

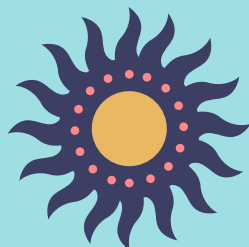


# CULTURAL PRESERVATION *Handbook*

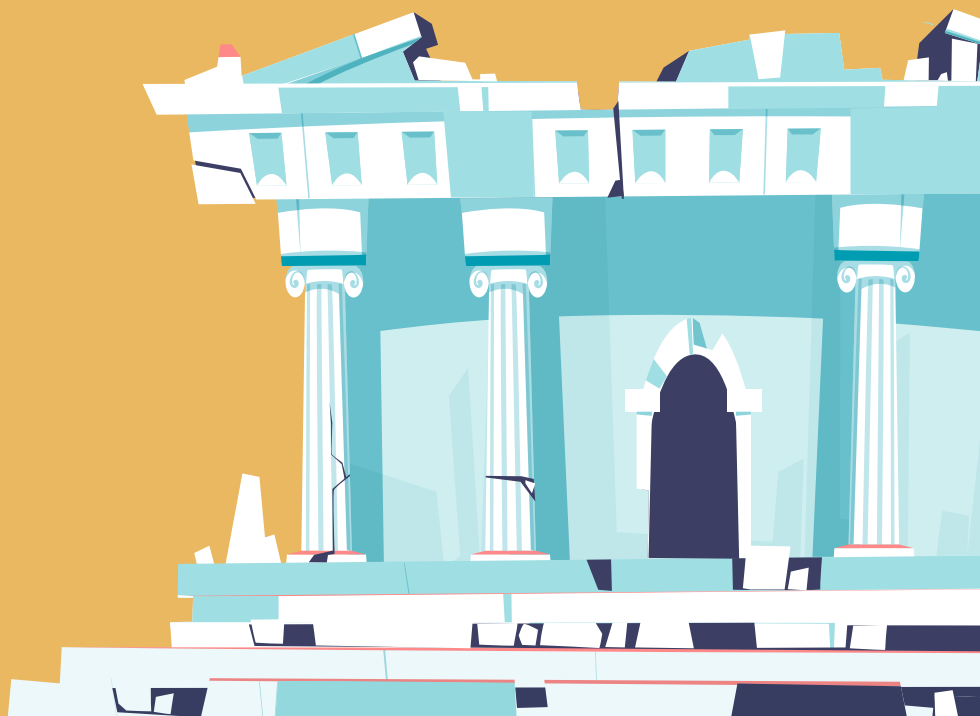
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# INTRODUCTION



## I would like to start this handbook by telling you a story.

I first visited the Acropolis about ten years ago when I was just six years old. I was immediately struck by the beauty of the building, but what really captured my imagination were the stories that surrounded it. I kept returning to the Acropolis, fascinated by its rich history. Over the years, I learned about its many conquerors, including the Romans and the Ottomans, and the challenges it faced throughout its existence, including destruction and deterioration. Despite these challenges, the Acropolis has endured thanks to preservation efforts in recent years. This monument, which is one of the most important in the ancient world, has been saved from destruction and is still standing today. Without these preservation efforts, I would never have had the chance to experience the wonder of the Acropolis. The Acropolis has become incredibly important to me. It represents the resilience of human ingenuity and the power of preservation efforts to protect our shared cultural heritage. I feel privileged to have been able to witness this remarkable monument firsthand, and I hope that future generations will be able to do the same.

**In the face of constant change, cultural preservation allows us to remember our roots, connect with others, and learn from the past to better our future.**

Cultural preservation can mean many things, from preserving languages, to funding museums, to ensuring that significant artifacts are not ruined by global warming. There is a great deal that young people can do to promote preservation, and this handbook is intended to educate and inspire them to join the preservation efforts. If we learn about culture and the importance of preserving it from a young age, we are more likely to fight for improvements in cultural preservation processes.

## What is cultural heritage?

If I were to ask you to describe the characteristics, similarities, and differences of two distinct cultures, you would have no trouble doing so if you were familiar with the two cultures in question. However, defining the word “Culture” (with a capital c) is more difficult and has been an impossible task for even the best anthropologists, which is why I will not

attempt to do it. But, I will attempt to inform you about some aspects of culture and cultural heritage.

When we talk about Culture, we may be referring to tangible culture or intangible culture. Tangible culture refers to what we can see and touch. Statues, artifacts, and buildings are examples of tangible culture. Intangible culture is more difficult to define. The term is used to designate things that we do not see and cannot touch. Languages, religions, and social norms are examples of intangible culture. These are important terms to keep in mind as you read this handbook.

## I encourage you to think of culture as heritage.

Heritage is much easier to define than culture. Heritage, according to UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), is the “cultural legacy which we receive from the past, which we live in the present, and which we will pass on to future generations.”<sup>1</sup>

**This simple definition proposes a very important idea: heritage is timeless. Heritage is the cultural legacy and the parts of culture that we need to preserve.**

At the beginning of this handbook, I told you the story of the Acropolis. This was a story about safeguarding a part of the cultural heritage of Greece. We call these kinds of efforts “cultural preservation”.

<sup>1</sup>UNESCO, “Cultural Heritage,” UNESCO, accessed March 16, 2023, <https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/santiago/cultura/patrimonio#:~:text=Heritage%20is%20the%20cultural%20legacy,pass%20on%20to%20future%20generations.>

# WHAT IS CULTURAL PRESERVATION?



**Cultural preservation is the act of maintaining and protecting different aspects of cultural heritage from past and present cultures and societies.**

Cultural preservation is the maintenance and protection of both tangible things like statues and artifacts, and intangible things, like oral traditions, languages, and religions. A common belief is that cultural preservation is only important for preserving past cultures. While many archaeologists and historians do focus on preserving past cultures like those of Ancient Rome and Ancient Greece, cultural preservation also involves preserving modern cultures today; it can mean preserving our own cultures. Cultural preservation is the conservation of all heritage.

**A common misconception is that preserving old cultures obstructs modernization and does not allow for positive change.**

In reality, cultural preservation is not incompatible with modernization; indeed, it can even inspire modernization and the improvement of society since it allows us to learn from the past and the present in order to create a better future. Given the technological advancements and the modernization of society today, many people wonder why it is important to preserve culture or even care about ancient cultures. Others ask what the importance of preserving current cultures is, since we are living in them right now.

The late historian Paul L. Ward provides a response to questions like these in his article, “Why History?” Ward says that people often spend time thinking about memories and myths. Through history, he says, we can better understand these memories and myths which play a large role in our daily lives. Ward tells us that history is not a “closed book.” There is still much history to be discovered and interpreted, and there are still also many historical disagreements and arguments to be settled.

**The most important reason we should care about history is that history affects all our lives.**

For example, studying World War II allows us to understand how many modern borders were drawn and how modern political relationships were shaped, and Studying classical Greece is important because it helps us understand the origins of democracy and allows us to reflect on ethical and philosophical questions that continue to affect our lives today.

No matter how far back historians go, they can identify aspects of past societies that are still present in modern cultures. In this regard, studying history is a way for people to understand the world that they live in. Studying history also allows for the improvement of different systems and beliefs that originated in history.

## History could never be studied without preserving both tangible and intangible culture.

If cultural heritage is not preserved, then there will be no way to study history. So much culture has already been destroyed or lost and what is left is precious. It is important to ensure that the remaining tangible and intangible aspects of culture are preserved so that we can better understand and study history and culture.

We also need to preserve modern culture so that we do not slowly start losing aspects of our life that are so important to us in this rapidly changing world. As our culture and society continue to advance, there are many integral aspects which are seemingly being left behind.

I spoke with Rob Cope about this on *The Intangible* podcast.<sup>2</sup> Cope is a jazz musician based in England, and one of the questions I asked him was about the importance of preserving the art of jazz music. While jazz music is still prevalent today, it has certainly lost some popularity. Cope told me that preserving jazz is important because it has been the basis for many other types of music. For example, hip-hop and video game soundtracks are heavily influenced by traditional jazz. Therefore, preserving jazz music is not only for people who enjoy listening to jazz; it is also so that we do not forget about the influence it has had on society. Jazz music is a part of our current culture.

Just as we must preserve historical culture, it is critical to be educated about modern culture. This is not to say that modernization should be avoided and that we should only learn about the past. After all, modernization is an integral part of human nature that is in fact encouraged by cultural preservationists.

<sup>2</sup>Nicholas Sikellis, season 1, episode 1, "The Intangible with Rob Cope," December 2022, in *The Intangible*, podcast, audio, 22:09.

**Cultural preservation teaches us about the past, which, in turn, allows us to create a better future. While modernization is important, it is equally important to remember, study, and preserve cultures both current and past.**

## Should all cultures be preserved?

Cultural practices and artifacts that are irrelevant or offensive may seem not to warrant preservation. It can be argued that if a given cultural practice or artifact does not affect our society and does not teach us anything about the past or the future, then it need not be preserved.

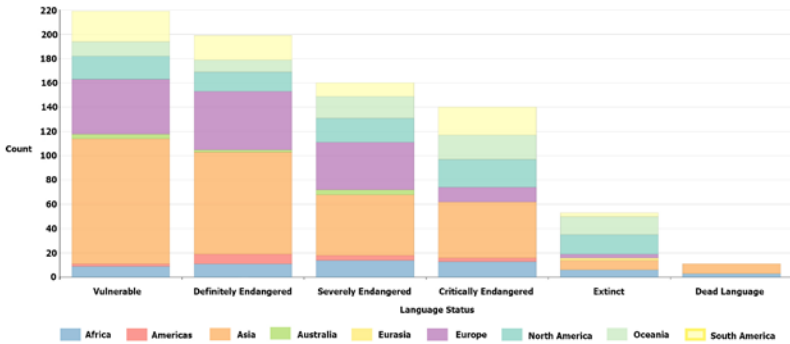
A language from a remote culture thousands of years ago does not seem to have any relevance to American culture, for example. Nevertheless, studying other languages is critical in understanding the one that we speak and it can tell us how different civilizations and cultures work. Unfortunately, though, according to UNESCO, the disappearance of languages is a phenomenon that will become increasingly common.<sup>3</sup> Figure 1 depicts the number of dead and dying languages. It is important to ensure these languages do not become extinct because not only do they tell us how a civilization was structured in the past, but they can also teach us something about our culture.

**If you are still not convinced, imagine a world where people only spoke English, Mandarin, and Hindi – three languages that are by far the most spoken. What would this mean for other cultures? What would this mean for your culture?**

The extinction of all other languages would, in turn, lead to the extinction of all other cultures. Language is the spoken part of our culture. Therefore, even though the preservation of these languages might seem insignificant at first, their preservation is critical. Continuing in this imaginary world, imagine there are only 3 different types of restaurants and only two kinds of music. Wouldn't you agree that this is boring and almost scary to think about? This is yet another reason why it is important to focus on preservation.

<sup>3</sup>Navino Evans, "Bar chart showing count of UNESCO endangered languages for each status broken down by continent," chart, Wikimedia Commons, accessed January 30, 2019, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2a/Bar\\_chart\\_showing\\_count\\_of\\_UNESCO\\_endangered\\_languages\\_for\\_each\\_status\\_broken\\_down\\_by\\_continent.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2a/Bar_chart_showing_count_of_UNESCO_endangered_languages_for_each_status_broken_down_by_continent.png).





## What about if certain cultural practices are offensive to certain groups of people?

Some argue that an aspect of a culture that is offensive to a group should not be preserved and should even be destroyed because it invokes hateful sentiments. This viewpoint is a very important one to consider with empathy: how would you feel if an object or an image that you found offensive was being displayed in the center of your community? Certain historians argue that all types of cultures should be preserved, though, no matter how offensive they might be to a specific group. Their argument is that erasing history allows for people to forget why an aspect of culture was problematic or dangerous in the first place and allow for the possibility that similarly offensive and hurtful cultural practices may be repeated in the future. Offensive cultural objects can be removed from public spaces and preserved in museums, away from the communities that find the artifacts offensive.

**As you can see, cultural preservation means dealing with difficult questions, but I hope that by now, you'll agree with me that preserving heritage is worth the effort.**

# WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES THAT ARISE WHEN PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE?



In this section, I highlight some of the difficulties we face when attempting to preserve tangible heritage.

## Weather and Climate

Some artifacts have been outside for thousands of years, and have been severely affected by the climate and weather conditions over the years. This has weakened the structural integrity of many of these artifacts. Severe temperatures, snow, rain, intense sun, and high winds can affect an artifact. Erosion can make preserving artifacts even more difficult. Climate change often aggravates the harmful effects the natural world can have on cultural artifacts.

Take, for example, the Skara Brae Prehistoric Village in Scotland. The Orkney islands, where the Skara Brae is located, receive around 41.3 inches of annual precipitation. This rain not only affects the structure of the prehistoric artifact but also leads to erosion of the site and the area around it. Rock erosion is detrimental to the Skara Brae. Not only is the water getting closer to the Skara Brae, but the prehistoric village is also at risk of washing away. From 1992 to 2013, the ocean level in the Orkney Islands rose 3 millimeters per year.<sup>4</sup> The tide now occasionally reaches the Skara Brae. In a recent report entitled “Climate Risk Assessment For Heart Of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Property,” a group of researchers concludes that one single climate-related disaster could, without a doubt, destroy the Skara Brae.<sup>5</sup> The Skara Brae is just one example of how weather and climate can threaten cultural sites.

## Climate change

Climate change is another factor that has a significant impact on the preservation of artifacts and archaeological sites. Take the study I just referenced as an example. The scientists in the report concluded that climate change is a “serious threat” to the Skara Brae. But, reports have found that the Skara Brae is not the only artifact affected by climate change.

<sup>4</sup>Aria Bendix, “Before-and-after photos reveal how landmarks have been ravaged by fires, floods, and melting ice over the last decade,” Business Insider, last modified November 11, 2019, accessed March 16, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/photos-landmarks-destroyed-by-climate-change-2019-11#skara-brae-is-exposed-to-heavy-rains-and-frequent-storms-the-land-is-also-eroding-due-to-sea-level-rise-4>

<sup>5</sup>Historic Environment Scotland, *Climate Risk Assessment for the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site*, [1-92].

In a recent article, a scientist named Rohit Jigyasu showed that climate change has significant and unique effects on all types of cultural objects and sites, regardless of their location.<sup>6</sup> An important point that Jigyasu makes is that climate change not only immediately affects cultural heritage through disasters like tsunamis and tornadoes, but can also affect cultural heritage through slow processes which could have effects years later. An example that he mentions is that a steady increase in wind speeds or a change in wind direction over some time may significantly affect the artifact being preserved.

Climate change, climate, and weather significantly affect the preservation of culture and often make preserving culture difficult. For example, the forest fires in Greece make it challenging to ensure the conservation of the Acropolis.

## Interaction with people

Interaction with people can also affect the preservation of culture. There are two types of interactions with people that make preservation of culture difficult: the effects of the local community, and the effects of tourism. Local communities may occasionally lack resources to preserve their own culture. It is also possible that, being surrounded by their local culture, a local community might not understand the importance and beauty of their artifacts and culture as a whole.

**Think about an artifact in your local community. Do you think that you might overlook its significance and importance sometimes because you see it so often or it has been a presence all your life?**

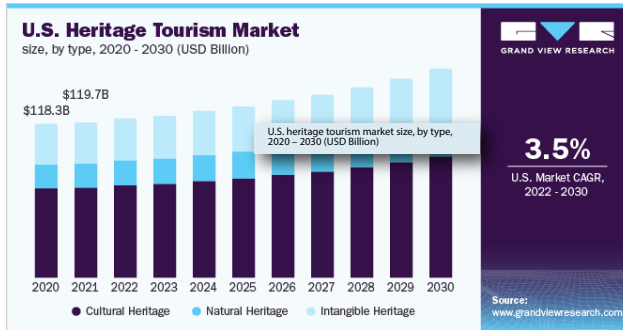
If local cultures are not preserved, we run the risk of living in a world where cultural specificity disappears and local identities are forgotten. Another important advantage that culture and its artifacts bring to communities is money through tourism. In an article entitled “Using historical heritage as a factor in tourism development,” professors from Kazan Federal University in Russia show just how important cultural heritage is in tourism.<sup>7</sup> The article cites tourism as the primary means for many communities to improve their economy.

<sup>6</sup>Rohit Jigyasu, “MANAGING CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE,” *Journal of International Affairs* 73, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2019): [Page 87-100]

<sup>7</sup>Gulnara Ismagilova, Lenar Safiullin, and Ilshat Gafurov, “Using Historical Heritage as a Factor in Tourism Development,” *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2015, [157-162]

Preserving this cultural heritage ensures that tourism will serve as a source of income. A study by Grand View Research predicts that heritage-related tourism in the United States will increase by 3.5% from 2022 – 2030.<sup>8</sup> Other parts of the world will likely see a similar pattern.

## Tourism



While tourism provides monetary benefits, it can also threaten cultural heritage. Tourists sometimes treat artifacts in a harmful and disrespectful manner. While UNESCO does note the importance of tourism for certain communities, the organization also draws attention to the problems that arise with tourism, including the “loss of cultural heritage.”<sup>9</sup> There are many examples from recent history of tourists who have caused the “loss of cultural heritage” that UNESCO cites. In late 2022, a viral video showed a woman dancing on Mayan pyramids. This could have severely damaged the pyramid’s already unstable structure. The biggest issue with this woman’s actions was the disrespect she showed Mayan culture. Disrespecting cultural heritage in itself is detrimental to preserving cultural heritage. Luckily, there was no severe damage to the Mayan pyramid as a result of the woman’s actions, but a similar situation could lead to serious structural damage to tangible parts of a culture’s heritage. I’ll mention one last way in which tourism affect cultural preservation.

<sup>8</sup>Grand View Research, “U.S. Heritage Tourism Market,” chart, Grand View Research, accessed March 16, 2023, <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/heritage-tourism-market-report>.

<sup>9</sup>UNESCO, “Cultural Heritage Based Tourism,” UNESCO, accessed March 16, 2023, <https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/almaty/silkroads/cultural-heritage>.

# WHAT IS BEING DONE TO PRESERVE CULTURAL HERITAGE?



Local communities sometimes hesitate to close down the cultural attractions for conservation purposes because they do not want to decrease economic gain. While closing down a site in order to restore a monument or a building, say, might reduce immediate economic gain, restoration would prove advantageous in the long run. If we do not take care of cultural sites, we cannot hope that tourists will come to see them.

## Lack of government focus and funding

Another difficulty in preserving culture is the lack of attention that the government gives to the preservation of cultural heritage. This issue is more prevalent in some countries than in others, as some countries do not have as much cultural heritage to be preserved, simply require less amount of governmental support to preserve their heritage or are in different financial situations. In 2023, the United States government will provide \$150 million for cultural preservation; this figure represents \$0.50 per U.S. citizen.<sup>10</sup> In Europe, the average spending per capita by all of the governments in the European Union was \$89.1.<sup>11</sup> While at first glance it seems that the United States government is far behind European governments in the preservation of culture, this is actually not the case. The United States has much less tangible culture that needs to be preserved due to the nation's relatively short history (Although there are many North American cultures much older than the United States that need preserving as well). Conversely, many European countries have a large amount of tangible cultural heritage. Therefore, the discrepancies between the United States government and European countries' cultural preservation budget is reasonable. Nevertheless, both the United States and Europe could benefit from an increase in governmental funding. An increase in governmental funding for cultural preservation—especially in Europe—would help preserve the thousands of tangible pieces of culture that many European countries have.

## Armed conflict

Another difficulty in preserving cultural heritage arises when there is armed conflict in the area. In times of war, for example, it is very likely that the

<sup>10</sup>U.S. Department of Interior, "Historic Preservation Fund," Natural Resources Revenue Data, accessed March 16, 2023, <https://revenue.data.doi.gov/how-revenue-works/hpf/#:-:text=The%20Historic%20Preservation%20Fund%20is,during%20the%20annual%20budget%20process>.

<sup>11</sup>UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "UNESCO Institute of Statistics releases data and key findings on cultural and natural heritage expenditure," UNESCO Institute for Statistics, last modified February 6, 2022, accessed March 16, 2023, <https://uis.unesco.org/en/news/unesco-institute-statistics-releases-data-and-key-findings-cultural-and-natural-heritage>.

armies will damage culture's heritage sites; this is something that has happened throughout history. The Bamiyan Buddhas, for example, were destroyed by the Taliban in their fight against the Afghanistan government. In ancient times, destroying cultural heritage as a show of superiority in war was very common. For example, the Acropolis was partially destroyed when the Ottoman Empire took over Greece. In general, armed conflict is, and has been, a serious threat to cultural preservation. Fortunately, UNESCO does have a Cultural Property Protection and Peace department which oversees the cultural preservation process during times of armed conflict.

In addition to the difficulties I've just discussed, which concern tangible culture, there also exist threats to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The latter are endless, but Jeremy Bucher, the Collections and Archives Manager at the National Hellenic Museum in Chicago, highlights one in particular: the difficulty of preserving oral culture. I asked Mr. Bucher about his work, and have provided his responses below. As you will see, he not only explains what oral history is and why it is worth preserving but he also shows just how difficult preserving intangible oral culture is.

## Interview with Jeremy Bucher of the National Hellenic Museum in Chicago

**Nicholas Sikellis:** What are the difficulties in preserving oral culture?

**Jeremy Bucher:** Oral history is the practice of collecting and studying historical evidence about people, groups, events, and quotidian experiences through audio and video recording media as well as written transcriptions of interviews. Interviewees have witnessed or participated in past events and oral history's goal is to record and document their perceptions and memories to preserve them for future generations in the interviewee's own voice. Oral historians strive to fill in the gaps in the historical record and acquire different perspectives than those present in existing written sources. Oral history interviews are a primary source meant to be used in conjunction with other primary and secondary sources to provide a complete history of the chosen topic.



**Conducting an oral history project is an excellent opportunity to get to know a community better and to tap into that community's knowledge to help fill in historical gaps, but the process is not without its challenges.**

Technological challenges have always been present when working with recorded media in any form, but there are also social obstacles as well as simple time and staffing constraints that can be present with any large project involving multiple moving parts and stakeholders.

As technology has evolved so has oral practice to accommodate new methods that have made recording and disseminating interviews easier. The growth of digital recording methods has provided oral historians with a broad range of new tools to record interviews in both audio and video format with smaller devices that make conducting interviews in the field far easier and less burdensome.

When interviews were recorded with reel-to-reel audio recorders and video cameras with VHS tapes, interviewers were required to carry more gear, have a larger crew to assist, and deal with the threat of accidentally destroying a recorded interview due to the more fragile media used. Today, interviews can be recorded with a smartphone and uploaded to a cloud server all before the interviewer leaves the recording location. Additionally, other digital recording devices such as digital cameras and Zoom audio recorders store interviews on SD cards that can fit in an interviewer's pocket to upload into their chosen storage location later. These technological advances have undoubtedly made recording oral histories much easier, but they are not without their drawbacks.

It is often stated that digitization is a process, not a goal, and born-digital objects such as a digital recording of an oral history reinforce that statement. Digital objects are just as fragile as physical objects. Both can be burnt in a fire, both degrade over time, and in the absence of multiple copies the objects are lost to time. Hardware failures or poor storage and cataloging can lead to a digital interview disappearing, so it is important to store multiple copies of digital files in different locations. Best practice is to have three separate storage locations, but two is still better than one.

Another common storage issue pertains to the size of interview files. Advances in video technology have provided the ability to record in 4K and 8K, which are very high resolution and produce incredible video quality. The downside is that recording at those resolutions creates enormous video files that are difficult to store in absence of a server or large external storage device. Unless an interviewer has access to such resources, it is best to avoid the highest resolution recording available to save storage space and time. Focus more on the quality of the content of the interview rather than the quality of the video recording.

Once technological barriers are overcome there are still obstacles that may appear even after an interview is recorded, stored, and transcribed. It is important to remain mindful that a person's oral history is their story, and many people can be more protective of their story once it is recorded than they had been before they began speaking. Best practice is to thoroughly explain your release form, detailing how the interview will be stored, who will have access to it, where it will be displayed, and in which ways the entire interview or clips might be used in the future. It is a vitally important aspect of earning and maintaining an interviewee's trust and avoiding any potential conflicts that may arise if questions remain before an interview is recorded. After the release form has been explained it must be signed by the interviewee and the interviewer or organization or institution conducting the interview. The signature is an acknowledgement that the interviewee understands how their story will be presented to the public and that they are willingly participating in the interview.

As an interviewer, you can do everything correctly in this process and still fail to produce an interview. A potential issue that may arise involves an interviewee changing their mind after they have signed a release form and participated in an oral history interview. This creates a moral quandary for the individual, organization, or institution in possession of the interview. By signing the release form, the interviewee has acknowledged that they willingly shared their story and consented to it being recorded, but some interviewees will decide after some thought that they are not comfortable with aspects, or the entirety of their interview being shared publicly. The interviewer then must work with the interviewee to come to a solution. It is possible to place a restriction on an interview so that it will not be made publicly available for a set amount of time, to allow the interview to only be viewed by request for research purposes, or to edit out portions of an interview with which the interviewee is uncomfortable.

These options may not be enough to satisfy an interviewee's concerns, and then it is up to the interviewer to decide how to proceed. With a signed release form an interviewer is within their rights to do anything with the interview listed in the form, and the path forward because a morality discussion and is left to the discretion of the interviewer, organization, or institution. There is no easy answer in this situation, highlighting the difficult nature of oral history practice.

### **Finally, no oral history project can so much as get off the ground in the absence of staff and resources.**

As amazing as the various technologies available for recording oral histories are, they also come with a hefty price tag. Many audio recorders can cost hundreds of dollars and video recorders often cost far more. On top of the recording equipment, interviews need to be edited and stored, which means paying for a computer and editing software as well as a server or external hard drive for storage. With these considerations in mind it's important to remember that an oral history can be recorded and edited on a smartphone. Sure, the quality will suffer, but again, the importance of an oral history is the information, not the display, unless the display is the goal of conducting the interview in the first place.

Should the financial burdens of acquiring recording and storage equipment be surmounted, the issue of staffing must still be navigated. Some universities offer collaborative opportunities in which they provide students in an oral history class to conduct interviews, which is beneficial to both parties. This is an ideal situation absent a professional staff able to conduct interviews.

A much less ideal situation is relying on volunteers with no oral history practice training. It's never clear what kind of quality interviews will be until after they have been conducted and some people aren't necessarily interested in providing a good interview, just in upholding their end of the deal. Though this cannot always be avoided, a way to mitigate this is to get ahold of an institution or organization that conducts oral history and ask them to provide any training materials and a template of a release form. This information can be used as a guide to help communicate what one would like accomplished during an oral history project and provide a basis for volunteers to understand what's expected of them.

There is no perfect oral historian, and volunteers can produce a great interview when given the tools to do so. It is important to repeat, that the most important aspect of an oral history interview is the information provided, and the key to unlocking that information is a good conversation. Some people are better suited to speaking with strangers than others, and it's important to find people with that skill, whether trained in oral history practice or not.

**Oral history practice is fraught with difficulties, as is any history-based project. These obstacles can be overcome, but it is important to bear them in mind when starting an oral history project.**

The more prepared one is for the challenges they may encounter, the better they are able to navigate those challenges. Oral history is an excellent tool for filling in gaps in the historical record and tapping into communities with a long history of oral cultural communication, and by acknowledging the social and technological issues related to the practice interviewers prepare themselves to produce great oral histories.

Despite the many difficulties that may arise when trying to preserve cultural heritage, there are many actions being taken to aid in preservation efforts. Cultural heritage is protected by five principal groups:

- 1 **Non-profit organizations**
- 2 **Local and national governments**
- 3 **Museums**
- 4 **Universities**
- 5 **UNESCO**

## Non-profit organizations

Non-profit organizations play a significant role in the preservation of culture, both in the United States and abroad. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of organizations that focus on some sort of preservation of cultural heritage. This section of the handbook aims to highlight a few of the organizations that play key roles in the preservation of culture worldwide. Each of the organizations discussed below helps preserve culture in its own way.

In the United States, one of the leading preservation organizations is the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA). The AIA preserves tangible aspects of culture, specifically archaeological sites. While the AIA's focuses on archaeology and its preservation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation is solely focused on preserving historic sites in the United States. A large part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation is a branch named the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund. In the history of the United States, African American culture represents a very meaningful part of the country's heritage. The African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund aims to preserve sites that commemorate African American achievements. This is a very important part of cultural preservation as the preservation of sites shows what the United States stands for, allowing visitors to draw inspiration and wisdom from the sites. For example, visiting Rosa Parks house can inspire anyone to fight oppression and find a voice. Simultaneously, it can teach us about American history and remind us of the horrid conditions that African Americans have experienced.

The Small Cycladic Islands Project (SCIP) is an example of a nonprofit organization that conducts fieldwork in Greece. Its primary focus is surveying the archaeological and cultural heritage of the Greek Cyclades islands. While the organization's main goal is not the preservation of specific cultural artifacts, SCIP is an example of an organization that ensures that archaeological fieldwork is preserved and encouraged. An example of what SCIP might do is excavate on a small island that has never been excavated on before. Their findings have significant implications for our understanding of the culture of the region. Then, after the archaeologists have analyzed the artifacts, they are given to the proper authorities to ensure that they are properly preserved. These types of organizations are critical to the cultural preservation field because they ensure the preservation of different parts of cultural heritage while also learning more about the region and making new findings. The Small Cycladic Islands Project shows that, while an organization might not necessarily be focused on cultural preservation, it may nevertheless ensure that the heritage they work with is properly preserved.

Other non-profit organizations are focused on the future. One example is CyArk, which is creating new systems for preserving culture. CyArk is focused on digital cultural preservation and has three primary goals: 1) storytelling, 2) documentation and training, and 3) open access. Using digital cultural preservation, which can create models of different aspects of culture, CyArk can tell stories of a culture using these models. Using these digital models, CyArk can also document historical artifacts and understand what next steps need to be taken to ensure their preservation. Documentation is very important because it allows experts to develop preservation plans. It can also be useful in understanding artifacts and buildings that are not easily accessible by creating digital models of them. Finally, CyArk ensures that all of its projects are accessible to everyone. This means that anyone can go on to CyArk's website (<https://www.cyark.org/>) and learn about different artifacts!

## Local and National governments

While local governments sometimes do not do enough to preserve their cultural heritage, a big part of the preservation of local culture comes from the local government. Especially in places with a large amount of tangible culture, like statues and monuments, the local government bears the brunt of the burden when it comes to preservation. Because preserving cultural heritage is essential not only for their local community but also for tourism, many local governments ensure that the prominent aspects of their culture are preserved. Nevertheless, it is often difficult for a local government to fully ensure that their cultural heritage is preserved, which is why non-profit organizations also play a significant role in helping certain communities preserve their cultural heritage.

## Museums

Museums play a crucial role in the preservation of cultural heritage. Worldwide, thousands of museums house important heritage objects belonging to all different types of cultures. This makes museums very special, because the art objects in museums are not just from one culture or even from one time period. Every artifact and every display in the museum represents one unique aspect of culture that the museum is preserving in an effort to educate the public. But, while a museum does preserve cultural heritage with the artifacts inside it, there are thousands of artifacts that a museum chooses to leave out of their collections. Having deciding power of this kind ultimately leaves many museums in a difficult position. In his interview with the Cycladic Preservation Group (CPG), Dr. Daniel Weiss, CEO of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, addresses this difficulty. Dr. Weiss explains that the MET's goal is to "collect the art of every culture, across every civilization, across all of history."<sup>12</sup> While he admits that this is an impossible task, he says that this objective leads the museum to collect artifacts from cultures that are not represented in the museum, as long as the art is legally acquirable and worthy of the MET museum. The MET museum is, of course, one of the most prominent museums in the world, but many other influential museums also try to preserve as many cultures (and as many types of cultures) as possible. Museums not only preserve cultural heritage by displaying artifacts; they also ensure that the culture on display is properly preserved.

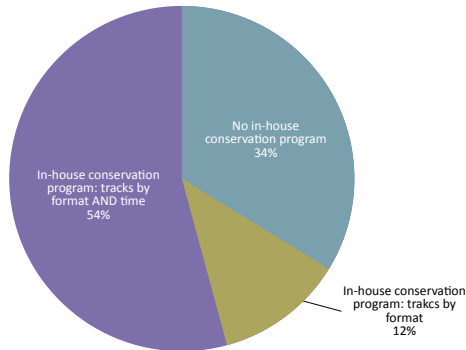
<sup>12</sup>Daniel Weiss, videoconference interview by Nicholas Sikellis, Online.

In the same interview, Dr. Weiss talks about how the museum's first responsibility is to "care for the art."<sup>13</sup> By this, he means that the museums' first responsibility is to preserve the important cultural heritage in their possession. The way most museums do this is through curation; curators and conservators are a vital part of the preservation of heritage.

However, some museums, especially those smaller in size, have trouble with preservation. In a survey conducted in 2012, Annie Peterson, Holly Robertson, and Nick Szydlowski found that an alarming 34% of preservation institutions, which includes libraries and museums, do not have an in-house conservation program.

**This simple definition proposes a very important idea: heritage is timeless. Heritage is the cultural legacy and the parts of culture that we need to preserve.**

## Universities



Universities worldwide are also key in the preservation of cultural heritage, through the projects that they run, their museums, and the courses their faculty teach on the subject. University projects are often very similar in nature to the non-profit organizations mentioned above. Many university projects focused on archaeology are also focused on preserving cultural heritage. An example of this is the Azoria Project run by Donald Haggis, a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>13</sup>Weiss, interview.



The Azoria project's main focus is archaeology and archaeological findings in Crete, and they consider cultural heritage to be at the core of their mission. A large part of the reports that come out about their findings involve conservation documents, which include information about how to preserve the sites as well as what they have done to preserve the site. Like many universities, teaching and ensuring conservation through these archaeological projects is key for the next generation of archaeologists.

Many universities also have their own museums, which often display cultural artifacts. Similar to the museums discussed earlier, university museums are significant in that they preserve cultural heritage. Not only do university museums take in artifacts and cultural heritage from many different cultures, but they also go to great lengths to preserve the cultural heritage inside their museums. University museums are essential educational tools for university students and for the general public.

University education is also critical for cultural preservation. Most universities offer specific courses on cultural preservation. This is more common in graduate programs, but there are some undergraduate programs that offer cultural heritage classes as well. Cultural heritage is taught in many different ways at universities. For example, archaeology courses often focus on the preservation of cultural heritage. If you are interested in learning more about cultural preservation, I would recommend that you reach out to any nearby universities and see if there are any programs you can become involved in! Internationally but specifically in the United States, universities play a significant role in the preservation of cultural heritage.

<sup>13</sup>Weiss, interview.

## United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

Last but not least, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also plays a central role in the preservation of cultural heritage. Belonging to the United Nations is advantageous for UNESCO because it affords the organization an important influence on many countries. UNESCO's cultural preservation is mostly limited to wartime preservation (discussed above), and this is a very important endeavor. As a neutral group in wars, UNESCO plays a critical role in preserving cultural artifacts during times of war. Their affiliation with the United Nations makes them a legitimate organization and protects them from danger when preserving culture during a war.

<sup>13</sup>Weiss, interview.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP PRESERVE CULTURE?



## **By now, I hope that you share my view that cultural preservation is a worthwhile endeavor.**

As a teenager myself, I wrote this handbook in order to inform you about what can be done to preserve cultural heritage. Below, I've included some insights from prominent experts on the subject of cultural heritage, who are much more knowledgeable and experienced than I am in the field. I hope that what they have to say will inspire you to do what you can to preserve culture. And, remember, that it is in our hands to continue and improve upon cultural preservation practices!

### **Michael Galaty**

One thing we have realized, as archaeologists, about human behavior is that all human decisions and actions are intertwined and affect one another, through time and across borders. Human systems, both large and small, are highly integrated. Moreover, human systems are dynamically linked to natural systems. Change in one causes change in the other, and vice versa. Thus, when we study past human behaviors, we can better understand our present situation, and we catch glimpses of possible futures.

That the climate and environment are being changed by humans is undeniable. Throughout the world, societies are developing—growing populations, building infrastructure, changing landscapes. One casualty of unchecked development and climate change is the archaeological record. When a highway gets built, archaeological sites get destroyed. As sea levels rise, archaeological sites get destroyed. If students want to protect cultural heritage, they can work to ensure that laws to preserve archaeological sites in advance of development are strengthened and enforced. If they want to protect archaeological sites, especially those close to coasts, as is the case in the Cycladic Islands, they should work to curb climate change.

**These goals are linked; fighting climate change helps protect archaeological resources, and protecting archaeological resources is yet one more reason to fight climate change. Doing both is a win-win.**

## Jeremy Bucher

There are many ways to get involved with cultural preservation in your community. One of the easiest ways is to volunteer at your local historical society or history museum. Such institutions are always looking for help and new ideas for projects related to local history and can be great resources when researching and engaging in historic preservation projects.

Another great way to engage with cultural preservation is to get in touch with your State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO). SHPO's are responsible for identifying and surveying historic properties, reviewing nominations for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, and providing support to state and local organizations, federal organizations, and even the private sector when needed. Each state, territory, and the District of Columbia are responsible for forming their own SHPO and creating the rules and regulations by which the office functions.

**One of the most important actions an individual can take to further cultural preservation is to identify cultural beliefs, actions, structures, organizations, and institutions in local communities and documenting why those various aspects of culture are important in the history of that community.**

Due to social or demographic changes, aspects of a community may have been forgotten, such as why a bridge looks a certain way or why a statue exists in a park, and by researching that history and reaching out to local institutions with that information individuals are contributing to cultural preservation.

## Donald Haggis

To preserve culture, and by extension, material culture (the material remains of the human past), one has to study and to try to understand what “culture” is and why it is worth preserving. So, this question would logically extend to defining what culture or “a culture” is, and then, in terms of historical preservation, cultural resource management and conservation, defining what “material culture” is. The latter, “material culture,” is perhaps easiest to define.

There are many ways to get involved with cultural preservation in your community. One of the easiest ways is to volunteer at your local historical society or history museum. Such institutions are always looking for help and new ideas for projects related to local history and can be great resources when researching and engaging in historic preservation projects.

The term generally refers to the physical, material, architectural, and artifactual remains of human activities—such as monuments, buildings, structures, features, objects, art, and implements—produced by group of people or implicated in the practices and customs of a specific group of people; as well as the material or formal characteristics of those things, which we use to define a specific culture group, from antiquity to the present. While I won’t venture an absolute definition of “culture” or “culture group”—this is a much bigger question—in archaeology, we traditionally use the terms in a normative sense to mean a particular set of definable, replicated, and presumably collective social practices, activities, norms, institutions, customs, and modes of behavior (such as language, ritual, religion, political and social systems, technologies, etc.). The people [who make up] cultures or culture groups of the past leave material traces or residues that survive into our present. Some of them are still standing in our public squares; or are foundations of newer buildings; or are reused to contain bars, restaurants and apartment buildings. While others are buried or partially buried or built over. But whatever their condition, it is their materiality—the distinct physical characteristics, affordances, and our attributions of meaning in the present—and their physical survivability that allow us to use cultures and culture groups as sources for defining and studying past societies.

Today, our material cultures, languages, customs, and institutions exist because of the cultures and the material cultures of the past. Our own social and material existence depends on and is a testament to the existence of past social and material cultures. So, the question of “preservation” is really about trying to retain material memories of past cultures, study them or derive meaning from them; it is about trying to understand the past social and material cultures that define who we are today—as a social, political, and material world.

Much of the foregoing sounds a lot like the discipline of history. And the study of past cultures and culture groups is indeed one aspect of the study of history.

So I would say that the best thing that students in middle school and high school can do is to start studying history, ancient languages, and archaeology—but not merely to study, read about, and reconstruct dates, events, chronological narratives and culture-histories of certain people or selected groups of people or places of human interaction in the past; but to gain an understanding of deep time, long-term human-environment relationships through time, and the durational nature of cultural landscapes. Cultural landscapes can be visualized as a continuous process of human-environment interaction; the co-evolving social and physical processes leading up to and including the present day. Embedded in our contemporary physical environment are the remains of the past, still existing and surviving with us into our present. We may choose to ignore them, to destroy them, to bury and build on top of them; or simply to refuse to see them around us; but to understand what they are, how and why they exist and still survive, and how they have actively shaped our own physical and social landscape, and our own cultures are the ultimate goals of cultural preservation.

**It realizes that the past survives with us in the present and informs the present. To preserve these remains is to preserve the material memories of the past that help us understand who we are today as a society, culture, or species.**

The absence of cultural preservation is cultural erasure, which is simply to ignore history. Erasure and destruction of culture is a means of rewriting history to create specious cultural narratives in order to maintain ephemeral political economies.

## Brian Rose


“Culture” is a difficult word to define, and it tends to mean different things to different people at different times. As a result, it is not always easy to determine what should be preserved. What about the bronze and marble statues of Lenin and Stalin that once occupied the public spaces of Russia and Eastern Europe? Nearly every one of them has been pulled down, and many were subsequently burned, melted, or deposited as garbage. What about the statues of Saddam Hussein in Iraq or those of Mussolini in Italy?

Both [historical figures] were responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people, so is there any reason to preserve their images for posterity? During the last decade we’ve seen this issue debated extensively, especially the images of Confederate generals in the American South. Most of those have either been defaced or dismantled, or they’ve simply disappeared. Is there any reason to preserve such monuments, even though they stand as symbols of racism and intolerance?

As archaeologists we face these problems every day—what should or should not be preserved, and how should it be preserved? In the case of archaeological sites, the decision is easy: the buildings we find are thousands of years old and representative of civilizations that have disappeared. Clearly, we should do everything possible to preserve as many of the ancient buildings and their associated material culture as possible, even ensuring that they will continue to stand in the event of an earthquake. But what about modern history? For most archaeologists, the examples I’ve cited above would be regarded as historical documents, and most archaeologists could not conscience the destruction of an historical document, even if that document is tied to racism, sexism, homophobia, or anti-Semitism, among other forms of injustice.



History is messy, and if we try to erase the messiness, we end up with no history. If a monument has been or continues to be used for the promotion of any kind of hatred, then it may need to be taken down from the site where it has always stood and moved to a museum, where it could be surrounded by text panels and used as a teaching tool, as a powerful example of material culture tied to injustice. But erasing where we've gone and what we've done as a nation and as a world may cause that injustice to be repeated in the future.



**I raise all of these issues because cultural preservation isn't just about the past; it's about treating history and its monuments with respect, even when we disagree strenuously with what those monuments commemorate.**

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**NICHOLAS SIKELLIS** was born in 2006 in Boston, Massachusetts to two Greek parents. At a very young age, Nicholas moved to Athens, Greece with his family where he stayed for 7 years. From there, he moved all around the world from Shanghai, China to Munich, Germany and then to New Jersey. While he has been living abroad for the past years, Nicholas still spends a significant amount of time in the Cycladic Island of Paros in Greece, which he considers to be his home. He loves Paros's natural beauty and, while traveling around the world, maintaining his Greek heritage has been key for him. Having traveled the world, Nicholas understands the importance of maintaining culture and how it brings people together, which is why he started the Cycladic Preservation Group (CPG). CPG is a nonprofit organization that aims to preserve tangible culture in the Cyclades. CPG aims to educate the public about cultural preservation through interviews with experts in the field. While still continuing his work with CPG, Nicholas also decided to start The Intangible Podcast. In the podcast, Nicholas brings on special guests to discuss modern cultural preservation and why it is important for the past, the present, and the future. After countless interviews with the Cycladic Preservation Group and the Intangible Podcast, and internships at the Benaki Museum of Greek Culture and the Ekatontapiliani Church Museum, Nicholas decided to write this handbook on cultural preservation. With this handbook, Nicholas hopes to teach middle and high school students internationally about the importance of cultural preservation.

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Mr. Bucher graduated with an M.A. in History from Loyola University Chicago while he was working as an intern at the National Hellenic Museum. As the Collections and Archives Manager, Mr. Bucher handles the donation, registration, cataloging, storing, and digitalization of artifacts. The National Hellenic Museum is focused on the display of Greek and Greek-American artifacts, but the museum also plays a significant role in the preservation and education of cultural heritage. Mr. Bucher is also an expert on the preservation of oral culture and digital preservation, which are two very important areas of preservation. Mr. Bucher was one of the experts in the field of cultural preservation interviewed by the Cycladic Preservation Group before joining the board in January of 2023.

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Michael Galaty received his Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Wisconsin. He is an archaeologist and directs field projects in Greece and Albania. He studies the rise of complex societies and has written extensively on the Mycenaean states. His book on the tribal cultures of northern Albania, titled *Light and Shadow: Isolation and Interaction in the Shala Valley of Northern Albania*, won the 2014 SAA Book Award. Michael Galaty was one of the experts interviewed by the Cycladic Preservation Group in the field of cultural preservation before joining the board in December of 2022.

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Brian Rose received his B.A. from Haverford College, and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia University. His research interests include Mediterranean archaeology, Roman art and archaeology, and archaeology of Anatoli. At the University of Pennsylvania, Brian Rose teaches many courses related to culture and archaeology in the ancient worlds of Rome, Greece, Troy, and Anatolia. He is also currently the head of Post-Bronze Age excavations at Troy, and he is the co-director of the Gordion Excavations. Some of Brian Rose's publications include: *Dynastic Commemoration and Imperial Portraiture in the Julio-Claudian Period*, *The New Chronology of Iron Age Gordion*, *The Archaeology of Phrygian Gordion*, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Troy*. Brian Rose was one of the experts interviewed by the Cycladic Preservation Group in the field of cultural preservation before joining the board in December of 2022.

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# DONAL HAGGIS

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Donald Haggis received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. He teaches archaeology courses in the Department of Classics and the Curriculum in Archaeology. His research interests include settlement structure in the Bronze Age and Iron Age Aegean; the archaeology of Prepalatial, Protopalatial and Early Iron Age Crete; and the development of early cities and small-scale states after the abandonment of Bronze Age palatial centers (ca. 1200-500 B.C.). He has participated in surveys at Kavousi, Vrokastro, and Gournia, and excavated in the Athenian Agora, Kouphonisi (Crete), Vronta, and Kastro Kavousi, Kalo Khorio-Istron, and at Azoria where he is the director of the Azoria Project, the excavation of a Final Neolithic, Early Minoan I, Late Minoan IIIC, and Early Iron Age-Archaic site on the eastern edge of the Bay of Mirabello in eastern Crete. The Azoria Project is very involved in helping preserve cultural heritage. Donald Haggis was one of the experts interviewed by the Cycladic Preservation Group in the field of cultural preservation before joining the board in December of 2022.

**CULTURAL  
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