the very diverse ways of organizing the preservation of cultural heritage, according to its significance for individual cultures and communities of citizens at national levels. The role of transnational and especially global activities seeking to find common denominators in these complex issues is therefore increasingly important.

The Blue Shield International is one of the most important overarching institutions in the preservation of cultural heritage. That is why I was very pleased when Ms Jana Součková, the Chair of the Czech Committee of the Blue Shield, approached me in 2019 to inform me about the possibility of organizing a general assembly of this non-governmental organization in the Czech Republic and to ask for support from the Ministry of Culture. Thanks to the cooperation of all participants, including the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, everything necessary could be provided. But then, not just culture, but our entire society was paralyzed by the pandemic with all the ensuing restrictions. Although this complication has heavily impacted international cooperation in the preservation of historical monuments and museums, it cannot paralyze it permanently. Sophisticated communication technologies have made it possible to stay in touch in times of confinement. I believe that personal experts' meetings will gradually be held more frequently now, and I consider them to be extremely important for consolidating and improving cooperation on a global scale.

The Blue Shield is an essential platform for sharing good practices in the preservation of cultural heritage. It enables the international community to better face the attacks on material evidence of the cultural past, which we have unfortunately witnessed even in recent decades. Only coordinated joint efforts can mitigate the effects of disasters such as those that affected cultural heritage in Iraq or Syria. However, even cultural institutions and monuments in advanced and rich democracies are not completely safe from manifestations of extremism or just madness, as was the case, for example, with arson attacks on churches in Norway; and this country recently experienced a similar attack in Guty.

No matter how much any of us would like to have a calmer world without sudden crises, it is certain that good prevention and rapid intervention aiming to protect cultural heritage in critical situations will remain much needed. I therefore hope the Blue Shield will continue to make a vital contribution to the coordination of non-governmental organizations, exploiting the potential of universities and other specialist workplaces. Such professional background is absolutely necessary for successful steps from the position of governmental structures and the international community as a whole.

Let me thank you for all your efforts and express my hope that together we can do the maximum for the preservation of our historical monuments and institutions, as well as for the mitigation of the effects of future crises, if they cannot be prevented.

# The Blue Shield Celebrates Its 25th Anniversary

**Jana Součková**

**Chairwoman Czech Committee of The Blue Shield**

June 2021 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the international organization Blue Shield. At first, it was not actually an organization, but rather an association of four international memory organizations – ICOM, the International Council of Museums, ICOMOS for monuments, ICA for archives, and IFLA, the Federation of Libraries. What were these two and a half decades like? Difficult. As a matter of fact, the association grew out of the harsh conditions of the Balkan wars. I still remember the depressive atmosphere in which the ICOM Ethics Committee reported on their inspection trip to the Balkans, namely about the rules of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property not being respected, and the famous blue and white cross even becoming a target for armed attacks. These were not the first cases, and unfortunately not the last, either. Even in later years – remember Afghanistan, Mali, Iraq, Syria – cultural facilities were used for military bases or destroyed, and cultural objects sold to finance the fighting. In all those places opponents were aiming at cultural monuments, destroying with them the memory of a nation in order to break its pride, the awareness of mutuality, to sweep the nation away as an entity.

Back then, the alarming report led to heated discussions at both the ICOM assembly and in the lobby, and the national committees did not want just to sit back and watch. In informal debates, they sought a structure that would enable cooperation under often very different types of national legislations. At a meeting in Turin in 2004, supported by the participation of representatives of all four international founding organizations, they presented a public statement with their intentions and competences. In addition to the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflicts, as defined by the Hague Convention, they included in their principles all the conventions and recommendations of UNESCO concerning the preservation of cultural heritage and natural environment threatened by human failure or natural disaster. The consequences of the military operation in Iraq were equally reflected. National Committees have gradually found their role in follow-up and assistance, as well as in preventive measures.

The structure was formed gradually and not easily. The National Committees met again in The Hague in 2006 to agree, under the leadership of Leif Parelli, on the establishment of a free grouping – the Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield. The legally enshrined form originated again in The Hague, in 2008, headed by Karl von Habsburg-Lothringen, and lasted until 2016, when both groups, the International Committee of the Blue Shield and the Association of National Committees, agreed on a single statute establishing the Blue Shield International, with its official seat in The Hague and operating under Dutch law. The final revised text was to be discussed at the General Assembly of the organization in Prague in 2020, but the pandemic arrived and the General Assembly was shifted to September 2021. This date did not come up either, as many of National Committees are in the countries most affected by the pandemic. The meeting will finally take place online in December this year. We therefore cannot hear the contributions, but we can read them here, at least some of them. The preceding article by the current president, Professor Peter Stone, offers a view of the united organization in a broader scope and perspective.

The Czech Committee of the Blue Shield is one of the founding National Committees. It was officially established in April 2000, initially along the lines of the international organization, i. e. composed of the Czech Committees for archives, libraries, ICOM and ICOMOS, but was soon expanded by other institutions in the field – the Czech Association of Museums and Galleries, the Council of Galleries, the National Heritage Institute, the National Film Archive, and later the Department of Archive Administration of the Ministry of the Interior as well. The Czech Committee actively participated in all the aforementioned conferences and proved the benefits of coordinating all memory organizations in the evaluation of remedial measures after the floods in Moravia in 1997, and then during the floods in 2002. The experience acquired was reflected in a survey on the preparedness of Czech memory institutions to deal with emergencies, carried out in 2003 in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic; the results of the survey were further disseminated through the various topics of seminars organized every year, in the preparation of emergency plans, in two editions of a manual, the First Aid and Rescue Activity Wheel and its recent modification for the library sector. The Czech Committee currently focuses on the prevention of cyber threats.



**The floods in 2002, the flooded buildings of Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky near Prague**

The history of the Czech Committee of the Blue Shield has been described in more detail in recent years, including in the pages of the Newsletter of the Czech Association of Museums and Galleries. That is why this thematic issue offers space for a more profound presentation of the goals and activities of the individual signatories of the Czech Committee, because each of their fields of activity necessitates a specific approach and has its own requirements.

# Protecting Cultural Heritage with Technological Protection Systems

**Pavel Jirásek**  
**ICOM Czechia**

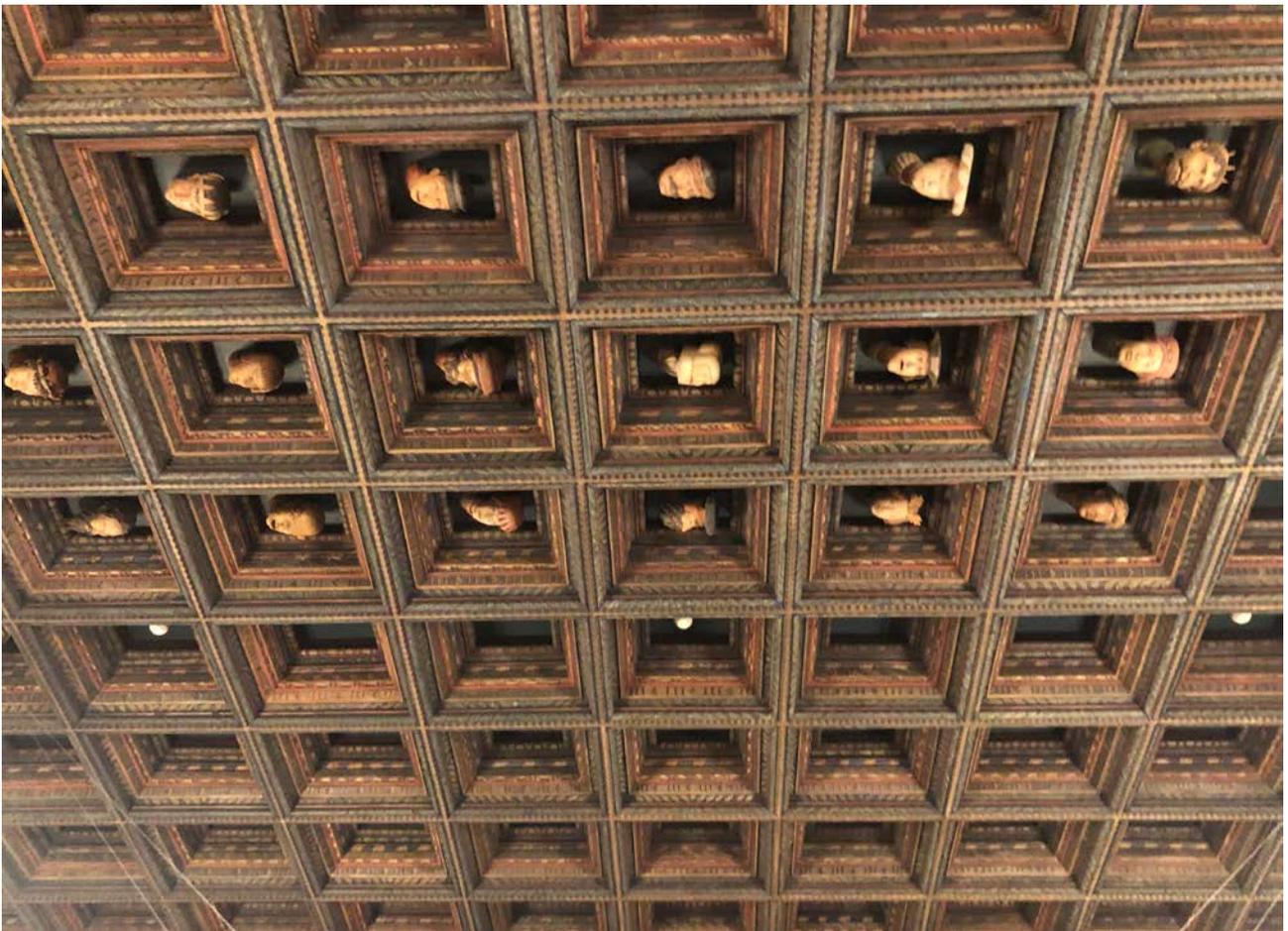
In addition to the legislative and physical protection of cultural heritage, there is a less visible yet extremely effective way of preserving cultural heritage: the ever more frequently used technological protection systems. In recent years, they have undergone a rapid development, both in terms of meeting safety and functional requirements and being user friendly. In addition to integration functions and the related miniaturization of technological elements, their reliability and utility value are increasing. Thanks to an ever-increasing share of optical transmission paths, structured cabling in local networks and new mobile networks enabling fast data transmission, there has been a gradual change of user behaviour and perception of these systems that increasingly affect standard operation of cultural institutions. But are there reasons to apply technological protection systems in times of military conflicts, large-scale natural disasters and civil wars, which are the main focus of the Blue Shield's activities?

The answer is yes. Unfortunately, not in direct and targeted attacks on the cultural icons of the enemy that occurred e. g. during the war in Bosnia, in the Taliban destruction in Afghanistan or the Islamists in Mali. However, they can significantly affect the extent of the side effects of violent conflicts – looting, theft in museums or historical buildings, plundering of archaeological sites.

An early warning from a perimeter protection or intruder detection and alarm system can significantly reduce the consequences of unexpected intrusion into buildings. In recent years, the capacity of security control panel inputs for detection elements has significantly increased, together with an increase in the number of possible subsystems into which the installation can be divided. Therefore, the systems are no longer in danger of hitting full capacity. It is no longer necessary to equip large museum buildings with several control units. This greatly reduces problems in their control and mutual cooperation in controlling the connected subsystems. Outdoor perimeter detection systems are widely used to guard large areas. In the field of cultural

heritage, these are mainly archaeological sites, open-air museums and also, for example, parks and gardens with outdoor exhibits. The systems are able to detect, classify and locate any threatening event in the vicinity of the monitored object.

Fires are often accompanying phenomena of conflicts. Their early detection is very important. Significant improvement in the speed and reliability of fire detection can be observed in recent years. Standard electrical fire alarm systems only react when a large amount of smoke accumulates in the room or when the temperature rapidly rises. Modern detectors using sophisticated mathematical algorithms to analyse the waveform in the environment and adjustable parameters corresponding exactly to the installation environment are able to detect a fire at an early stage without the risk of false alarms. This saves valuable minutes, which determines whether the fire can be extinguished or whether it will spread.



**Renaissance ceiling with installed smoke detectors in Wawel Royal Castle**

Fixed extinguishing systems are an extremely valuable contribution to fire protection. In recent years, especially in public spaces, there has been a return to water as the most effective extinguishing medium.

CCTV systems have increasingly been used in the protection against various types of threats. Thanks to advanced methods of video analysis based on artificial intelligence, they can also fulfil the role of intruder detection systems, with the cameras serving as detectors and the system actively evaluating security situations. A significant trend is the intervention of CCTV systems in the field of fire detection: The signal from the cameras is evaluated by a special software that can perceive the occurrence of fire and related smoke on the basis of other similar situations. The built-in video analysis functions of the cameras serve to detect movement, the crossing of a line, entry to / exit from the monitored area, smoke or flame detection, as well as for instance the detection of an abandoned object or face recognition.



**Modern dustproof showcases with installed technical protection systems in exhibition called "Crown Treasury and Armoury"**

The application of technological protection systems in cultural institutions is dealt with by the technical staff. However, security is often perceived merely as a necessary evil. Although this approach may be understandable to some extent, it is fundamentally wrong. When designing a security system concept, it is necessary to involve the whole range of experts of the given cultural institution in the preparatory work, preferably with no exceptions. Not only the technical staff, but also curators and registrars of collections, conservators, finance managers, exhibition professionals, etc. The work of such a multidisciplinary team will help ensure that the resulting security system will not only protect, but also facilitate their demanding and responsible work by reflecting their needs. To prevent wider threats to cultural heritage institutions, it is necessary to set rules for cooperation with the emergency services, especially the police and the army, including joint training exercises.

# Protection of Library Collections in the Czech Republic

## Making use of the experience from assessing the physical condition of library collections and prevention of damage to collections during natural disasters and catastrophes

**Petra Vávrová**

**National Library of Czech Republic**

### Introduction

Readers and researchers increasingly use digital resources and services based on them, and this situation will certainly gain in importance in the near future. In connection with the digitization of library collections and the ever-increasing frequency of cyber-attacks, the importance and role of preserving the original library collections in good physical condition has changed. In the future, they will serve as reference collections, used for identification and authentication of digital copies, as well as a permanent and long-term backup intended for preservation. The National Library of the Czech Republic, together with the Moravian Library in Brno and other libraries and archives of the Czech Republic are institutions that have legally binding duties in the field of document collection management, archival functions and permanent preservation of library collections (according to Act No. 257/2001 Coll.). Good knowledge and detailed assessment of the physical condition of the enormous number of specimens in library collections is a major prerequisite for their physical preservation for future generations.

### Maintaining the physical condition of library collections

The permanent physical preservation of library collections for future generations requires utmost care as well as the cooperation of collection managers with collection preservation staff. The aim of all efforts and activities in this field is to preserve exemplars for future generations in an unchanged form. To this day, a great deal of effort by many experts, and considerable financial resources have been invested in order to stop or at least slow the processes of degradation and natural ageing of library collections. One library objective is to preserve collections as authentically as possible, i. e. as they were made, in their original form and with original materials, with the minimum possible restoration and conservation interventions. Measures falling within the area of so-called preventive conservation are much more collection-

friendly, and also significantly cheaper than any subsequent time- and money-consuming conservation and restoration processes.

### **Assessment of the physical condition of collections**

A database application for assessing the physical condition of library collections, named “The Central Knowledge Base of the Digitization Register” used for survey of library collections, has been developed in the National Library of the Czech Republic in cooperation with experts from the Moravian Library and the Scientific Library in Olomouc. It makes it possible to record selected physical parameters of library units, work with them and use them to improve the care of library collections. This database is a suitable tool for effective selection of specimens for the preservation method of mass deacidification, and is also directly interconnected with another tool developed by the National Library of the Czech Republic – the Register of Deacidified Documents.

The Restoration Information System *ResIS* has been developed for historical collections; taking a different approach, it enables communication between custodians and restorers concerning a given book, manuscript, etc. It contains a detailed overview of the physical condition, restoration interventions, and other detailed information.

The knowledge database is used for detailed research of library collections, which results in a detailed overview of the actual physical condition of individual specimens. The results of such a detailed survey make it possible to assess the types of damage, diagnose the causes and devise possible solutions (repairs, conservation and restoration interventions, use of protective packaging, deacidification, reformatting).

### **Dealing with accidents and natural disasters in libraries**

Preparedness for natural disasters and catastrophes should be considered when dealing with the preservation of library collections. In 2019, we prepared what we call a First aid and rescue wheel for library collections, presenting the steps to take in the first 48 hours after various kinds of catastrophes or natural disasters, depending on the type of library collections or the material thereof. **The fact that the first 48 hours are critical is crucial for timely and effective preservation care.**

Disaster Preparedness Kits, First Aid Kits, i.e. packages with basic equipment to reduce the impact of a natural disaster, are available abroad for both library collections and cultural heritage in general, as well as for the staff rescuing affected buildings. A more accessible version has been prepared for the needs of Czech institutions and the packaging of the new “first aid kit” has been adjusted.

## Conclusion

The physical condition assessment is aimed at ensuring more efficient and better care of library collections. We have described the tools that can be used to record the physical condition of library collections and individual specimens, with respect to the material and date of origin of the collections. This leads to more effective and specific prioritization for the care of collections. As to the set of measures intended to reduce the damage to collections or their total loss, high priority is given to the planning of measures in case of natural disasters and accidents, as well as preparedness for such emergency situations. The aim of all these methods and efforts is to preserve library heritage in good physical condition for future generations.

## Acknowledgements

The article received institutional support for the long-term conceptual development of a research organization provided by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.



Working station for library collection survey

# The Role of Czech Experts in Saving the Cultural Heritage of Iraq

**Petr Justa**

**Gema Art Group**

News about the region overwhelms the population worldwide with information about unrest, war, destruction and instability. The country's difficult situation is rooted not only in its location in the heart of the Middle East, the ethnic and religious diversity of its population, but above all in its vast mineral wealth. One may thus easily lose the sight of fact that this is the area of the cradle of many cultures and civilizations, ancient Mesopotamia, the fertile region between the Euphrates and the Tigris, in present days Iraq. From ancient times its territory is living proof of the importance of cultural and religious diversity and its architectural monuments belongs to the treasures of the world cultural heritage.



**Settlement tell and citadel (qal'a) of Erbil, aerial view from southwest**

The restoration company GEMA ART has been working on restoration and conservation projects in the country since 2004 and quickly became one of the major contractors of the government assistance for the preservation of Iraqi cultural heritage. The first projects were focused mainly on the aid to heavily damaged cultural institutions in Baghdad and its surroundings. The Iraqi National Library and the National Museum, heritage houses on Rashid street in Baghdad and especially one of the most endangered monuments in the area, Al Madaa'in Palace in Cteisiphon and Minaret Al Hadbaa in Mosul, the latter unfortunately blew up in 2017 by ISIS. Between 2004

and 2021, the company organized series of assessments of selected monuments as well as a large number of courses focused on the restoration and conservation of various materials like paper, books and manuscripts, paintings, sculptures, architectural monuments and archaeology.

Czech specialists were also the first who had started to save monuments in Erbil, the capital of autonomous region of Iraq, Kurdistan, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world with a history stretching back to 5th millenium B.C. Thanks to the high standards of security, Erbil has also become the base of the company ever since.

After falling of the Saddam Hussain regime, it was necessary to enhance the interest of the responsible authorities and public in the importance of the Erbil Citadel as a highly valuable archaeological and architectural site and to start necessary scientific and systematic work for recovering of the Erbil Citadel history and its preservation and revitalization. Based on the „Action Plan for the Citadel“ and UNESCO expert missions the Conservation Master Plan of the Erbil Citadel was developed and since 2011 the projects of preservation of the most valuable and most damaged houses have been implemented.

Developing of basic skills and abilities for heritage protection, documentation, mediation and teamwork was constantly part of our continuous work in Iraq. One of the outputs of the study for preservation and rehabilitation of the Erbil Citadel was creation of the Citadel Visualization and Information System (CIVIS, see Fig. no.2).



**Software combining 3D Model of the citadel and Database of photos, drawings, architectural and historical data of the Erbil Citadel perimeter houses. Home page.**

CIVIS was designed as a low cost system, i.e. maximum of the possible free software and minimum of the maintenance requirements for the technical support and hardware. This unique archiving utility, produced especially for the Erbil citadel as simple, clear and user-friendly data archive system, was intended to support the citadel researches work and further projects.

The Citadel of Erbil, world heritage site since 2014, has suffered from the collapsing of large number of houses for decades, namely at the perimeter of the site. Long-term movements and continuous erosion of the slope of the Erbil citadel moved the outer facades of buildings downwards. The serious cracks in the walls followed by deterioration of the entire structures including roofs, turned many of them into ruins.



**Outer façade of House no 13/1 before and after reconstruction**

Gema Art is continuously working in close cooperation with UNESCO Office Iraq in the Citadel and saved until now more than 10 historic houses. However, the major project implemented in the Citadel was opening of the Interpretation and Visitor Centre housing large multimedia exposition documenting architecture, art and crafts and other considerable milestones of Kurdish history.



**House no. 13/1, Room no. 6, south view of a room before and after reconstruction**

In addition to the Citadel projects there was also a large project of stabilization and restoration of the leaning minaret Choli, once a historical symbol of Kurdistan region. Choli minaret is dated to the Atabag period (12<sup>th</sup> Century). The structure was built from low burnt bricks using gypsum based renders and mortars. Due to the long term effect of deterioration, the essential part of architecture has disappeared and thus the leaning minaret became the last survival of the past mosque. In 2006, the Minaret was in the final stage of deterioration and any delay of necessary treatments could cause fatal destruction. The comprehensive stabilization and restoration of the last remnants of early medieval decoration was in fact the first satisfactory project that have opened the gate to the intensive collaboration with Unesco in the area.



**Minaret Choli after reconstruction**

Choli minaret, the true symbol of Kurdistan and Erbil Citadel as the UNESCO World Heritage site became the most important historical landmarks of the Kurdistan region.

The good reputation of Czech restorers in the preservation of architectural monuments in Iraq has also led to the broad international cooperation after the liberation of Mosul and Nineveh province as a whole. Among other, GEMA ART is running projects with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. to save the Museum of Civilizations in Mosul and US General

Consulate and the Alliance for the Restoration of Cultural Heritage (ARCH) to save the Shrine of Prophet Nahum in Alqosh.

The complex rehabilitation of the former Synagogue with the tomb of the Old Testament Prophet Nahum the Elkoshite was so far the last completed restoration project. This Shrine was chosen for rehabilitation for its symbolic significance, precisely for the national and religious diversity of Iraq, the territory of Mesopotamia, the territory of many civilizations and cultures. The monument with the tomb of the Prophet is a sacred place for all three monotheistic religions in Iraq – Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

GEMA ART has been focusing on the education of new expert generation for the field of cultural heritage care for a long time. Local craftsmen participants have participated all Czech projects since very beginning. One of the principal goals of heritage projects was also to give an opportunity to expand the ranks of Iraqis who have been trained to get special skills in the care of monuments.



**Shrine of Prophet Nahum in Alqosh**



**Interpretation Centre in Erbil Citadel**

# The Preservation of Film Heritage and Its Musealisation

**Matěj Strnad**

**National Film Archive in Prague (Národní filmový archiv, Prague – NFA)**

From the perspective of the media attention, digitisation is usually the most rewarding subject with regard to the preservation of film heritage. And it should be noted that this is rightly so – it has been a dramatic and fundamental challenge even from the point of view of film archives themselves. No matter whether we are talking about high-definition digitisation, allowing access to thousands of films on television and on the Internet, or the transformation of the entire production chain that forced film archives to start collecting and preserving “born digital” cinema. Finally, the most visible projects are the extremely challenging digital restorations bringing classic films back to the screens of present-day cinemas. But digital restoration should be seen as an ever-evolving concept, even if in fact it is not quite as new as it was just a few years ago. That is why we believe that those interested in this subject have something to draw on and can follow the results of our work. We would therefore like to use this possibility to outline some other aspects of the work with film heritage. Specifically those that, at least at first glance, have little to do with digitisation as such, but still concern film materials.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to start with digitisation anyway, pointing out its conception – at least as far as the vast majority of the NFA’s film collection is concerned – as a primary tool for accessibility. The scanning of reproduction materials (negatives, duplication prints, etc.) carried out within digital restoration projects produces very high quality digital reproductions, of the best quality that can be presently achieved. However, their main purpose is to bring the films – after making the desired restoration interventions – back to the screens of digitised cinemas, not to preserve the masters in this way. The data generated by digitisation are carefully saved and maintained so that they can be used in the future, but films produced and shown on film are preserved on film. Respect for the original medium and technology applies in the other direction, too – it does not make sense to think of securing digital cinema in any other way than through digital tools and digital archiving.

What does the preservation of film material look like? It is of course based on passive conservation in depositories with temperature and relative humidity corresponding to the recommendations generally applied for the type of film support or emulsion and recording method. However, the passive approach has its obvious limitations – the films need to be studied, processed and, specifically, digitised. In light of the above, it should be stressed that we are usually not primarily interested in some imaginary title (feature or documentary film, news footage, home or non-professional work), but in each and every piece of film material. A film element must go through a process that records its physical properties and content characteristics and specifics so that a decision can be taken on its possible repair, storage, security – and finally on the relation between the material and the title in question.

Is it an original negative, material exposed directly in the film camera and then used as a matrix for further copying? Is it a copy from the time of the film's re-release, representing some later, full-fledged and independent version? What is the position of the material in question in relation to all the others representing the same title in some way? The fact of photographic reproduction, fundamental for the very existence of cinema, has brought on the multiplicity of reproductions, which are largely unique copies of the supposed original. If we want to present a given title to researchers or to the general public, we must strive for the best possible knowledge of what we are actually conveying. Inquiries into versions and differences are made on a daily basis – when prints are chosen for digitisation, for screening in cinemas or for study. Such questions are most intensively asked during demanding digital restoration projects or photochemical laboratory preservation. Our questioning then includes all representations of the work in our collection, as well as all other surviving representations in other film archives around the world. Indeed, with the exception of so-called inverse originals (when the camera negative, once developed, has become positive material intended for projection), it can be said that there rarely exists just one film.

For many of the film archives associated within FIAF, the abovementioned photochemical preservation, i. e. simply put copying and printing, is still more or less a daily routine. Národní filmový archiv, Prague (The National Film Archive), uses the services of Film Laboratories Zlín for this activity, but the long-term availability of these services – as well as the necessary materials (chemicals and photographic material) – is one of the most pressing issues for the entire professional community. What and how do we copy? Given the size of our collection and the

unceasing acquisitions, we are talking about a number of titles that still need to be preserved by copying on a non-flammable support. Copying is also needed for classical, photochemical restoration projects. And finally, new prints are still being made, albeit rather sporadically and very specifically for the purpose of screening in cinemas.

It may seem like a paradox, but it describes quite well the media-hybrid nature of the current role of the NFA as a memory institution. In fact, classical photochemical processes and digitisation are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary, they complement each other in many ways. In the field of presentation we see it as our duty to maintain both paths for as long as possible. This is out of respect for the original medium, as described at the beginning of this paper. In addition to regular screenings of films from classic film prints in our Ponrepo archive cinema, we support such activities both across the Czech Republic and also abroad; we are happy to lend Czech films on film prints whenever possible.

We have recently prepared a special distribution offer for Czech cinemas, with the selection taking into account not only the titles as such, but also the specific film prints selected. These have been provided with specific annotations taking into account their condition and provenance. This actually means the musealisation of something that was previously considered more or less a consumer product, but now represents a unique artifact – with its own history and its own stories. But film prints alone are not enough for a film performance. That also requires technological equipment and, in particular, people who can reliably operate it. That is why we also run specialised courses and internships aimed at those interested in the exclusive but extremely rewarding profession of a classic film projectionist. Our effort is therefore aimed with the same intensity at making film heritage accessible under new technological conditions on the one hand, and preserving the original conditions on the other.



# BLUE SHIELD

## 25th anniversary

### Protecting Heritage in Crisis

**TRANSLATION:**  
Kateřina Danielová

**GRAPHIC LAYOUT:**  
Czech Association of Museums and Galleries

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