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No Temple in Palmyra! *Opposing the Reconstruction of the Temple of Bel*

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Background

In 2015, the Temple of Bel in Palmyra, Syria was intentionally destroyed with explosives by the so-called Islamic State (ISIL, Daesh). (Fig. 1-3).² Other ancient buildings in this oasis city were also destroyed. The museum was bombed through its roof, seriously compromising its structural integrity, and many artefacts were purposely smashed. Even the catalogue of the museum's inventory was destroyed in the civil war. A new survey will have to be taken and a completely new catalogue composed. This alone will require years of work. Other serious consequences of the war were the lootings, especially in the ancient tombs, and the increased illegal export of artefacts, especially from Palmyra.

The world's reaction to all these events varied widely. First, mention must be made of the "First Aide" admirably provided by Polish archaeologists: immediately after the destruction of the monumental lion sculpture standing in front of the museum, they went to Palmyra and documented the damage and took steps towards a new restoration.

In general, the international press, radio, and television reports raged continuously and with approximate accuracy over the latest levels of destruction. The Mayor of London at that time, Boris Johnson, erected the central arch of Palmyra in a reproduction of reduced proportions at Trafalgar Square³ as a "warning" (Fig. 4). The Russian National Symphony Orchestra staged a Peace Concert in the Palmyra Theatre⁴ for the benefit of the Russian and Syrian soldiers at which a video of President Vladimir Putin thanking *his* soldiers for the liberation of

Palmyra and “rescue of ancient culture”,⁵ something which “the West was not capable of doing” was screened. In both cases, the fate of Palmyra was exploited politically by means of press and media exposure with the goal of projecting a political or even moral self-image to the public, rather than actually valuing an ancient cultural heritage.

More respectable reactions could be observed in the domains of art and culture. Films were made such as the stirring declaration of love by Hans Puttnies.⁶ Exhibitions with catalogues were organized at which photos, and models made of cork and plastic, as well as 3D animations were placed next to original ancient artefacts (Fig. 5-6). Lecture series and workshops were held repeatedly to discuss “the future of Palmyra”. The world of scientific specialists met repeatedly in a number of conferences and expressed itself in a number of publications.

Political institutions and organisations, both governmental and private, addressed the need for the protection of culture. Statements, reports, ethical charters and red lists appeared. National and international aid and reconstruction programs were initiated to prepare for what could be done once hostilities ceased. For example, mention can be made here of the efforts undertaken by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD),⁷ and the German Archaeological Institute (DAI);⁸ both of which are supported financially by the German Foreign Ministry. Much of this activity can be interpreted also as a direct expression of the frustration, horror and dismay of politicians and the scientific and cultural community. That this was a kind of *kulturbeflissene Trotzaktionen*, an act of cultural defiance,⁹ does not necessarily diminish its value. Yet one could sometimes gain the impression that profiling and self-representation of individuals or institutions might have been a greater motivator than the goals expressed.

The Debate on Reconstruction

Immediately following the destruction of the Temple of Bel, a heated debate arose concerning its reconstruction. In this controversy the proposals were wide-ranging. Some called for a life-sized reconstruction of the temple at its original site with the aid of modern 3D-printing technology,¹⁰ and others joined the “Rebuild the Temple!” campaign.¹¹ There was also a demand for a *kämpferische Reproduktion*, Combative Reproduction.¹² On the other hand, others requested “No *Berliner Schloss* in Palmyra!”,¹³ or “A reconstruction is out of the question”,¹⁴ or even “We should do absolutely nothing!”.¹⁵

It is the purpose of this article to argue that the complex debate about a reconstruction of the Temple should be determined by the building *itself*, by its history, its historical background and context as well as by its cultural significance through scientific and scholarly research.

The Historical Significance of Palmyra

In the globalised world of the Roman Empire, Palmyra played an essential role as an exchange point for goods and cultures of the East and West. This pivotal role was a consequence of its geographical and geo-politically privileged position between the ports of the Mediterranean and the trade routes to Asia (Fig. 7). The many samples of Chinese silk found in the tombs of Palmyra (Fig. 8)¹⁶ are the very products which gave the “Silk Road” its name. To pursue this long-distance trade, the Palmyrenes used not only the land routes but also the sea routes via the Euphrates and the Gulf which extended their trade to India. The means of transport were not only the dromedary camel caravans but also sea-going ships, both of which are documented by inscriptions and visual representations (Figs. 10-11). The wealth of the city, based on trade between Rome on the one hand and China and India on the other, is evidenced not only in the written sources, but also in the archaeological evidence of the prosperous and imposing landscape of ruins: a large cityscape with dwellings, temples, public buildings, monuments and public spaces often

connected by colonnaded avenues, and last but not least an extensive and impressive necropolis.

The Temple of Bel

The Temple of Bel is possibly the prime example demonstrating the pivotal role of Palmyra in the global exchange between East and West.¹⁷ It is precisely this building that presents itself as a monument to both Eastern and Western traditions. And it is here that these two traditions are combined to become something quite unique. This fact cannot be emphasised enough when debating the reconstruction of the Temple.

The Temple was erected in the first century AD. Its layout follows the Greek scheme of a peripteral temple with a double wide portico (*pseudo-dipteros*) (Fig. 12). Furthermore, the temple is, not only in its plan but also in its size, an exact copy of a very particular Greek temple, the Temple of Artemis at Magnesia on the Maeander in Ionia on the west coast of Asia Minor (Fig.13).¹⁸ The latter was erected around 200 BC by the famous architect Hermogenes, that is, some three hundred years before the Temple of Bel. The copy in Palmyra goes so far as to place the axis of the door at exactly the same position where in the temple in Magnesia the partition separates the porch in front (*pronaos*) from the interior hall (*cella*). Furthermore, details of the architectural decoration, such as the Ionian half-column capitals on the exterior walls of the main hall (Fig. 14), are exact copies of those on the temple at Magnesia (Fig. 15). Thus, both the layout and the architectural decoration of the Temple of Bel are drawn directly from this particular Greek-Hellenistic model. Additionally, a Greek inscription gives us a Greek name of an (or, *the*) architect of the Bel Temple: *Alexandros architekton tou Belou*, Alexander, Architect of Bel.

Yet, there is an important difference between the two temples. While the Temple in Magnesia has its entrance on the narrow side of the building, the Temple of Bel has its entrance on its long side. This difference brings the structure into conformity with ancient eastern practice of temple construction.

According to this ancient eastern tradition the visitor to the temple had to enter through the long side of the temple from where the representation of the deity was not immediately visible ahead. Rather, to approach the ritual cultic niches it was necessary to turn at a right angle, either to the right or to the left.

With this oriental detail, the Greek architecture has become something quite different. This variance becomes even more visible when looking at the upper structure of the Temple of Bel. From its narrow side, the building looks like a Greco-Roman temple with a facade of eight columns and a triangular pediment over them (Fig. 16), similar to the Mars-Ultor Temple built at about the same time by Emperor Augustus on his Forum in Rome (Fig. 17).¹⁹ On the other hand, seen from its long side, i.e. the entrance side of the temple, the building has – unlike anything Roman – a flat roof accessible by stairway towers. This conforms again to ancient eastern tradition (Fig. 18). In particular, the stepped battlements crowning the top of the building are consistent with ancient eastern sacred architecture. This architectural motif was long established and common to religious buildings also in Palmyra, for example on the old Allat Temple (Fig. 19) which was already present before the Temple of Bel.²⁰

All of these facts indicate that the Temple of Bel is a building which is at once influenced by both East and West. Nonetheless, or perhaps precisely therefore, it was considered a sacred building by people of varying cultural backgrounds; on the one hand, by those with a native Middle Eastern religious background, while at the same time by those of the Greco-Roman tradition. To grasp what this phenomenon indicates it might be useful to imagine what such a religious building could look like in today's Europe. For example, one could imagine St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna with a minaret instead of its Gothic bell tower (Fig. 20). The symbiosis of different traditions as demonstrated in the architecture is especially noticeable also in the frieze of the Temple (Fig. 21). While the motif and the type of vine scrolls come clearly from the repertoire of Roman urban

architecture, the execution of this motif can be attributed to a local mason because the grapes have been given the shape of dates.

The ambiguity of the building's construction and in particular of its roof was acknowledged by its contemporaries well into late antiquity. In the year 390 AD, for example, Libanios described the building in detail when writing a tract lobbying the Christian Emperor Theodosius for the preservation of pagan temples. The tract was entitled *Pro templis* and was intended to rescue antique pagan temples such as the Temple of Bel from destruction. It ends with the words: "And this excellent, gigantic temple with its wonderful roof and the many bronze statues which are protected from sunlight in the dark interior is in danger."²¹

Later, during the sixth and seventh centuries AD, the building was actually used as a Christian church. Evidence for this was left in the wall paintings on the west wall of the interior cella (Fig. 22). There, a seated Madonna is depicted with the Christ child (with a nimbus) on her lap. Behind and above her an angel with spread red wings can be recognised. To the right and to the left of this ensemble are bearded male figures in white robes, also with halos. These are most likely meant to depict Apostles.²²

Following the capture of Palmyra by the Muslim Arabs in 634 AD, and from the eighth century onwards, the inhabitants of Palmyra increasingly sought refuge behind the protecting walls surrounding the sanctuary. These were strengthened in the course of the 11th and 12th centuries, transforming the sanctuary into a kind of fortress. Since that time, the temple/church was being used as a mosque. A semi-circular prayer niche (*mihrab*) was cut into the interior of the south wall of the cella, indicating the direction of Mecca, towards which prayer was to be oriented. Arabic inscriptions provide evidence of several restorations of the mosque in the 12th century. The building was used as a mosque by the local inhabitants until the beginning of the 20th century, that is, for nearly a thousand years.

Palmyra in the World View of Europe

The first records indicating that European travellers found interest in Palmyra appear beginning in the 17th century. This was linked to their curiosity for the fabulous ruined city of the desert with its enormous Sun Temple. The first known depiction of Palmyra is presented in the oil painting completed in 1693 and attributed to Gerarde Hofstede. This painting is preserved today in the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam (Fig. 23).²³ The monumental painting, measuring more than four meters in width and nearly 90 cm in height, gives a panorama where the shining white Temple on the left dominates an otherwise sand-coloured canvas of ruins. The painting was made as viewed from the north and was based on sketches provided by visitors to the site. It became the model for all subsequent representations of Palmyra, as in the engraving published by Timothy Lanoy and Aaron Goodyear following their visit to Palmyra in 1695 (Fig. 24). It is of historical interest that they noted on this engraving, “Temple now inhabited”. Following this representation, Johann Fischer von Erlach drafted his educational guidebook, *Entwurf einer Historischen Architectur* (Concept of Historical Architecture) published in 1725. Von Erlach never visited the city. In his fantasy landscape of Palmyra, the city is illuminated by the rays of the sun rising behind the Temple of Bel (Fig. 25).

Then, the Englishmen Robert Wood and James Dawkins visited Palmyra in 1751. They were the first to take measurements of the monuments they studied, publishing their drawings, plans, vistas, and reconstructions in 1753.²⁴ This publication had an enormous impact in England, as is evidenced in many aristocratic country houses built in this era. For example, the ceiling of the drawing room in Osterley Park House, conceived by Robert Adam about 1765,²⁵ relies closely on Wood’s drawing of the ceiling of the south niche of the Temple of Bel (Fig. 26-27). It is also interesting to note that it was in the correspondence between the architect and his employer, Francis Child, that the term ‘arabesque’ can be documented for the first time: the house owner requested that the

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architect create an “Arabesque ceiling like in Wood's publication”.²⁶

Thirty years after Wood and Dawkins, in May 1785, the French architect and painter Louis-Francois Cassas spent three weeks in Palmyra and finished more than 100 large-scale drawings, plans, depictions, and reconstructions. Cassas's measurements are far more exact than those of Wood and Dawkins. He also was the first to number the still-standing columns on a complete plan of the sanctuary and to distinguish graphically the exactly-measured elements from the reconstructed ones (Fig. 28). Additionally, he added his handwritten notes about the condition of the buildings. One could consider Cassas the first architectural historian in the sense that term is used today. Cassas then worked on his portfolio from Palmyra while residing in Rome. There he exhibited his works and published his monumental, three-volume study in 1798-99 (Fig. 29-30).²⁷ In Rome at that time, many members of the contemporary social and cultural elite met in the salon of Angelika Kaufmann. It was within this setting that the encounter between the 31-year-old Cassas and the 38-year-old Goethe took place (Fig. 31-32). Goethe was very impressed by the work of Cassas and described it euphorically and in detail in his *Italienische Reise*.²⁸ These descriptions leave no doubt that the work of Cassas—and with that, Palmyra and the Temple of Bel—had a remarkable influence on the development of German classical literature.

In 1806, Cassas opened his *Galérie d'Architecture de Monsieur Cassas* in Paris. This was Europe's first Museum of Architecture. Visitors could purchase the master's drawings and models of 745 monuments made in cork or terracotta. Among these was also a model of the Temple of Bel. The Austrian Emperor Franz I attempted to purchase the entire collection, which was valued at 200,000 Francs. But the French government, at this time still under Napoleon, refused to allow the transfer and bought up the collection itself for 126,000 Francs, to which it also added a life pension for Cassas. Emperor

Franz did, however, acquire the entire published works of Cassas for the Vienna Hofbibliothek.

In fact, the influence of Palmyra on 19th century European poets, novelists, artists, and travellers is present in many works. Examples include the following: Hölderlin made a reference to it in his *Lebensalter* (1803-04): “*Ihr Städte des Euphrats! Ihr Gassen von Palmyra! ...*”. [“You, cities on the Euphrates! You, streets of Palmyra! ...”]; Baudelaire made a reference in his *Fleurs du mal* (1857): “...Mais les bijoux perdus de l'antique Palmyre...” [“...The lost jewels of ancient Palmyra...”]; and the traveller Léon de Laborde published his sketches in 1837 (Fig. 33). Then, in the second half of the century the first photographs of the Temple appeared. Louis Vignes published his in 1864 (Fig. 34),²⁹ Félix Bonfils published his in 1870 (Fig. 35), as did John Henry Haynes in 1885.³⁰ Comparing the photographs of Vignes and Bonfils is of special interest because it documents that the first column of the portico to the right of the Temple's entrance must have been removed between 1864 and 1870.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Palmyra with its now famous “Sun Temple” became the traveller's and adventurer's ultimate goal. It was also the stage for diplomatic activity. Gertrude Bell noted in her diary in May 1900: “Beyond them [the ruins] is the immense Temple of Bel; the modern town is built inside it and its rows of columns rise out of a mass of mud roofs.” (Fig.36).³¹ Between 1927 and 1936, Marguerite (Marga) d'Andurain, the “femme fatale” and “comtesse de Palmyre” resided in her Zenobia Hotel and from there exercised considerable influence on the diplomacy of the Middle East (Fig. 37).³² Agatha Christie stopped in Palmyra with her archaeologist husband Max Mellowan, noting in her diary: “That, I think, is the charm of Palmyra – its slender creamy beauty rising up fantastically in the middle of hot sand. [...] It isn't – it can't be real.” (Fig. 38).³³

The scientific investigations of Palmyra and especially of the Temple of Bel continued apace into the 20th century. At first came the two German expeditions of Otto Puchstein in 1902 and

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Theodor Wiegand in 1918. The latter came under contract to the *Deutsch-Türkisches Denkmalschutzkommando*. This was one of the first interventions in the cause of preservation of antique monuments authorized by the Ottoman government. Both expeditions, of which the results were published only later in 1932,³⁴ spent only three weeks in Palmyra. The Temple, at that time standing in the centre of an Arab village, was thereby documented (Fig. 39-40). The archives of both expeditions have yet to be fully exploited. Of particular interest is the private photographic archive of Otto Puchstein, only recently discovered and opened for scholarly investigation. These photographs taken in 1902 present the condition of the Temple and permit insights into the life of the villagers living in its vicinity. (Fig. 41-43).³⁵

On 7 April 1917, a day after his arrival, Theodor Wiegand wrote to his wife Marie:

“Tritt man ein in das gewaltige Viereck [des Belheiligtums], muss man sich erst durch ein ganzes Araberdorf durchwinden, das hier vor Beduinen sicher wohnt, um zu dem Tempel zu gelangen. Sein reiches Riesenporttal führt heute zur Moschee über eine große Freitreppe.” [Trans.: “To enter the enormous rectangle [the Sanctuary of Bel], one has first to find one’s way through an entire Arab village which has settled here as a refuge from bedouin raiders. The enormous and richly adorned entrance [to the Temple] leads today to a mosque by means of a large open staircase].”³⁶

In addition to a full plan of the city of Palmyra, the researchers also made measurements and drawings of the extensive Necropolis. We are also grateful to Wiegand and his team for the only documentation of the temple's building as a mosque with its wooden inclusions (Fig. 44-45).

Comprehensive changes came to the Temple after 1929, when the *Service des Antiquités de Syrie et du Liban* of the French Mandatory Government took charge (Fig. 46-49). The French had been installed as the mandatory power of the new states of Syria and Lebanon by the League of Nations after the

collapse of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. In Palmyra, the major players were the archaeologist Henri Seyrig, the architectural historian Robert Amy, and the architect Michel Ecochard.³⁷ Their goal was to restore the Temple of Bel to its ancient condition. This involved a partial structural consolidation and restoration, but also the clearance of subsequent structures so that visibility and access for scientists, scholars and the public at large could be facilitated. Additionally, a complete and detailed survey of the Temple was made. These goals were completed between 1929 and 1931 during which time the mud brick structures of the local inhabitants within the precincts of the Temple were demolished, according to the protagonists, the entire Temple precinct was “cleared” and those who lived within and around the Temple's precinct were relocated to dwellings in a newly-built village. The medieval and/or modern structures built inside the Temple were also removed to restore “its original form”. All this, the resurrection of the ancient Temple of Bel in its pure form, the removal of the temple's historical surroundings, and the termination of its utility as a living cultural center for the local population, was reconciled with the goal of making it into a solitary and marvellous ruin.

All this occurred in tune with contemporary western European aesthetics, and with scholarly and scientific values of the time which held that ancient buildings were superior to those of the medieval period; isolated monumental structures were preferred to those in historical context; sacred buildings were preferred to those of ‘profane’ significance, and certainly, to those of habitation. Furthermore, this task was considered a project of national (in this case, French) prestige.

Other European nations pursued the same goals. A similar prestige project, also oriented on contemporary Western aesthetic values, had been undertaken by Germans already in the 1880s, and at that time, without a doubt, in competition with the French. This was the recovery of the Temple of Didyma on the west coast of Asia Minor being led by Theodor Wiegand. Also,

in this case, an entire village was evacuated and its houses demolished in order to investigate the ancient temple and to render it accessible. Wiegand wrote to his wife Marie on 8 March 1887: “*Das halbe Dorf muss demontiert werden. ... die Blöcke sind so gewaltig, dass sich die Franzosen mit Pulversprengungen (!) geholfen haben, da sie die nötigen Hebemaschinen nicht bei sich hatten.*” [Trans.: “Half the village had to be demolished. ... the blocks are so massive that the French assisted with explosives (!) because they hadn't the necessary cranes available.”]³⁸

Since that time, our awareness has certainly changed on these issues. We are far more critical of radical measures with regard to historically-integrated buildings. That this consciousness is variable is a proof of how the approach to ‘cultural heritage’ can alter quite rapidly.

In the case of the Temple of Bel it is clear that the French architects achieved their goals of laying free the Temple and rendering it accessible for scholars and the general public. Soon the first ‘tourists’ arrived. Notably, we have the photo of Horatio Gates Spafford showing members of the American community settled in Beirut posing in their bathing suits in front of the Temple of Bel (Fig. 50).

In 1980, the Temple stood in the centre of a large open courtyard and was designated a “World Cultural Heritage” site by UNESCO. Also, it was to serve as the venue for an annual Palmyra Festival. As for the local population, the Temple was a symbol of identity mostly in its function as an object of tourism. Beginning in the 1980s, as I have personally seen, tourism boomed so spectacularly that cruise-ship passengers were transported by tour bus to Palmyra early in the morning from the port of Latakia on the Syrian coast. They visited the ruins of Palmyra in the heat of the day, participated in the obligatory ‘tea break’ on the terrace of the Hotel Zenobia, and, as the sun set, were transported back to their ship in time to enjoy the Captain's Dinner on board.

One can legitimately ask if the henchmen of the so-called Islamic State would have found the Temple of Bel so objectionable if it had been left integrated in its historically-developed environment. But, in the form the Temple was exposed in the 21st century, for the members of Daesh it had become a symbol of the hated ‘Western’ culture. What if it had not been restored to its ancient beauty, if it had not been presented in isolation but left in the protection of the dwellings of a surrounding native population who had for nearly a millennium used it as a mosque? From this perspective one can see the Temple's destruction in 2015 as a natural progression in a historical process beginning with the secular Enlightenment in Europe in the 18th century. At the time of its destruction, the Temple had already had four lives: it had first been a temple, then a church, then a mosque. Then, in its fourth life it continued as a temple, but it was now an icon of European interest and attraction. Tourists pursuing cultural enlightenment of what they considered their own, admittedly shared, world heritage pursued such icons globally. We conclude that for 2000 years the Temple had served as a centre of cult: pagan, Christian, Islamic, and finally touristic.

A New Life for the Temple

With its destruction, the building has begun its fifth life (Fig. 3). What should this look like? Can we set some reasonable parameters and directives for this phase? The following seem essential:

First, it is clear that the area must be secured. This would involve the removal of all military installations from the entire area of the ancient ruins, including the Russian camp at the northern Necropolis (Fig. 53), and the removal of any explosives and battle detritus. Secondly, the destruction itself must be properly documented. All remaining elements must be surveyed *in situ* using all the techniques at scientists’ disposal. This will take years despite the progress in technology. Thirdly, new excavations may now be possible. Researchers may be able to find new evidence as a result of the disturbance of the site. What, for

example, preceded the Temple of Bel on this site? We already have some evidence of prior occupation.

Indeed, one could see the temple's destruction as an opportunity. It is known from earlier excavations and some architectural elements (Fig. 54-55) that the Temple had predecessors in the third/second century BC (Fig. 56).³⁹ Additionally, ceramics indicate that the area was already settled in the second millennium BC. Future excavations and investigations must be pursued in close collaboration with the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities and the local population. A useful model of the appropriate collaborative guidelines is provided by the international archaeological projects at Jerash in the Kingdom of Jordan between 1981 and 1988.⁴⁰

And finally, should the Temple's fifth life include its reconstruction? If so, then so many questions are appropriate: Which of the previous four lives of the Temple should be reconstructed: the shrine to Bel, the Christian church, the Islamic mosque at the heart of a Syrian-Arab village, or, should it be a 'restored corpse' or an 'artificial ruin' in the era of Western science and tourism? For whom and why should it be reconstructed? Should it be a cultural icon? Should it serve an economic function, as it did in the case of tourism? Or should it be a political prestige project, and/or proof of successful heritage protection?

Would the reconstruction of the Temple as it was in 2015 not be the restoration of a 'ruins romance' which began in Europe in the 18th century? If so, that would surely be the expression of a Western, backwards-oriented nostalgia as yearned for by a Western-educated, Eurocentric middle class. After all, until 2015 the Temple was mainly a place of Western remembrance. We should be careful not to dictate to others the appropriate view of historical heritage. Many, including the journalist Charlotte Wiedemann⁴¹ and the historian Alexander Demandt,⁴² have warned us of the dangers of hubris. As Frank-Walter Steinmeier formulated in his speech while German Foreign Minister on 27 April 2016: "*Wir brauchen klügere*

Konzepte als das Ausdrucken und Aufstellen von Repliken” [Trans: “We need wiser concepts than the printing and exhibition of replicas”].⁴³ Our task should not be motivated by a neo-colonial activism which we or those after us would regret.

Furthermore, all debates concerning a reconstruction of the Temple must clearly be decided also by those who will live there once peace and security is established. We can make suggestions and discuss possibilities and concepts, extending financial and human resources. But, most of all we must express hope in the future, trust, and primarily, patience. We should leave the ruin as it is, accept its loss, and learn that even destroyed culture is a historical document. Even a purposely-destroyed ruin has the right to tell its history, like the gnarled form of an ancient oak tree whose story would be lost if it were to be pruned of its deadwood. A destroyed monument carries a symbolic significance and authenticity. It is the means of communicating a phase of history and dealing with it. It is, indeed, also a part of the cultural heritage.

My personal preference would be to build a new world-class UNESCO Visitors Centre on the site. I remember that the representative of UNESCO had already suggested such a centre when speaking at an international congress held in Palmyra in 1992. As a model for such a centre, the Visitors Centre in Bamberg, Germany comes to mind.⁴⁴ But others have suggested the Visitors Centre at the Anza-Borrego State Park in California as an appropriate model.⁴⁵ There, the environment is featured against the background of the region's original inhabitants. These types of visitors centres provide multi-dimensional encounters for both foreign and native visitors, with forays into the history and ecology of the region as well as in-depth presentations of the heritage site. Placed within the confines of the ancient city of Palmyra, the visitor would have both an on-site experience and the opportunity to learn about the history and culture of Palmyra. The centre would provide access to the latest maps and plans (Fig. 57) texts and pictures, models and 3D-animations (Fig. 5-6) and facilitate dialogue among those

researching there and between them, the local population, and visitors.

The People of Tadmur

The Syrian Arabic name for Palmyra is Tadmur. Though it is a stretch to find comparable dilemmas for the population of Tadmur, there are some examples which provide insight. Dresden was purposely destroyed during World War II. The will to reconstruct its cathedral, the *Frauenkirche*, came not from outside but from the citizens of Dresden. But this took a very long time to emerge. Then between 1989 and 1997 –and with the reunification of Germany– a plan was devised and the funds raised. The actual reconstruction of the cathedral took place from 1997-2005, that is, half a century after its destruction. Between the destruction and the reconstruction two generations of Dresdeners had lived and contributed to the project.

Another example, that of Warsaw, took a completely different course. The citizens of the city joined together to reconstruct immediately following the war. Between 1946 and 1953, the old city was reconstructed with attention to historical detail. But here the choice was made not to reconstruct an isolated monument, but to rebuild the living quarters of the people first.

With that, we return to Palmyra and see that its present-day city, Tadmur, has been destroyed in the civil war (Fig. 58). Its inhabitants have fled if they were not killed in the war or murdered by the insurgents. Those who survived and remained now live in improvised plastic shelters outside their homes which are in ruins. Clearly, their situation must be addressed first. The reconstruction of living facilities and the provision of infrastructure of electricity, water and sanitation must take priority (Fig. 59-60). Dwellings and streets, shops, hospitals and pharmacies, mosques and schools need to be restored or built anew. These can be built with mud brick or with stone as was done both two millennia ago and a century ago when the

population living within the ancient city were re-housed in the new town.

Thus, as Frank-Walter Steinmeier formulated in his abovementioned speech: “*Wir brüten nicht über der Rekonstruktion beschädigter Tempel, während in Syrien Tag für Tag Menschen sterben*” [Trans: “We can hardly brood over reconstructions of damaged temples while people in Syria are dying day to day”]. This statement applies the more especially for Palmyra/Tadmur: As finally, and of particular personal regret and sorrow, it is especially the members of the local population who had worked for and with the foreigners and who were essential in the investigation and restoration of Palmyra as a World Heritage Site who require assistance. These were especially targeted by the terror of ISIL, were branded by them to be “heathens” or “false believers”, and many of them were murdered. It is, therefore, all the more imperative that all activities, projects and financial support be concentrated on the rebuilding of the city of Tadmur, especially in their honour. This responsibility should be carried by all those persons and institutions which acted as quasi-official bodies, including those operating under the rubric of the “World Heritage Site” (for example UNESCO, DAI, the German Foreign Office) and those who exploited Palmyra as a prestige project and symbol of cultural foreign policy. The tens of thousands who fled Tadmur must be returned to their homes, and their city restored. All other activities and projects must be secondary to this.

The Temple of Bel in its original form already some 2000 years ago is an example of, and model for, the successful coexistence and synthesis of different cultures. Throughout its eventful history it survived as a symbol of tolerance. It therefore pleads for a patient and careful interaction with every sort of historical reality.

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² All figures appear in Annex 1.

³ Turner, L., 2016. *Palmyra's Arch Recreated In London*. [BBC News. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36070721> [Accessed 21 April 2020].

⁴ GmbH, F., 2016. *Nach Vertreibung Des IS: Orchester Spielt In Den Ruinen Von Palmyra*. [online] Available at: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/nach-vertreibung-des-is-orchester-spielt-in-den-ruinen-von-palmyra-14218718.html> [Accessed 21 April 2020].

⁵ Turner, L., 2016. *Palmyra's Arch Recreated In London*. [online] BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36070721> [Accessed 21 April 2020].

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