

# EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

Kristin Hausler\*

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## *Cultural Heritage in Danger: Illicit Trafficking, Armed Conflicts and Cultural Diplomacy* Research Conference at the Centre for Heritage, University of Kent Canterbury, 9 June 2017

On 9 June 2017, the Centre for Heritage at the University of Kent held a one day conference at the Canterbury Cathedral Lodge as part of its project on “Canterbury and the Via Francigena: Promoting Heritage through Cultural Routes”. The project seeks to engage the public with heritage through various events, such as this conference but also through workshops and volunteering opportunities.

The topic marked the ratification by the United Kingdom of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, which was adopted in 1954 and remains, to this day, the key treaty for the safeguarding and respect of cultural objects “of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people” in wartime. The focus of the conference was on cultural heritage “in danger”, and it highlighted the increase in direct attacks against heritage sites, from

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the mosque and mausoleums in Timbuktu, Mali, to the temples and other monuments in Palmyra, Syria, as well as the risks of collateral damage to which cultural heritage is currently exposed in several ongoing conflicts.

The conference brought together senior government officials and leading academics. The first panel, which focused on trafficking of cultural objects, included a discussion by Janet Ulph (University of Leicester) on due diligence requirements under the law, as well as a presentation by Kathryn Walker Tubb (UCL) who considered some of the key developments in the practice of combatting illicit trade. Finally Dr. Sophie Vigneron (Kent Law School) analysed the Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property (also known as the Nicosia Convention), which had just been adopted by the Council of Europe on 3 May 2017 and will enter into force once it has been ratified by five States. So far it has only been ratified by Cyprus.

The keynote speech was delivered by Artemis Papathanassiou, the Former Chair of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and Senior Legal Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, who provided a detailed explanation of the application of the Hague system of protection, including the Second Protocol, which was adopted in 1999 to remedy some of the gaps and the lack of implementation guidance for the 1954 Hague Convention.

The first session of the afternoon turned to law enforcement and the criminal regulation of attacks against cultural heritage in practice. Mark Harrison (National Policing & Crime Advisor, Historic England) discussed the real-life threats to heritage in England, while Sophie Hayes (London Metropolitan Police's Art and Antiques Unit) explained the work of her specialized team in combatting art crimes. Finally, David Gill (University of Suffolk) offered the audience the perspective of an archaeologist on the illicit trade in antiquities.

The last session of the day included presentations about the role of cultural diplomacy in the protection of cultural heritage, starting with a presentation by Carla Figueira (Goldsmiths, University of London), who analysed in detail the scholarship pertaining to "cultural diplomacy"; and followed by a presentation by Kristin Hausler, the author of this short report, who focused on the EU's diplomatic response to "cultural heritage in danger", highlighting the two key areas in which the EU has so far undertaken initiatives, namely the combatting of trafficking and the safeguarding of cultural heritage.

The conference was particularly engaging because the audience was composed of experts in the field, coming from both practice and academia. This resulted in interesting discussions on several key topics, such as the most appropriate ways to improve cultural heritage protection and strengthen the fight against trafficking in cultural objects in the current context, which is particularly uncertain given the constant threat of terrorism, the increase in non-international armed conflicts, and the involvement of armed non-State actors, as well as the political instability resulting from, for example, Brexit.