

Welcome and introductory remarks (Sabine Schmidtke)

Good afternoon, and a warm welcome

In the aftermath of WW II, the cultural genocide of European Jews, that accompanied the Nazi's systematic mass murder, led to an unprecedented appreciation of "the importance of cultural objects as symbols of the enduring legacy of those who could not be saved".

An unparalleled process of restitution of Jewish cultural property was initiated, in the course of which the American Military Government of Germany played an exemplary leading role.

At the same time, the deliberate destruction of religious and cultural property constituting a key element in attempts to destroy entire groups was increasingly acknowledged. The Polish-born Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, the initiator of the "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide", coined the notion of "cultural genocide". Although it was not included in the Convention's final text as it was adopted in December 1948 by the UN General Assembly, the concept materialized in the "Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict" of 1954, followed by the 1972 "World Heritage Convention".

Lemkin wrote as early as 1933, a few months after the Nazis came to power:

"An attack targeting a collectivity can also take the form of systematic and organized destruction of the art and cultural heritage in which the unique genius and achievement of a collectivity are revealed ... The contribution of any particular collectivity to world culture as a whole forms the wealth of all of humanity, even when exhibiting unique characteristics.

Thus, the destruction of a work of art of any nation must be regarded as acts of vandalism directed against world culture. The author [of the crime] causes not only the immediate irrevocable

losses of the destroyed work as property and as the culture of the collectivity directly concerned ...; it is also all humanity which experiences a loss by this act of vandalism.

.... Such acts shock the conscience of all humanity, while generating extreme anxiety about the future. For all these reasons, acts of vandalism and barbarity must be regarded as offenses against the law of nations."¹

I happened to read a monograph about the restitution of Jewish cultural property between 1946 and 1949 right before those seven days in early January of this year when the U.S. and Iran came close to the brink of war, a week that has been described "as the most perilous chapter so far in President Trump's three years in office".² The US president's threat (made via Twitter on January 4) to "target 52 Iranian sites" some of which, he said, are "important to Iran & Iranian culture" prompted an international outcry. It is also the background to today's event—as I was reading about the threats against the people of Iran and their cultural heritage, I was thinking what I could possibly contribute.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the speakers of today's event who enthusiastically responded to my invitation to speak here at the Institute for Advanced Study about Iran's cultural heritage.

And I am grateful for all of you for joining us here this afternoon,

... to listen, to learn, and to share.

Let me briefly introduce our seven speakers, in the sequence of their presentations (additional information is included in the program).

¹ Raphael Lemkin, "Acts Constituting a General (Transnational) Danger Considered as Offences Against the Law of Nations: Additional explications to the Special Report presented to the 5th Conference for the Unification of Penal Law in Madrid (14 -20 October 1933)". <http://www.preventgenocide.org/lemkin/madrid1933-english.htm>. Published in German as "Akte der Barbarei und des Vandalismus als delicta juris gentium," *Anwaltsblatt Internationales* 19 vi (November 1933), pp. 117-119. English translation "

² Peter Baker, "Seven Days in January: How the U.S. and Iran Approached the Brink of War," *The New York Times*, January 11, 2020.

Each presentation will last about ten minutes, and at the end of the program there will be a q&a session.

Alexander Nagel teaches at the State University of New York, and he is a Residential Research Associate with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. Alexander is actively involved in the research and publication of materials from archeological fieldwork in Iran and Greece.

Touraj Daryaee holds the Maseeh Chair in Persian Studies & Culture at the University of California, Irvine. His research focusses on ancient and early medieval history of Iran, specifically the Sasanian Empire.

Ani Honarchiansaky is at Princeton University where she works on the social and cultural history of the Roman Empire and Sasanian Iran and their relations with Armenia and the history of the Armenian Church.

Matthew Miller, from the University of Maryland, College Park, works on medieval Sufi literature, the history of sexuality and the body, and digital humanities.

Rudi Matthee teaches Middle Eastern History at the University of Delaware and currently serves as the President of the Persian Heritage Foundation. Rudi specializes on early modern Iran.

Thomas Weiss is coming to us from The CUNY Graduate Center. Tom has written extensively about multilateral approaches to international peace and security, humanitarian action, and sustainable development.

I am especially delighted to welcome and introduce **Irina Bokova**, the former Director-General of UNESCO. During her time in office (2009-2017), Irina actively engaged in international efforts to advance quality education for all, gender equality, and the protection of the world's cultural heritage as a humanitarian imperative and security issue to strengthen the foundations for lasting peace.

Now, without further ado, I leave the floor to our first speaker,
Alexander Nagel.