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ARTICLE

Triumph (re-)Imagined: Saddam's Monument to Victory

Annelies Van de Ven[1]

Introduction

National narratives are not rootless; they are located in time as well as space.[1] They are also not neutral, and each one carries within it a specific interpretation of the past, its literary and material remains, that is often focused on a particular territorial entity or cultural group. These interpretations form the basis for a national myth and they are incorporated into state ideologies to create a common national identity. The governing bodies of national and cultural groups can reform these historical sites, figures and events as tools to support a desired sense of identity. Through assessing how official interpretations of history are displayed in the public sphere through speeches, monuments or museum displays, we can begin to recreate these narratives and their processes of formation and revision.

In this paper, I focus on the narrative of Saddam Hussein's Victory Arch in Baghdad (Figure 1). The colossal structure was one of the many monuments erected by Saddam's government in order to immortalize a new vision for the Iraqi nation. This vision did not only address Iraqi expectations for the nation's future, but it reformulated their narratives of the past, creating a world in which the nation's well-being depended on the continued supremacy of the Ba'th party and its leader. The Victory Arch was a particularly poignant symbol of this narrative and had pride of place within the government's architectural repertoire. It was commissioned at a critical time for Saddam's government: 1985, the climax of the devastating Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988), when the legitimacy of the autocratic ruler was being questioned by his own population as well as the international community. Less than a decade after its creation, the Victory Arch was already subject to scathing reviews

[1] A. D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, 2nd edn, Cambridge, 2010.

✉ Annelies Van de Ven
annelies.van@unimelb.edu.au

[1] School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC 3010, Australia

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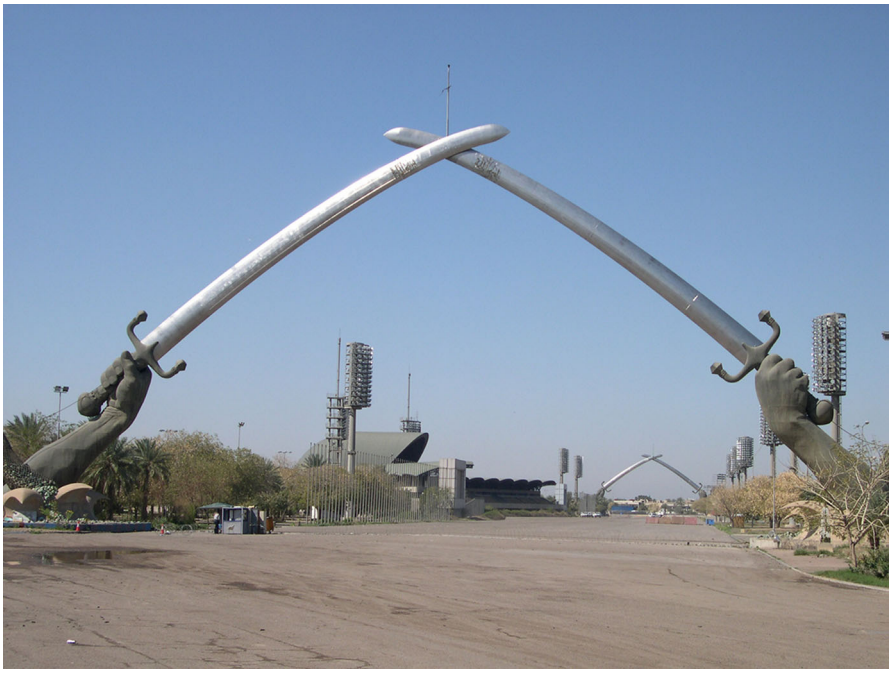

Figure 1 Victory Arch, Baghdad *Source* Diane Siebrandt, 2005, with permission

that positioned it as a demonic machination of Saddam and a testament to the nation's shame, rather than a monument to victory or national pride.[2]

While Roman triumphalist architecture and its influence on modern western architecture has been previously discussed in the literature,[3] its reinterpretations by recent rulers – and its role following the death or deposition of that ruler – remains to be fully examined. In this article, I explore the influences and possible intentions behind Saddam's Victory Arch, and its impact on Iraq and the broader region from its inception until today. First, I assess Saddam Hussein's Victory Arch within a wider system of responses to the triumphal arch motif. After a discussion of the development of the triumphal arch from ancient to modern times, I move to the particular context of Saddam's Victory Arch, designed by the sculptors Khalid al-Rahal and Mohammed Ghani, with a great deal of input from the ruler himself. Specifically, I analyse its spatial forms, its implementation of the practices of spoliation and its implied notions of militarism and martyrdom. Throughout the paper, I consider the motivations and practices adopted in the context of late twentieth-century Iraq in relation to the wider network of arch building throughout

[2] K. Makiya (alias. S. al-Khalil), *The Monument: Art and Vulgarity in Saddam Hussein's Iraq*, London, 1991, p. 134.

[3] See for example, M. A. Zaho, *Imago Triumphalis: the function and significance of triumphal imagery for Italian Renaissance rulers*, New York, 2004. E. Macaulay-Lewis, 'The architecture of memory and commemoration', *Classical Receptions Journal* 8, 2016, pp. 447–78. J. Power and H. Norrie, 'Australian Triumphal Arches and Settler Colonial Cultural Narratives', *Fabrications* 27, 2017, pp. 71–99.

history; this is in order to elucidate how the Victory Arch's construction was neither a simple transposition of an imperial tradition, nor a conceptually isolated structure. Rather, Saddam's archway is a monument that translates the notion of the triumphal arch, interweaving it with other historical narratives – suggesting a variety of historical figures, places and events – and ultimately inscribing it with a modern sense of identity, relevant to his own vision for Iraq.

Triumphal Arches Spanning Time and Space

The triumphal arch is a monument type we mostly associate with the Roman Empire, though the Romans were not the first to use such structures and precedents exist in the form of vast ornamented processional gateways used in annual festivities.[4] However, beginning in the first century CE, the arches of Rome became so ubiquitous throughout the imperial territories that they became something of a hallmark, indicating a rhetoric of power that drew on triumphal celebrations.[5] Though these gates and the events that led to their installation differed from one another through time and space, they have some architectural commonalities. The triumphal arch is defined by Roman art historian Fred Kleiner as 'a freestanding arch or gateway erected to commemorate an event or to honour a person or a family, often, but not always, in the occasion of a military victory'.[6] These arches were not connected to the defences of the city; rather they were monumental symbols for the variegated Roman practice of triumphal celebrations in which an individual's contributions to the state were recognized in a great urban pageant. In republican times, these processions were bestowed upon an individual by the senate to commemorate their contributions, military or otherwise to the well-being of the Roman state. The arch's functionality impacted on its form and reception in its own time, as its context and appearance were connected to individual prestige, as much so as the significance of the state. This all changed in the imperial period when the ceremony was appropriated by the Emperor who in his person embodied the state. It was no longer exclusively awarded to victorious generals, but instead was conferred at the discretion of the emperor as a self-propagandizing ceremony for him and his family.[7] It was also later in the imperial period, in the third century CE, that the idea of the *arcus triumphalis* solidified in the Roman vocabulary, before this point being a structure that lacked a standard term.[8]

[4] An example of this quite close to the Victory Arch's location in Baghdad is the series of ornamental gateways of the ancient Mesopotamian dynasties. The most famous of these is probably the Ishtar Gate, but other examples can be found across the territories once belonging to the Babylonian and early Achaemenid empires. Similar to a triumphal arch, the Ishtar Gate was meant to display the power of the ruler, the city and its chief god Marduk on a monumental scale, and it formed part of a processional route. However, unlike a triumphal arch it served as an integrated part of the city's fortification structures. S. Maul, 'Tor der Götter', *Antike Welt* 39, 2008, pp. 21–29.

[5] M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, Harvard, 2007, p. 46.

[6] F. S. Kleiner, *A History of Roman Art*, 2nd edn, Boston, 2010, p. 313.

[7] G. S. Sumi, *Ceremony and Power: Performing Politics in Roma between Republic and Empire*, Ann Arbor, 2005, pp. 29–35.

[8] Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, pp. 45–46.

When constructed in Rome, a military arch and the triumphal procession that passed through it could metonymically denote the vastness of the Empire and the expansionist underpinnings of Roman rule.[9] At the same time, honorary arches were also erected by Roman rulers in the great cities of the ancient world. These accomplished the inverse of their Roman counterparts, bringing the centre into the periphery and asserting Roman military superiority. These structures often stood at the entrances to fora or along major processional roads.[10] In both cases, the arches provided a gateway into the heart of the Roman city, framing Roman civic life in a monumental sense. Located in such prime positions, triumphal arches underlined Roman power in a very public and physical form, using an architectural language of commemoration and civilization to validate changing political and military behaviours.[11]

In her book on the pluralistic realities of the Roman Triumph, Mary Beard highlights the contingency of the triumphal ritual and its referentiality to the tendencies of classical historiography.[12] There is a sense of memory creation, of nostalgia present in the narratives that come down to us about ancient triumph. While these present a seemingly stable image of the tradition, the reality was much more fragmented, with individual motivations and historical circumstances influencing each singular event. The notion of preserving a pristine memory over the chaotic reality was extremely important within these celebrations and the triumphal arch was the ultimate repository of memory, inscribed not only with the narratives of individual triumphators, but also of all those who went before them, and of the achievements of the Empire at large. Even after the decline of Roman rule, these arches continued to stand for the power and prestige of the emperor, his domination of the spaces of empire and his subjugation of foreign enemies. It is in this capacity that the arch has been able to be re-appropriated by later rulers from the Renaissance to the present, each one attempting to make his own mark on historic memory.

If asked to imagine these reinterpretations of the triumphal arch, most people would think of something along the lines of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris (Figure 2), the Marble Arch in London, the India Gate in New Delhi or even the North Korean Arch of Triumph in Pyongyang.[13] If we look at these examples, we see all the elements of the traditional formula: a structure framing a round-topped Roman

[9] I. Östenberg, *Staging the World: Spoils, Captives, and Representations in the Roman Triumphal Procession,* Oxford, 2009, p. 274.

[10] A well-known example of this phenomenon that existed until recently was the monumental or triumphal arch in Palmyra, destroyed by IS on October 5 2015. K. Shaheen, 'Isis Blows up Arch of Triumph in 2,000-year-old City of Palmyra', *The Guardian,* 5 October 2015. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/05/isis-blows-up-another-monument-in-2000-year-old-city-of-palmyra. For an in-depth analysis on Roman rule in the Middle East and its architectural manifestations, see M. Sartre, *The Middle East Under Rome*, Harvard, 2007.

[11] E. Dench, *Romulus' Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian*, Oxford, 2005, p. 39. Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, p. 291.

[12] Beard, *The Roman Triumph*.

[13] F. B. Sear and R. John, 'Triumphal arch', *Grove Art Online*, Oxford. http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/subscriber/article/grove/art/T086233.

Figure 2 Arc de Triomphe, Paris *Source* Sarah Woeckener, 2011, with permission

opening with rectangular piers and a flat attic or entablature, decorated with architectural and sculptural elements and often inscriptions.[14] Very few would look to Bagdad for an example. Indeed, it looks quite out of place within this list. The Iraqi triumphal arch is instead made up of two bronze forearms cast off the body of Saddam Hussein, further personalized with his thumbprint. These emerge from 'the exploding ground' made of reinforced concrete. Strung from the concrete protrusions are bronze nets holding Iranian helmets. Saddam's bronze hands grip two stainless steel swords that meet at the apex of the assemblage.[15] Despite these differences, Saddam's structure still draws from many of these earlier receptions, most prominently the post-Roman Triumphal Arch archetype, the Arc de Triomphe. Referred to as the Ba'thi or Iraqi equivalent of the Parisian arch,[16] Saddam's arms and fists equal the sixteen metres of its predecessor while the crossed swords give it additional height and local significance.

When studied intently, very few of the reconceptualized triumphal arches mimic the triumphal forms of its predecessors exactly, and all appear as composite and complex constellations of local and international associations. If we consider two of the most recent arches to be monumentally erected within this tradition, the

[14] G. H. Sullivan, *Not Built in a Day: Exploring the Architecture of Rome*, New York, 2006, p. 134.

[15] Makiya, *The Monument*, p. 2.

[16] Makiya, *The Monument*, p. 3. A. Rohde, *State-Society Relations in Ba'thist Iraq: Facing Dictatorship*, London, 2010, p. 120.

Pyongyang Arch and Arch 22, both represent distinct reconceptualizations of triumphalist display while still indicating a relationship to more canonical arches. Arch 22 has taken the three-bayed design from traditional examples but applies an almost Palladian window effect by dividing the central arch across two floors and presenting the two side bays as rectangles defined by large fluted columns. Its upper section consists of a decorated pediment that extends across its regular rectangular-based pentagon, cut by a viewing platform within the central archway as well as three windows and a small clock at its pinnacle. The Pyongyang arch while seemingly more Roman in its styling, aesthetically merges a traditional local Korean tiered temple roof, the gateway marking temple boundaries and a classical four-way arch.

Even Napoleon's Arc de Triomphe upon which many of these later structures are based is missing the decorative columns that were so characteristic of many of its Roman counterparts. So, while these arches seem visually similar from a distance, in actuality each one is quite distinct; an arch adapted to its own particular historical and geographical context. This is even more apparent in the designs and descriptions of temporary arches erected for special occasions, and were particularly prominent in colonial territories, most often marking the entry of a ruler into a non-capital city or a coronation.[17] Indeed, a number of triumphal arches only ever existed on paper or in models such as Dürer's etching of the *Ehrenpforte*, designed for the ruling monarch Maximilian I, or Hitler's design for a forty-metre-high triumphal arch to commemorate the fallen in World War I.[18] Though not permanently established as monuments, these arches were conceptualized and physically manifested. It is the iconic connection to triumphalism that has allowed these monuments through time to be so adaptable, yet recognizable in their indication of power. Not necessarily directly reflecting the material of their predecessors, but rather evoking them through motivations and messages. It is in this way that the Iraqi structure appears ideologically similar to several of its triumphal predecessors. These constructions are interconnected through a wider category of functionality and through reference to a constructed historiographical framework of Roman power.

The Arch(es) Located in Space

Saddam's structure, from its conception to its opening, was certainly conceived of as a response to modern triumphal arches. The arch's primary architect Khalid al-Rahal, described it as a pair of swords with one pointing to Iran and the other to

[17] For a few examples, see J. McKay, 'Celebrating in the Streets: A Century of Triumphal Arches', *Queensland Review* 16, 2009, pp. 1–14. S. Brussels, *Spectacle, Rhetoric and Power: The Triumphal Entry of Prince Philip of Spain into Antwerp*, Amsterdam, 2012. J. Ogilby, *The Relation of His Majestie's Entertainment Passing through the City of London to his Coronation with a Description of the Triumphal Arches and Solemnity*, London, 1661.

[18] L. S. Stiber, E. Eusman and S. Albro, 'The Triumphal Arch and the Large Triumphal Carriage of Maximilian I: Two Oversized, Multi-block, 16th-century Woodcuts from the Studio of Albrecht Durer', *The American Institute for Conservation, The Book and Paper Group Annual* 14, 1995, pp. 62–85. A. Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture: The Impact of Classical Antiquity*, University Park, 1990, p. 133.

Israel, the two great enemies of Arab Islam.[19] In Saddam's own speech of 22 April 1985 describing his plans for the monument titles it *Qaws al-Nāsr*, a (single) arch to victory. It is also written this way on the invitation presented to notable dignitaries attending the opening of the arch, even though the preliminary drawing for the square, represented on the same invitation, shows two arches.[20] His use of the singular can be seen as an attempt to align the unconventional complex with the ideologies propounded through the tradition of a singular triumphal arch. Rather than opting for a Mesopotamian processional gate as the primary model, such as the Ishtar Gate of Babylon,[21] or medieval Islamic fortified gates, such as the Bab al-Wastani in Baghdad, which would make a better fit for his program of identity building around Iraq's history, he chooses to reference a monument type that has strong ties to the historical, and in particular, the imperial narratives of the West while retaining familiar forms inherent in Islamic architectural traditions such as the pointed arch and Islamic sword. He activated a similar narrative of east meets west by building the Open Mind Gate at the University of Baghdad. Designed by Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius, this monument was part of a wider attempt to use art and architecture to redefine the nation. This was not a trend unique to Saddam and had already been in play under the Hashemites when Faisal called for urban modernization in the 1950s.[22] Saddam's construction of both these monuments signified his own desired place as a world player on the international stage, as well as an attempt to surpass his perceived rivals in his nation's past. In this context, the monument does exactly what Pliny the Elder asserts that a triumphal arch should do, namely, raising the person represented above all others.[23]

Despite Saddam's designation of *Qaws al-Nasr*, an arch of victory, structurally speaking, it is more accurate to call this construction the Victory Arches as the monument actually consists of two identical arches straddling the Parade Ground that was constructed by Saddam in the geographical and political centre of Baghdad, between the Republican and As-Salam palaces. Therefore, the German name, *die Schwerter von Kadesia* or the Swords of Qādisiyya,[24] or the French name, *les Mains de la Victoire* or the Hands of Victory seem more apt. Sinan Antoon's appellation,

[19] O. Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political discourse in Iraq*, New York, 1998, p. 138.

[20] Makiya, *The Monument*, pp. 2–3.

[21] While this was not the main event on the square, there was a replica of the Ishtar gate on site.A. Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968–89*, London, 1991, p. 81.

[22] M. Marefat, 'Bauhaus in Baghdad: Walter Gropius master project for Baghdad University', *Journal/ International Working-Party for Documentation & Conservation of Buildings, Sites & Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement (Docomomo)*, 35, 2006, pp. 78–86.

[23] Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXIV.12.

[24] The German appellation is also interesting as it was actually a German company that created the four swords for the monuments. The involvement of the German metallurgical industry was communicated to the press when it was discovered in 2003 that English company, the Morris Singer Foundry, still held a copy of Saddam's thumbprint from when they were commissioned to help construct the statue's arms and hands. R. Alleyne, 'UK Firm may have a Hand in Saddam's Fall', *The Telegraph*, 4 August 2003. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1437919/UK-firm-may-have-a-hand-in-Saddams-fall.html. The Sunday Times, 'Saddam Hussein – Agenda', *The Sunday Times* via Factiva, 2003.

the 'Crossed Swords Complex', highlights the physicality of the monument even more strongly, while also indicating his own stance on its context of construction.[25]

These descriptors address both the ideology and the integration of the arches within their setting. The structures were placed 650 metres away from one another, spanning an area known as the Grand Festivities Square, designed in 1983 for public celebration and military parades.[26] The arches form the two outer limits, the boundaries within which the populace could be included in the dramatic performance of state. One such performance was Saddam's entry through the arches in their opening ceremony. The event was held on 8 August 1989, one year after Resolution 598 was implemented instituting a cessation of military actions by both parties.[27] During the one-year anniversary celebrations, he presented the cease-fire as a new Qādisiyya, a grand victory for the Arabs, in particular for Iraq and its nation's leader, sanctioned by god.[28] He wore monarchical ceremonial attire while riding a white horse.[29] In Michael North's words, this type of performance creates a 'collective emotional event', what Victor Turner might call a 'social drama'.[30] Through collectively performing a specific identity, whether induced from the ground up or from the top down, the community is in effect bringing that vision into being. These events, when seen as top-down creations, are intimately connected to what the Romans term *evidentia*, a tactic that induces 'emotional sharing', that moves 'the spectators to emotions by presenting them with emphatic images of reality'.[31] Saddam's Victory Arch could be seen as such an image.

The great arms sprouting forth from the ground simultaneously symbolized inclusion and exclusion in such an event. On the one hand, they embody the broader nature of the new Iraqi identity narrative, one focused on the persona of the charismatic leader. This leader encompasses the entire Iraqi population within his embrace and protects them from potentially damaging forces outside the state. On the other hand, the structures express a message of exclusion and violence towards any who might try to oppose the regime. For them the swords act as a warning sign, highlighting the inviolability of the celebration grounds as a sacred space where the cult of the nation and its leader is celebrated through various rituals and processions.

The complex designed by Saddam parallels imaginings of the Roman triumphal procession, through arches that marked an extended site of power and propaganda. This placement created an association between those honoured by the arches and the essentialized virtues of Rome, particularly that of military triumph. This projected

[25] S. Antoon, 'Bending History', *Middle Eastern Report*, 257, 2010, pp. 29–31.

[26] S. Yamada, *Baghdad, 1979–83,* Tokyo, 1985, p. 91.

[27] UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 598*, 20 July 1987.

[28] S. Hussein, 'الرسالة يوم النصر', اذاعة صوت الجماهير , Baghdad, 8 August 1989. C. C. El Dine, '"Qadisiyat Saddam": The gamble that did not pay off', in *Writing the Modern History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political Challenges*, ed. J. Tejel, P. Sluglett and R. Bocco, Singapore, 2012, p. 274.

[29] Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology*, p. 81.

[30] M. North, 'Public As Sculpture: From Heavenly City to Mass Ornament', in *Art and the Public Sphere*, ed. W. J. Thomas Mitchell, Chicago, 1992, p. 16. V. Turner, 'Social Dramas and Stories about Turner', *Critical Inquiry* 7/1, 1980, p. 142.

[31] Östenberg, *Staging the World,* p. 265.

sense of eternal Romanness is a construct similar to Saddam's composition of modern Iraq as a direct heir to past periods of Mesopotamian and Islamic regional dominance. Whether Saddam had actually led the army into any real victory was irrelevant.[32] As Makiya states the monument 'attests to the power of mass propaganda' corresponding 'to a deeply felt collective need to believe in a mythology such as victory in the Iraq-Iran War'.[33] The two arches of Saddam work in parallel to delineate the course and contours of propagandistic parades in Baghdad, associating the ruler with a tradition of victory displayed in these instances of public celebration.

In 1986, three years before the opening of the arches, construction began on the complex within which they were to be located. Like the famed Campus Martius in Rome, the starting point for Roman triumph in its narrativization, Saddam's Grand Festivities Square, complete with theatre, cinema, pavilion and parade ground, held a dual military and civic function.[34] The swords reflect these functions and simultaneously augment the ceremonial air experienced when entering the space.

While the arches are often discussed in isolation from their direct surroundings, their location is key to the message Saddam and his party wished to broadcast. In the study of archaeology and architecture, it is now quite common to consider each monument within its surroundings, assessing sight lines, view-sheds and circulation.[35] These elements illuminate the commissioner's intentions. Who did they want to be associated with? How did they intend the public to view their monuments? The Arch of Augustus in the forum, for example, was built between the temples of Castor and Pollux and that of Caesar. This could be a reference to the lineage claimed by Augustus. This lineage, featuring his adoption by the divinized dictator Julius Caesar and his connection to various heroic divinities of myth, lifted Augustus above all other citizens.[36] A different aspect of the arches' function is

[32] The Romans were not unfamiliar with holding triumphs to celebrate dubious victories. The rare few triumphs that followed civil wars, especially those in the transitional period between Republic and Empire, are significant here: the 46 BC triumphal extravaganza of Caesar after his victory against the sons of Pompei, Metellus Scipio and Cato the Younger in Africa; the triumphal procession of Octavian/Augustus in commemoration of his war against Anthony and Cleopatra, and especially the sea battle at Actium in 31 BC. Mary Beard also speaks of another two 'hollow military victories' in her monograph on the Roman tradition, namely, those of Caligula and Domitian, Caligula hiring actors to play German prisoners in his triumph while Domitian brought in fake spoils. She states that these 'despots' triumphs … literalize triumphal *mimesis* into sheer pretence.' Beard, *The Roman Triumph,* pp. 185–186.

[33] Makiya, *The Monument*, p. 15.

[34] This dual function as a place for military events, but also leisurely celebration, is highlighted by the often-quoted statement that the parade grounds were like 'Nuremberg and Las Vegas rolled into one'. Ibid., p. 51.

[35] See for example, A. Kaiser, *The Urban Dialogue: An Analysis of the Use of Space in the Roman City of Empúries, Spain*, Oxford, 2000. D. S. Harris and D. F. Ruggles, *Sites Unseen: Landscape and Vision*, Pittsburgh, 2007. E. Macaulay-Lewis, *The City in Motion: Movement and Space in Roman Architecture and Gardens from 100 BC to AD 150*, Oxford, 2007. T. M. O'Sullivan, *Walking in Roman Culture*, Cambridge, 2011.

[36] Only the foundations of this arch remain, but it is attested in the inscribed stone map, the Urbis Romae, as well as numerous coins from the early Roman Empire. L. B. Holland, 'The Triple Arch of Augustus', *American Journal of Archaeology* 50, 1946, pp. 52–59. E. M. Steinby, *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, I, Rome, 1993, pp. 80–85.

highlighted in the location of the Arches of Titus in Rome and Trajan at Benevento. Both arches are placed on a roundabout, a system once again adopted for the Arc de Triomphe. This diverges from the traditional interpretation of arches as processional gateways. They give the monuments a function outside of the triumph itself, allowing movement not only through them, but around them. This gives viewers increased access to relief sculpture and inscriptions, allowing for a more intricate and extensive decorative narrative.[37] It also presents additional options in terms of connectivity, and sightlines. Thus, the Pyongyang arch is connected to the sports stadium as well as several monuments to its south in the Mansudae monument complex featuring larger-than-life statues of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il and memorials to the revolution.

Saddam's own monument is equally propagandistic in its location. Placed within a purpose-built parade ground, it is intimately connected with the government's formal narratives and ceremonies. It formed part of Saddam's propaganda where projections of the regime's ideologies formed focal points for highly artificial public spaces.[38] This architectural intervention marks Saddam's own 'edifice complex'.[39] A term coined by Deyan Sudjic, it implies the need of totalitarian rulers to glorify themselves and express their political will through dominance over the built landscape.[40]

An architectural Network of Iraqi Militarism

Saddam's 'edifice complex' is embedded in a wider network of monuments in Baghdad,[41] all built within the crisis of the Iran–Iraq War, a violent conflict that ravaged both countries from 1980 to 1988. The War had a negative impact on the local people, infrastructure and economy costing the state more than 450,000,000,000 dollars and 180,000 lives, as well as severely damaging Iraqi relations with foreign powers, who were concerned by the effect of the war on the stability and regulation of the Middle East and its raw materials, as well as the Iraqi use of chemical warfare.[42] The monuments Saddam built to celebrate and commemorate this war collectively exhibited notions of militarism and nationhood

[37] W. L. MacDonald, *Architecture of the Roman Empire: An Urban Appraisal*, II, New Haven, 1986, p. 75. Sullivan, *Not Built in a Day*, p. 264.

[38] S. Balaghi, *Saddam Hussein: A Biography*, Westport, 2006, p. 116. Other examples of this include the Shahīd Monument and the Monument to the Unknown Soldier.

[39] D. Sudjic, *The Edifice Complex: How the Rich and Powerful Shape the World*, London, 2005.

[40] Ibid., pp. 326–27.

[41] There were of course a number of building projects outside of Baghdad that served the same self-aggrandizing purpose. Take for example the rebuilding of Babylon with Saddam's name inscribed into the bricks to rival the claims of the rulers of Ancient Mesopotamia. J. Curtis, 'The present condition of Babylon', in *Babylon: Wissenskultur in Orient und Okzident*, ed. E. Cancik-Kischbaum, M. van Ess and J. Marzahn, Berlin, 2011, p. 6.

[42] These numbers are derived from P. Razoux, *La guerre Iran-Irak, 1980–1988: Première guerre du Golfe*, Paris, 2013.

in an attempt to create a sense of common purpose and unity.[43] Beyond that they exemplify the 'normalization of war', how it became part and parcel of the everyday life of Iraqi citizens.[44] Besides the Victory Arch, Saddam also constructed his Monument to the Unknown Soldier (1982). His own monument was meant to replace the previous one that he destroyed to make space for his own statue on Firdos Square. This previous structure designed by Rifat Chadirji was an arch based on that of Ctesiphon, the seat of the Sasanians, the ancient enemies of the Islamic Arabs.[45] This strange choice of historical architecture was integrated with modern styles, methods and materials. Saddam's monument followed a similar military and weaponized theme to his Victory Arch, this time mimicking the form of a *dir'a* or traditional Arab-Iraqi shield. Like Chadirji's own structure, Saddam's new Monument to the Unknown Soldier formed a highly anonymized tribute to the war dead, this time symbolizing the virtue of those martyrs who had sacrificed themselves 'in the service of the party and in the cause of the Arab nation',[46] and those who would do so in the future.[47]

The Shahīd Monument (1983) is another structure honouring those who fought in the Iran–Iraq War. This monument, a forty-metre Islamic dome split in two, references the great piety of Saddam and his cabinet and the God-given legitimacy of his actions. These structures at the time were praised as giving Baghdad 'a new face',[48] and actively integrating the nation's historical and religious art and culture into the urban environment.[49] Another monument with a similar function of divine justification for military engagement is the Umm al-Ma'ārik, or Mother of All Battles, mosque.[50] Constructed from 1991 to 2001, this mosque was intended to celebrate the 'victory' of Iraq against America in the Persian Gulf War. The term 'Mother of all Battles' refers to the Battle of al-Qādisiyya where the Arabs won a victory over the Sasanian armies, heralding the transfer of civilizational supremacy

[43] Saddam was not the first ruler to do this and architecture was used to reflect and alter nationalist discourse from the years of the Iraqi monarchy and their great redevelopment project for Baghdad. C. Pieri, 'Editing Out the Architectural History of Modern Iraq: Aspects of the academic discourse (1950s–1980s)', *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 9, 2015, pp. 7–20.

[44] D. R. Khoury. *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance*, Cambridge, 2013, p. 3.

[45] M. T. Bernhardsson, 'Visions of Iraq: Modernizing the past in 1950s Baghdad', in *Modernism and the Middle East: Architecture and politics in the twentieth century*, ed. S. Isenstadt and K. Rizvi, Seattle, 2008, p. 92.

[46] Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, p. 165.

[47] M. Roy, 'Saddam's Arms', *Public* 28, 2003, pp. 56–76.

[48] W. S. Ellis, 'The New Face of Baghdad', *National Geographic*, 167, 1985, pp. 80–119.

[49] S. Daghir, 'بغداد حيث انتقل النحات من الحترف الى الشارع', الحياة 9508 9508, 8 November 1988, p. 10.

[50] This mosque is now named the Umm al-Qurā, or Mother of all Villages, Mosque. N. Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, New York, 2010, p. 37. Another famous mosque planned under Saddam is the al-Rahman Mosque, which remains uncompleted. He had also planned to build the Great Saddam Mosque, meant to be the largest in all the world, but this one was hardly underway when Saddam's regime fell. A. Cockburn and P. Cockburn, *Saddam Hussein: An American Obsession*. London, 2002, p. 129.

in the region.[51] Like the mosque's name, the entire project was meant to draw upon historical, religious and military imagery. A scud missile-shaped dome and Kalashnikov-shaped minarets measuring forty-three metres symbolize the forty-three days of the Desert Storm. Saddam's own integral place in securing the safety of Iraq and the Arab World is reflected in the structure's additional fittings: a pool shaped like the Arab World featuring a mosaic of Saddam's thumbprint made from the same mould as that used for the Victory Arch.[52] These structures mark a single monumental itinerary, one stylistically grounded in Iraqi modernism and militarism, while simultaneously remaining sheathed in traditionalism.[53]

As suggested by its German title, *die Schwerter von Kadesia*, the Victory Arch fits within this propagandistic series responding to the events of the Iran–Iraq War. The suggested victory of Saddam's triumphal complex was far from definite, neither Iran nor Iraq achieving any clear gain in the early years of the war. This was not the only bout of pre-emptive propaganda. In Iraq, the war was 'Saddam's Qādisiyya', a reference to the defining battle between the Arabs and the Persians in 636 which marked a long period of Arab domination in the region and suppression of Persian culture.[54] This battle was not just a victory for the Arab army, but a perceived victory for Islam, the religion that subsequently took root throughout the region. This narrative is interwoven into the symbolism of the Victory Arch. It can be seen in the monument's structure, in the sword 'as a symbol for honour, valour and pride in Arab culture'.[55] In addition to this, the slight curvature of the swords defines the form of a pointed arch which traditionally denotes ideas of Islamic culture and architecture as opposed to the use of round arches derived from Roman models.[56]

A particularly suggestive precedent can be identified in the *Taq-i Kasra* or Arch of Ctesiphon, built in the mid-sixth century by the Sasanians, which was also the model for the Rifat Chadirji's own monument to the Unknown Soldier that preceded Saddam's own constructions. This evocation may be intentional. Saddam himself stated on his invitation card that the swords were those of the Battle of al-Qādisiyya

[51] For an in-depth analysis of the Iraqi view of the war, see K. M. Woods, *The Mother of all Battles: Saddam Hussein's strategic plan for the Persian Gulf War*, Annapolis, 2008.

[52] Beyond the architectural features, the mosque also featured a Koran written in the blood of Saddam gradually donated over multiple years. Sudjic, *The Edifice Complex*, p. 4.

[53] Makiya, *The Monument*, p. 29.

[54] In their article for the second edition of the Encyclopaedia of Islam, Streck, Lassner and Veccia Vaglieri compare the evidence for a number of different probable dates for the battle and conclude that Muḥarram 15/February–March 636 is the date to be preferred for the Battle of al-Qādisiyya. M. P. Streck, J. Lassner and L. V. Vaglieri, 'al-Ḳādisiyya', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, ed. P. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs, Leiden, 2016. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-kadisiyya-COM_0412.

[55] N. Al-Sayyad, 'Identity, culture and urbanism', in *The Territories of Identity*, ed. S. Bandyopadhyay and G. G. Montiel, London, 2013, p. 142.

[56] It is important to note here that Islamic architecture and rounded arches were not mutually exclusive, and the triumphal arch was adopted in several Islamic structures, most prominently in the Gateway to the Great Mosque of Mahdiya erected by the Fatimids. Surrounded by remnants of earlier Roman occupation, the Fatimids would have been familiar with the architectural forms through examples like the Arch of Marcus Aurelius in Oea. M. H. Alami, *The Origins of Visual Culture in the Islamic Tradition*, London, 2015, pp. 122–3; 130.

fought between the Arabs and Sasanian Persians.[57] Their curvature and the so-called 'martyr's dome' pommel give them a recognizable Islamic appearance and simultaneously reference the Martyr's Monument built nearby just two years prior.[58] Though the exact combination of elements used may not have been present in a seventh-century armoury, the monument functions as a symbol of the identity Saddam wanted his people to rally around in the aftermath of the war; one that could be simultaneously nationalist and pan-Islamist. Combined with the references to a more classical past, the monument appears to address two audiences simultaneously, a local and international one, presenting Saddam's visions of his nation and himself on all fronts.

While attempting an air of authenticity, the monument seems to act as a self-Orientalizing 'kitsch'.[59] By weaving together various recognizably Islamic, Mesopotamian and classical elements, he is creating a caricatured version of his own vision of the Iraqi nation; one that is both locally familiar and internationally decipherable. Similar to the 1971 Persepolis celebrations of the Shah of Iran or Zahi Hawass's 'Chasing Mummies' documentaries in Egypt, the performance of identity is exaggerated in order to appeal to a broad audience.[60] Joshua Hagen discusses kitsch in his chapter on the Nazi cultural parades in Munich, and states that while the kitsch of such performances certainly seems quite laughable, 'kitsch is not frivolity'.[61] According to him, these events are a projection of a serious ideology that glorifies a system of militant nationalism. The 'participatory populist format' is important as it anchors this ideology in the public sphere and particularly its monuments. It is a means of control as much as a propagandistic spectacle.

In his Victory Arch, Saddam creates an umbrella of Iraqi elements. In this act, he attempts to unify the Iraqi people, if not in reality then at least in the view of the international community. Rather than being rooted in creativity, genuine emotion or kinship, these monuments are fantastical pastiches of the Iraqi nation.[62] They are unfeeling and anonymous, as they reflect a government rather than a people. Such structures and the events held within them allow the ruling body to lay claim to the spaces of the city, guiding movement and social interaction, and thus more directly impacting on people's daily lives.[63]

[57] Makiya, *The Monument*, pp. 1–2.

[58] Ibid., pp. 2 & 25–26.

[59] Ibid., p. 74.

[60] For an analysis of this phenomenon in Iran, particularly analysing the actions of the last Shah at Persepolis, see T. Grigor, 'Orientalism & Mimicry of Selfness: Archeology of the Neo-Achaemenid Style', in *Les Orientalismes en Architecture à l'Épreuve des Savoirs Archéologiques, Historiques, Techniques et Artistiques*, ed. N. Oulebsir and M. Volait, Paris, 2009, pp. 273–91.

[61] D. Alexander, 'Swords and Sabers during the Early Islamic Period', *Gladius* 21, 2001, p. 349.

[62] Makiya, *The Monument*, p. 72.

[63] R. D. Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History*, Cambridge, 1986, p. 5.

Drawing on Triumphal Traditions

Further supporting the Islamic narrative of the monument, the swords have been described as those of Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, the leading commander of the Arab army during the Battle of Qādisiyya and companion of the prophet Muhammad.[64] By placing these swords in the casts of his own hands, Saddam self-identifies with the great general, depicting himself as the newest instalment within a long line of protectors of Islam. Saddam's identification between himself as a modern conqueror, and his idealized forbearers is made stronger by the use of direct casting from his own arms and the later addition of his personal thumbprint. Makiya states that this reduces the artistic and creative value of the arch, as it introduces elements that are mechanically copied rather than creatively produced.[65] However, the direct semblance of the ruler imbues it with his being and thus his presumed authority. This image somehow engages 'the ancient belief that likeness preserves the spirit'.[66] Much like Saddam's monument, many classical examples of triumphal arches were not just meant to be architectural, monumentalizing the memory of the conqueror through their built form, but also to convey an iconographical message. Although Saddam and the great emperors used different iconographic traditions, Islamic and imperial, respectively, their monuments combine to convey a similar message – exalting the victory and piety of the monumentalized leader and establishing continuity with the authority of their popular antecedents.

A classic example is Constantine's references to former Roman emperors in his own arch through spoliation, the inclusion of sculptural fragments of other monuments. Through a process of appropriation and reuse, the monument assumes the authority of preceding emperors. Brilliant and Kinney described spoliation as 'the re-use of architectural components and sculptures' in new contexts.[67] This is neatly exemplified in the case of the Arch of Constantine which incorporates sculptural elements from monuments built by Constantine's historical predecessors: figures from the forum of Trajan, roundels from Hadrian's arch and panels belonging to a monument to Marcus Aurelius (Figure 3).[68] Each of these elements had the faces of the former emperors recut to resemble Constantine.[69] This shows

[64] S. Alianak, *Middle Eastern Leaders and Islam: A Precarious Equilibrium*, New York, 2007, p. 100.

[65] Makiya, *The Monument*, p. 6.

[66] H. Honour and J. Fleming, *A World History of Art,* 7th edn, London, 2015, p. 202.

[67] R. Brilliant and D. Kinney, *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine*, Burlington, 2011, p. 1.

[68] This sense of architectural spoliation can also be seen extended beyond Roman Emperors, to the use of Roman materials for the building of Mosques across the extended Roman Empire in the Near East and North Africa. M. Greenhalgh, *Constantinople to Córdoba: Dismantling Ancient Architecture in the East, North Africa and Islamic Spain*, Leiden, 2012. An example is the use of columns from Roman villas in the construction of the 7th-century Great Mosque of Kairouan. M. Greenhalgh, *Marble Past, Monumental Present: Building with Antiquities in the Mediaeval Mediterranean.* Leiden, 2009, p. 177.

[69] J. Rohmann, 'Die spätantiken Kaiserporträts am Konstantinsbogen in Rom', *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, 105, 1998, pp. 265–267. J. Elsner, 'From the Culture of Spolia to the Cult of Relics: The Arch of Constantine and the Genesis of Late Antique Forms', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 68, 2000, p. 163.

Figure 3 Arch of Constantine, Rome *Source* Zoe Mackie, 2012, with permission

the antiquity of using physical likeness in such monuments to reflect the power of their creators and apply it to the public sphere.

Saddam's monument does not incorporate spolia in the same architectural sense, it does not repurpose pre-existing architectural material. However, it does engage with the ideas of reuse and appropriation in a more symbolic sense, adapting them to a different modern style and context. The most obvious example of this when confronted with the monument is the inclusion of 5,000 Iranian helmets collected during the war. They serve as a trophy, a reminder of the Iraqi victory, much like the wagons of arms included in the triumphal processions of Rome later depicted as mounds of spolia on monumental archways such as the Arch of Titus.[70] At the same time, however, their distorted forms, riddled with bullets and marked with the scuffs of battle, provide a warning symbol to the Iranian people. The helmet form evokes that of a skull. Piled high in the bronze nets of the monument, they resemble the piles of severed heads depicted on the walls of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh. This combination of celebration and threat was one that lay at the core of the Roman triumph. The celebratory element justifies the sacrifice of the battle while the threat serves to boost the image of the victor and deter any further attempts of invasion or revolt from their enemies. In Saddam's case, the monument evokes the concept of

[70] Andrea Mantegna used the descriptions of Roman triumphal spolia in the works of Roman Authors like Plutarch and Appian, to create his own painting the *Triumphs of Caesar* at the end of the fifteenth century. J. Manca, *Andrea Mantegna and the Italian Renaissance*, London, 2006, p. 124.

jihad, a holy war that carries divine legitimacy and cannot be lost. This is combined with a message of continuous aggression in the form of a *jihad* against the Iranians who are painted as the incompatible other, infidels tainting the purity of Islam. This message was essential to Saddam's legitimation narrative for a war that pitted the modernized and secularized Iraqi nation against the Islamic Republic of Iran. By incorporating Islamic elements in his monument, both Shia and Sunni, Saddam attempts to rally support for a war that may have otherwise seemed blasphemous.[71]

A second element of reuse incorporated into the monument can be found in the swords themselves. According to Ba'thist propaganda, the twenty-four-ton steel swords were forged from the melted down guns and tanks of the Iraqi army. Though there is no way of confirming this, the claim itself carries weight. There is a long tradition of reusing metal from antiquity and the middle ages. When an area was conquered, statues of preceding inhabitants were melted down. This could serve a practical purpose based on the material value and usefulness of metals, especially bronze. In times of war, for example, ancient statuary was often melted down and reused for weapons. However, often the reuse of statuary served a symbolic purpose, marking the overthrow or suppression of a competing ideology, government or religion. For example, Pliny the Elder describes how the statue of self-proclaimed supreme authority Spurius Cassius was melted down by order of the censors as a 'precaution against ambition'.[72] The Catholic Church melted down or defaced pagan statuary to suppress pagan worship in favour of the new faith.[73] Melting down weapons has served similar purposes. Practically, it takes weapons out of circulation, placing more control in the hands of the state. Ideologically, the creation of statuary from these weapons serves to enforce the narrative of victory. Thus, the Serpent Column of Delphi is said to be made of Persian weapons collected from the battle of Plataea, and in a more recent legend the weapons of Napoleon's troops were melted down to make the Waterloo Lion.[74]

However, the idea of melting one's own weapons seems an odd one. An explanation can be found in Saddam's victory speech on 22 April 1985 when he first mentions his intention for the monument.[75] He states that 'The worst condition is for a person to pass under a sword which is not his own or to be forced down a road which is not willed by him'.[76] This statement not only references the difficulties of war and subjugation, but also the specific occasion of triumphal procession. The

[71] Also part of his *jihad* propaganda was his creation of a fake lineage connecting him to the prophet. This claimed status of *ashraf or sadat* supported his claim as the saviour of the Arab world. This all formed part of a wider scheme of legitimation, where he attempted to cater to both nationalist and pan-Islamist ideology. J. Krieger, *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, Oxford, 1993, p. 474.

[72] Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXIV.14.

[73] T. C. G. Thornton, 'The Destruction of Idols – Sinful or Meritorious', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 37/1, 1986, p. 122. A. Tinniswood, *Visions of Power: Ambition and Architecture from Ancient Times to the Present*, London, 1998, p. 85. R. Hughes, 'The Forever City', *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 October 2011. http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB100014240.

[74] M. Belozerskaya, *Medusa's Gaze: The Extraordinary Journey of the Tazza Farnese*, Oxford, 2012, p. 50. J. Logie, *Waterloo: La Campagne de 1815*, Bruxelles, 2003, p. 202.

[75] S. Hussein, 'صدام يكرر استعداده للسلام مع إيران', وكالة الانباء العراقية, Baghdad, 22 April 1985.

[76] Makiya, *The Monument*, p. 3.

sword becomes the triumphal arch constructed by Saddam, and the path, the roads upon which Saddam and his troops marched to celebrate their claimed victory. Walking beneath the swords of your brethren is also a common military salute. It signifies a transition – often used in marriages, funeral and military ceremonies – in which an individual passes in or out of a military context. It is also a demonstration of loyalty that presents the allegiance of both the persons walking beneath the arch and those performing the salute. It binds them together into a single community, a common cause.[77] The arch of Saddam has a similar set of roles, honouring the soldiers, proclaiming their victory and re-asserting their loyalty to ruler, country and their military brethren dead and alive. In Saddam's mind, their supposed victory allowed Iraqi soldiers the honour of a procession through familiar swords and spared them the humiliation of subjugation; a humiliation that, in Roman times, was displayed through descriptions of captives marching in defeat through the streets of Rome.

Celebration and Commemoration

The celebration of a military achievement lies at the heart of the Victory Arch as it did in the literary, architectural and pictorial traditions of Roman triumph. According to the literary tradition, the first ever triumphator in ancient Rome was Romulus, the founding hero of Rome. The triumph's presence in historical epic, and specifically Rome's founding myth, shows the importance of this tradition to the narratives of Roman society. The victorious generals, through their achievements, became associated with the heroes of myth. The celebration was transformed from an 'ephemeral spectacle to an enduring monument'[78] through the triumphal arch which anchored it in memory. It also gave a very material form to the triumphator's influence within the city. The festivities associated with the triumph allowed the deeds of select citizens and rulers to be separated from everyday politics. In pre-imperial times, this created a liminal space in which the civic threat that such figures could pose was weakened.

This celebratory element was accompanied by an equally important focus on commemoration. In Saddam's monument, the weapons incorporated into the fabric of the structure are described as those of Iraqi martyrs. The monument does not bear their names, as it would on the Arc de Triomphe or the India Gate, rather they remain anonymous, a collective embodied in the form of the arch and the body of Saddam Hussein, their leader. A similar effect is achieved with Arch 22, featuring a statue of the unknown soldier only a few metres from its base. The non-inclusion of explicit references to soldier names allows the ruler a larger representative role. This is similar to the imperial Roman act and depiction of triumph. While in the republic, triumphs could be held to commemorate successful generals, by the time of the Empire only the emperor was allowed to hold a triumph on behalf of the Roman people, and only the emperor who held imperium and his direct circle were

[77] H. Z. Lopata and D. R. Maines, *Friendship in Context*, Greenwich, 1990, p. 226.

[78] S. Midford, *The Triumph of Ambition: The Evolution of Roman Triumphal Honours from Ephemeral Spectacle to Enduring Monument*, MA Thesis, Melbourne, 2007.

personally commemorated in these monuments.[79] He had a pre-existent connection to the world of the divine and was the chief authority within the political sphere. The act of triumphal procession did not elevate him temporarily, but rather served to reinforce his established power.

Under absolute rule, the triumph went from being an honour bestowed by the senate to being a 'politicized privilege', one that by the late empire had become more established.[80] It was in the interest of the autocratic ruler, no matter the period or location, to remain at the apex of the social hierarchy. Letting any one individual surpass them in honour and heroism, could rally public support behind an alternate leader, destabilizing a regime's legitimacy. In this case, a dead martyr is a safer focus of triumph than a live hero who could challenge the ruler. As the ruler of a nation bearing the scars of recent civil war and a long series of military coups, Saddam was often 'more preoccupied with the risk of a coup d'état than other issues'.[81] Like Augustus in Rome, Saddam allowed his subject to idolize the fallen, but continued to portray himself through his monuments as the greatest saviour of the Iraqi people, who in turn would support his totalitarian rule.[82] Through his portrayals, he constructed an ideological narrative for the Iraqi people; one that would long shape the development of the Iraqi nation.[83] His person came to represent the Iraqi people past and present, and the land upon which they lived. Therefore, their sacrifice in war became his own, and the individuals who lost their lives were subsumed within his loss and his triumph.

Saddam became the ultimate patron of martyrs by appropriating the acts of faith executed by others. The notion of a martyr is an important one in Islamic thought. The Arabic word for martyr is *shahīd*. Like the English word martyr, *shahīd* signifies acting as a witness, specifically to a belief.[84] The term is closely tied to that of *jihad*, a battle to protect the faith, whether on or off the battlefield. The narrative of the martyr became central to the national ideology of Iraq and Iran, with both nations vying for religious legitimacy.[85] During the war, history itself became a battleground featuring secularized religious elements like the messiah and the martyr.[86] These figures symbolized communal commitments. Through their sacrifice, their lives no longer belonged to themselves, but rather became the property of the nation, serving as political symbols that the public could rally behind. The notion of communal mourning is especially significant in bringing the wider population together and creating a sense of unity. As David Lowenthal states in his work on the conflicts of heritage, martyrdom is the embedding of 'personal

[79] P. V. Jones and K. C. Sidwell, *The World of Rome: An Introduction to Roman Culture*, Cambridge, 1997, p. 87.

[80] D. G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*, Chichester, 2014, p. 297.

[81] J. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime*, Cambridge, 2012, pp. 138.

[82] For more a more detailed analysis of how martyrs became elevated above other citizen soldiers by the Iraqi state in this time, see Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, pp. 163–72.

[83] Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, I.5.

[84] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, Cambridge, 2007, p. 16.

[85] Antoon, *Bending History*, p. 29.

[86] M. J. Mūsawī, *Reading Iraq: Culture and Power and Conflict*, London, 2006, p. 78.

lives in communal fates' where 'private purposes coalesce into communal commitments'.[87] While this may sound romantic, the 'public appropriation of private lives'[88] is often a quite pragmatic action. The veneration of a deceased or anonymous hero, a martyr allows for a safer focus of celebration and commemoration. Such events deny the human agency of the martyr, making him an instrument of god; one sent to symbolize the entire nation and its destiny, rather than just his own will.[89]

A Monument to Victory?

In Saddam's own mind, the nation's destiny was to be victorious, and his monument was meant to reflect that. His vision was shared by numerous others; on 21 March 1985, the US State Department announced the defeat of Iran by Iraq. However, when the structure's erection was announced only a month later on 22 April 1985, the Iran–Iraq War was still far from over. Much of the Tanker War was still to come, as well as a number of attacks on major cities, residential areas and oil fields.[90] Though allegations of chemical warfare committed by Iraqi troops were rampant, Saddam was still being supported by the US and many European countries, especially in the form of military equipment. At this point, international opinions had not yet turned and the Islamic Republic of Iran was still seen as the main threat. War reports were muddled with neither side wanting to admit any losses. Only in July 1988, after long negotiations in Geneva, would Iran finally agree to the ceasefire agreement proposed by Iraq. Far from being a military victory, the end of the war was a clear defeat for the Iraqi forces.[91] Resources, not just money and ammunition, but also manpower and infrastructure were destroyed and motivation depleted. A moral victory was fabricated very early on in the war to compensate for this great loss of life and capital, and to keep the population motivated. Therefore, rather than commemorating an event that had occurred in the past, the monument, finally finished in 1989, projected a vision of an Iraqi future that in Saddam's own eyes could inspire self-sacrifice and loyalty.

The monument was a form of prospective memory, or memory for the future. Such structures are intended to define our expectations for the future by restructuring our understandings of the past. Monumentality gives a sense of permanence to memory, whether real or fabricated.[92] A victory memorialized in an arch becomes eternal, those it memorializes, immortal. This connection created

[87] D. Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 59.

[88] Ibid., p. 59.

[89] K. Makiya (alias. S. al-Khalil), *Republic of Fear: The Inside Story of Saddam's Iraq*, New York, 1989, p. 100.

[90] The Tanker War was a battle fought over dominance and territory within the Gulf region between Iran and Iraq from 1984 to 1988.
N. El-Sayed El-Shazly, *The Gulf Tanker War: Iran and Iraq's Maritime Swordplay*, New York, 1998.

[91] E. Podeh, 'From Indifference to Obsession: The Role of National State Celebrations in Iraq, 1921–2003', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37/2, 2010, p. 196.

[92] A. Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 22–3.

between the past and present allowed stories to be retold according to future aspirations. Thus, the Victory Arches retell the story of Qādisiyya within a new context. The defeat of the heathen Persians by the zealous Arabs during the Islamic conquest becomes equated with the battle between Iran and Iraq in the late twentieth century. An Iraqi victory becomes inevitable if this comparison is taken seriously. This new battle is, after all, Saddam's Qādisiyya. His ability to mobilize the masses through his appropriation of Iraq's golden age was highly effective. His monuments, parades and events 'make history a living reality and consolidate national consciousness'.[93] History is not a stable entity, but one that is constantly reproduced and reframed based on the needs of those writing it.

The architectural and sculptural languages were not only those of victory, but also of violence. This adheres to the general Ba'thist method of rule in which historical memories are appropriated as 'a form of cultural violence'.[94] The new monument was meant to show Iraq to be more modern and more culturally refined than its neighbour. What it actually displays is an appreciation of power over culture.[95] The narratives of the past are aggressively torn from their context and haphazardly thrown together to create a new story. The structure is one of authoritarian control, in which art and history are not respected in their own right, but rather become the handmaidens of the state, subordinate to its will. The spirit of victory expounded celebrates a culture of war, not peace. It is created with aggression towards a rival other, one that had to be defeated morally as well as on the battlefield.

Saddam's structure is a clear attempt not only to memorialize an Iraqi victory but also himself. He makes an effort to write himself into history, and 'engrain himself in public memory',[96] an act that requires the erasure of others as their identities are appropriated and their histories rewritten. Saddam was creating a cult for himself, a rule based on populism and propaganda.[97] Through waging war against the Islamic Republic of Iran, he was to become the ruler who had 'restored liberty' to Iraq.[98] This fit in with his general self-image: the safeguarder of the Iraqi people and the wider Middle East. He was a modern Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas. His monument shows how all of history, from the gates of Babylon, to the triumphs of Rome and the martyrs of Islam, can be conflated into a new legitimizing narrative. The structure is supported by casts of his own arms, tying it inextricably to his own life, a connection that proved problematic after his defeat.

After 2003, all structures associated with Saddam were blacklisted in the minds of the foreign occupants and much of the local population. Many were torn down or

[93] Podeh, 'From Indifference to Obsession', p. 196.

[94] Ibid., p. 203.

[95] Mūsawī, *Reading Iraq*, p. 82.

[96] Ibid., p. 79.

[97] For more on Saddam's leader cult, see Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party*, pp. 162–92.

[98] Augustus, *Res Gestae*, I.1.

re-inscribed with a new function.[99] The victory arch posed a problem as its connection to the former ruler was too strong for it to be repurposed. For years it was left to gradual fragmentation, but oddly the monument has survived.[100] Debates have raged on about its possible future, most without consultation of the local population, with proposals ranging from complete destruction, to preservation, disconnection of the swords from the arms, to using it as a museum.[101] In February 2007, the government debates turned into actions and the physical dismantling of this monument began. However, this was halted at the request of the Iraqi Ministry of Culture, the American Embassy and the Iraq Memory Foundation.[102] No actual attempts at deconstruction have been made since. In 2011, the monument was even restored.[103]

This is a familiar issue within the Middle East and North Africa, which have both experienced a number of violent regime changes over the past fifty years, each new regime approaching the monuments of its predecessors in its own way. The Marble Arch of the Philaeni installed by the Italian colonizers in Libya remained unscathed in the United Kingdom of Libya until the rise of the Libyan Arab Republic under Muammar Gaddafi. He tore the structure down save only two bronze statues that were relegated to a museum.[104] In Cairo, local construction workers were contracted by the new government to tear down Mubarak's old headquarters just four years after the revolution that ended his reign.[105] In Iran, while statues and images of the Shah were torn down, many of the Shah's old structures were repurposed by the Islamic Republic, either as symbols of Revolution such as the Shahyād, renamed the Āzādi or freedom tower, or as reminders of the decadence of the Shah and his

[99] A key example of this was the destruction of the Statue of Saddam at Firdos Square and its replacement by Bassem Hamad al-Dawiri's statue symbolizing the Iraqi state and the unity of its various ethnic groups. R. Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, New York, 2013, pp. 176–7.

Similar events occurred in Post-Soviet Russia. In Budapest, the bronze statue of Stalin in the park of Városliget was demolished to boot level by the local populous in 1956 and was replaced in 2006 by a revolutionary monument. E. Balas, *Will to Freedom: A Perilous Journey Through Fascism and Communism*, New York, 2000, p. 363.

In Iran, the statues of the Qajar Shah's were torn down in the 1953 revolution, and those of the Pahlavi Shah's in the 1979 revolution. An interesting comparison can be made at the Saʿdābād complex, where the White Palace of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi Shah was repurposed as a museum, but the statue just outside was torn down to thigh level. However, there has been talk since 2006 of possibly reviving this statue. S. Sadigh, 'Statues of Saʿd Abad Palace in Tehran to be Revived', *Payvand Iran News*, 20 November 2006. http://www.payvand.com/news/06/nov/1246.html.

[100] However, Saddam's flags atop the monuments were removed by American troops during the 2003 invasion (personal Communication with Diane Siebrandt, 12 January 2016).

[101] Antoon, *Bending History*, p. 257. B. Whitaker, 'Fate of Saddam relics sparks debate', *The Guardian*, 16 June 2004. http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/jun/16/arts.iraq.

[102] K. Semple, 'Iraq Confronts Hussein Legacy Cast in Bronze', *The New York Times*, 8 April 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/08/world/middleeast/08monuments.html.

[103] S. L. Myers, 'Iraq Restores Monument Symbolizing Hussein Era', *The New York Times*, 5 February 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/world/middleeast/06iraq.html.

[104] J. C. Quinn, 'A Carthaginian perspective on the Altar of the Philaeni', in *The Punic Mediterranean*, ed. J. C. Quinn and N. C. Vella, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 169–79.

[105] S. El Deeb, 'Mubarak's Party Headquarters Destroyed in Egypt', *The Star*, 31 May 2015. http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2015/05/31/mubaraks-party-headquarters-destroyed-in-egypt.html.

extortion of the Iranian people, such as his palaces in the Sa'dābād complex.[106] Iraq's position has been more complex due to its difficulty in establishing political independence since the 2003 invasion. The Victory Monument itself poses an additional problem due to its combination of sculptural representation and architecture. It is not just a building that can be repainted, renamed and reassigned. It is a physically recasting of Saddam's arms, providing a constant reminder of his reign of terror and its repercussions to anyone who walks by.

Conclusion

The questioning of Saddam's Victory Arch and its precedents is significant because it represents the relatively understudied period of late twentieth-century arch building that includes monuments like the Pyongyang Arch of Triumph erected by Kim il-Sung to represent his own resistance to Japanese Annexation and Arch 22 in Gambia commissioned by Yahya Jammeh to commemorate his overthrowing of the previous Gambian government. Though these arches have a very localized architecture, they are all directly responding to the existing receptions of classical arches. Their hybrid identities and connections to areas of ongoing conflict or global disconnect has made them resistant to intensive scholarship. However, by exploring their place within wider architectural symbolism like I have done here with the Victory Arch, we can begin to disentangle their meanings and references, presenting a more complex narrative that goes beyond that of a self-idolizing ruler, creating a wider range of possibilities for their future management and dissemination.

In a 2011 article, Ali al-Mousawi, government spokesperson for Nuri Kamal al-Maliki was quoted comparing the dismantling of the Victory Arch to the Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and the German removal of the Berlin Wall. His choice of comparatives is especially interesting: these two instances seem to be completely opposite to one another. On the one hand, the systematic and violent removal of references to pre-Islamic culture by a militant terrorist group as a political statement of defiance to the values of the west. On the other, the removal of a symbol of division to mark the end of a long period of military and political opposition between two world powers. How does Saddam's monument fit into this? Would its dismantlement be an uncivilized destruction of a valued historical monument, or a sign of reconciliation with the people of Iraq?

Al-Mousawi speaks of the restoration of the Victory Arch as a coming to terms with Iraq's past, but its dismantling also has the potential to achieve this goal.[107] As the general population has not been consulted, their voices have not been heard in this debate. If they were to call for the removal of the Victory Arch perhaps a middle ground could be found between destruction and preservation. A possible course of action could be extensive documentation of the monument, a dismantling of its more oppressive components, the storage of its parts and their replacement

[106] The Washington Post, 'Former Shah's Property Now Used by Poor', *The Washington Post*, 6 August 1979. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1979/08/06/former-shahs-property-now-used-by-poor/0c662079-2ab6-4ac3-81c3-22e7cd6fe127/.

[107] A. al-Mousawi as cited in Myers, 'Iraq Restores Monument Symbolizing Hussein Era'.

with a subtler allusion to the area's architectural and political history. The touristic potential of the old monument could then still be at least partially fulfilled through establishing a display containing some of its physical material and its story within a museum of Baghdad's architectural history on the ceremonial grounds. This way the monument would be given a place within history, without necessarily being an eye-sore to the local inhabitants.

However, inclusive debates are always more difficult to develop in cases that are embedded in ongoing conflict and trauma. What can seem an undesirable memory now, may later become a motivator and reminder of past struggles that should not be repeated. An informed decision can only be made after a monument is not only assessed emotionally, but also historically, a process that requires time and leniency. This has become especially significant in recent times with the flourishing dissemination methods independent of the state that allow for more public and immediate expression of opinion about the monuments, museums and their collections. By looking to the Victory Arch's wider systems of reference and possible meaning as a localized manifestation of a wider triumphal tradition, rather than seeing it solely a symbol of a single figure's self-indulgency, I present the possibility of a broader vision of the Arch's study, and the study of similarly contested monuments.