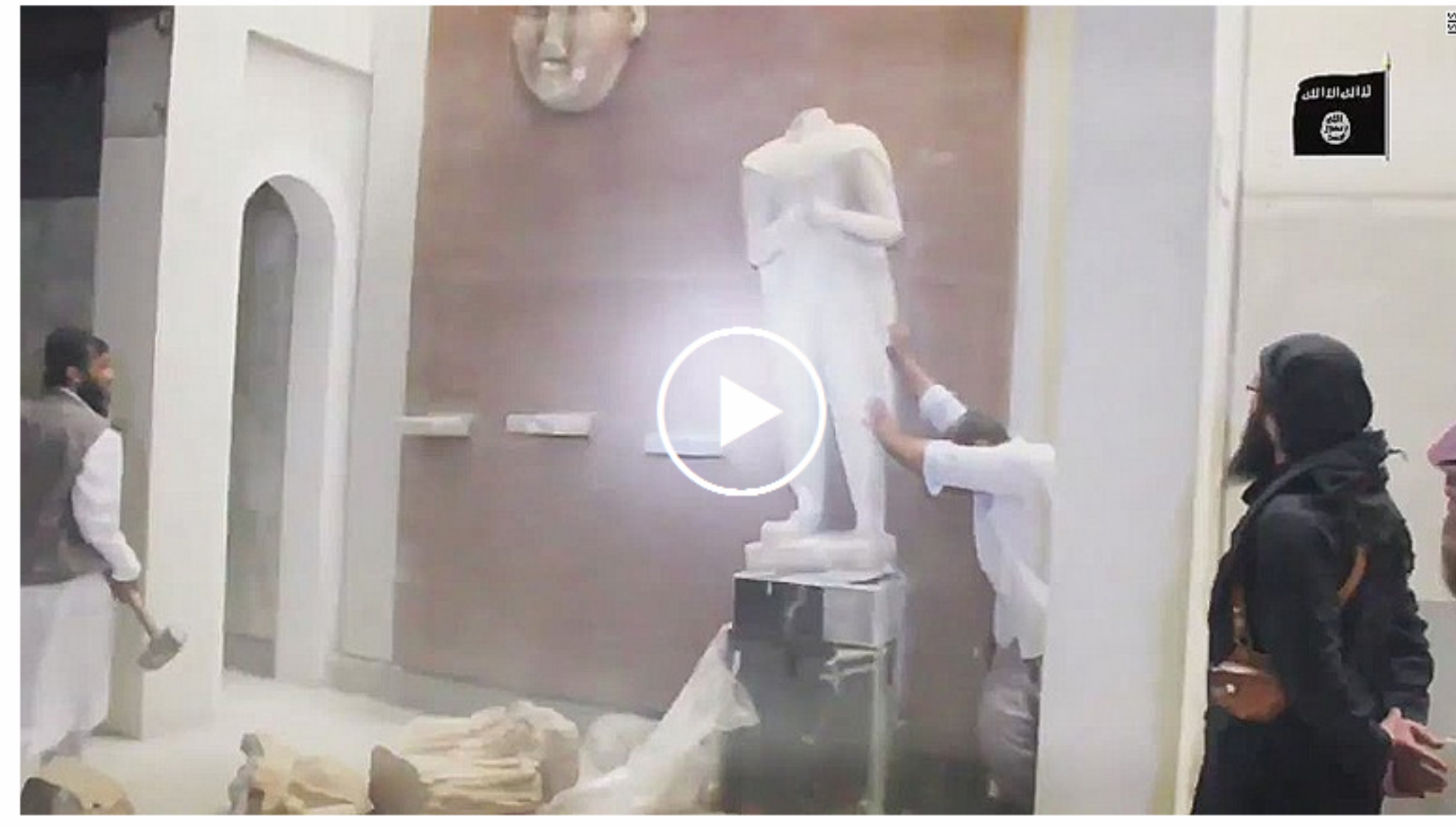


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# Artifact destruction a security issue

By Irina Bokova

Updated 22:49 GMT (06:49 HKT) March 7, 2015



ISIS escalates cultural annihilation 02:22

## Story highlights

ISIS bulldozed site of ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud in northern Iraq

Irina Bokova: Appalling to see the ravages of this violent extremism

**Editor's Note:** Irina Bokova is director general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The views expressed are her own.

There can be no justification whatsoever for the systematic destruction of the heritage of humanity, and I wholeheartedly support the many religious leaders who have taken such a firm position denouncing these destructions and the perverted use of religion.



Irina Bokova

**(CNN)**—The sack and pillage of the Mosul museum by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria displayed a violence rarely seen since the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan. The bulldozing of the archaeological site of Nimrud marked a new step in the cultural cleansing underway in Iraq. These acts are a deliberate attack against civilians, minorities, heritage sites and traditions. In the minds of terrorists, murder and destruction of culture are inherently linked.

It is appalling to see the ravages of this violent extremism in a region that is a cradle of civilization, whose temples, palaces and frescoes have born witness to the glory of Iraq and Mesopotamia for the last 3,000 years. It is important we understand the true nature of this conflict. This war against culture is a war against people. It is part of a strategy to crush free thinking and to ensure domination through oppression. This is why extremists attack schools, media, or other places of culture. Through modern methods of communication and information, they use warped learning and distorted academic texts to hijack young minds. They forbid girls to go to school, kill journalists and vandalize museums: all symbols that embody freedom of thought and respect for cultural diversity.

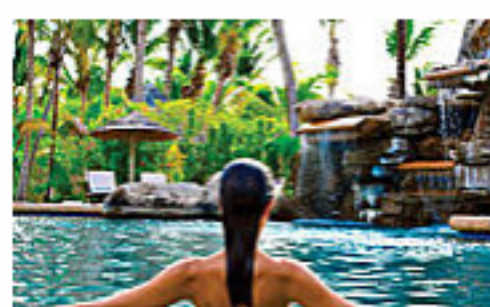
When culture is under attack, we must respond with more knowledge, and with ever greater effort to work to explain the importance of humanity's shared heritage. This is why we appeal to all cultural institutions, museums, journalists, professors, and scientists to share knowledge widely about the Mesopotamian civilization. We need to remind all of the history of this land which led the Islamic golden age.

And we also call on all people everywhere -- and especially youth, in Iraq and elsewhere -- to claim this heritage as their own. Pre-Islamic heritage in Iraq belongs to all Iraqis, just as the Pyramids are written into the identity of all Egyptians.

What is happening goes far beyond the domain of archaeologists and discourse on the "irreparable loss of treasures of humanity." What is happening is a security issue. The deliberate destruction of cultural heritage is a war crime. We see how terrorists are using such destruction to destabilize populations, spread terror, and encourage violence. We see also how extremists use heavy military vehicles to transport artifacts from looted sites, and how illicit trafficking is directly funding terrorism. With this in mind, we have joined forces with all partners and neighboring countries to halt these crimes.

The acceleration of such violence must be met with an acceleration of global solidarity and action. Faced with such crimes, we hope we can better understand the values we all share, and stand united in respect of humanity.

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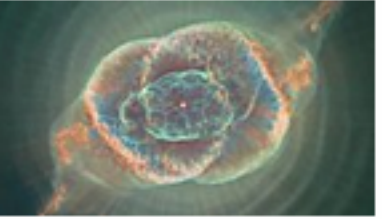


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