

# War, invasion and the historic environment: call for papers for the Historic Environment Policy and Practice Journal

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When the Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion and conquest of Ukraine he justified his action in historic terms as a response to western threats to Russian security, that the Ukrainian's and Russians are one people and that the Ukraine is in the grip of a genocidal, neo-Nazi regime. Several fact-checking websites have examined these claims.<sup>1</sup> That the Russian and Ukrainian people are one, that the borders drawn after First and Second World Wars are illegitimate and that the central powers created Ukraine after the First World War<sup>2</sup> is an interpretation of history marshalled in the cause of war and exploited through the use of cluster bombs and artillery on civilian targets. It is a justification promoted by a tyrant and supported by members of the Duma, the Russian parliament.

In Ukraine the threat to the historic environment has been quickly realised. Not only at risk are the seven world heritage sites, including St Sophia Cathedral, Kyiv's best known landmark, founded in the 12th century, or the old quarter of the western city of Lviv, but also museum collections and local monuments. Already extensively reported is the destruction of the Ivankiv Historical and Local History Museum, near Kyiv, burned by Russian forces<sup>3</sup> and the missile damage to the Babyn Yar site outside Kyiv.<sup>4</sup> On 9 March The Guardian reported that 'Alongside the humanitarian catastrophe, cultural assets have been bombed and damaged. They include a museum in the city of Ivankiv, north-west of Kyiv, which housed dozens of works by the Ukrainian folk artist Maria Prymachenko, some now lost forever. Last week Russian forces shelled the assumption cathedral in Kharkiv, hurling debris into its nave.'

*The 19th-century wooden church in the village of Viazivka  
(<https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ato/3423396-russian-in-vaders-destroy-19th-century-wooden-church-in-zhytomyr-region.html>)*



The article goes on to report that Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, described how Moscow had flattened a 19th-century wooden church in the village of Viazivka, in the western Zhytomyr region and that Lazare Eloundou, head of Unesco's World Heritage Centre, said the UN's cultural body was receiving 'more and more reports of the destruction of cultural heritage in several cities'.<sup>5</sup>

The road to war has been characterised by the deployment of the historic environment as scholarship has been subverted by a dominant regime in pursuit of a war of conquest. A spokesman for the Russian diaspora has been firm in his condemnation of the invasion as Putin's war.<sup>6</sup> The relationship between policy, practice and the historic environment is complex, in this war the core objective of conservation through managed change has been distorted by a bankrupt ideology. This call for papers asks those working in the historic environment to contribute to the condemnation of war. This may be through review, analysis and argument in areas such as the deployment of history and archaeology in the pursuit of war, the implementation of conservation policy in the face of military aggression, or the evident destruction of symbolic and historic assets in an attempt to erase the past. One of the important roles of archaeologists is to introduce awkward facts to convenient histories. Already the two world orders involved in the conflict are disputing the physical evidence of the human past, and the interpretations of it. Some forensic archaeology in the Ukrainian streets and forests abandoned by Russian forces would provide evidence that is not incontrovertible, because nothing is incontrovertible for a propagandist, but it would be conclusive for anyone willing to learn the truth. So there is a role for archaeology in writing very recent history, in providing evidence for war crimes trials, and in helping people manage grief. And possibly in reconciliation, though the polarity of views and force of sanctions suggest that that will be a very long and troubled process.

At a time when the world should be preoccupied by the threat of climate change, the objective of this call for papers is to assemble material from as broad a constituency as possible. I hope we'll be able to produce a substantial volume showing the futility of war, not to mention its horrific consequences for ordinary people, through appreciation of the historic environment in a themed volume of *The Historic Environment Policy and Practice* on war.

If you have an idea or proposal please e-mail or phone the editor, Dr Michael Dawson  
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*Theatre in Mariupol.  
Credit: Донецька  
обласна військова  
адміністрація*

<sup>1</sup> For example <https://www.rochester.edu/newscenter/ukraine-history-fact-checking-putin-513812/> accessed 5/3/22

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-24/full-transcript-vladimir-putin-s-televised-address-to-russia-on-ukraine-feb-24> accessed 5/3/22

<sup>3</sup> This is despite Russia being a contracting party to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347 (2017), and 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60588885> accessed 7/3/22

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/ukrainians-in-race-to-save-a-nations-cultural-heritage> accessed 9/3/22

<sup>6</sup> Financial Times 9/3/22