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The Protection of Monuments and Immoveable Works of Art from War Damage: A Comparison of Italy in World War II and Ukraine during the Russian Invasion

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Abstract: This article compares the safeguarding of monuments and immoveable works of art in Italy in the first years of World War II to the on-site protection undertaken in Ukraine during the Russian invasion and explores whether traditional or more innovative methods are being employed in Ukraine. Both the planning in advance of war and the implementation of protective measures amidst substantial obstacles are considered. The focus is placed on fixed works of art in churches and public statues. Special attention is given to the vulnerability of churches and their ornamentation during war.

Keywords: Ukraine; Russian invasion of Ukraine; Italy; World War II; war damage; immoveable cultural property; heritage protection; churches; iconostasis; mosaic; wall-painting



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1. Introduction

The terrible costs of war are all too evident in the contemporary world, as we witness the forced migration of populations, the destruction of historic urban centres and the depletion of cultural heritage through looting ([Human Rights Watch 2023a](#); [International Committee of the Red Cross 2023](#)). In Ukraine, since the Russian invasion began in late February 2022, about fourteen million citizens have been compelled to leave their homes, and the loss of cultural property through looting and aerial bombardments has also been severe ([Human Rights Watch 2023b](#)). Although the grief that results when monuments are ruined cannot be compared to the trauma of displaced people, the preservation of heritage is critical because of the attachment of communities to their cultural markers. This article considers the efforts that have been taken to safeguard cultural property that is precious to Ukraine as a nation in the twenty-four months since the Russian war began. The protection of immoveable art and architecture in Ukraine is compared to the project undertaken to safeguard monuments in Italy during World War II, which represents a benchmark for heritage preservation in the past. Several examples from each context are juxtaposed to discover whether the traditional methods employed about eighty years ago have been followed in Ukraine or if changes and innovations have been introduced.

2. How Can Italy in 1940 Be Compared to Ukraine? Heritage Management and the Experience of War

In Europe during World War II, a few countries, most notably Britain, France, and Italy, put in place significant on-site protection for monuments ([Bosman 2008](#), pp. 15–33, 72–89; [McCamley 2003](#), pp. 29–114; [Shenton 2021](#), pp. 130–72; [Nicholas 1995](#), pp. 81–151; [Karlsodt 2011](#), pp. 67–141). From among these countries, Italy has been chosen for three reasons. The first is that Italy had a federal system for the management of cultural property, which bears comparison with the national administration of heritage in Ukraine. However, while the Ukrainian laws for the protection of cultural property were instituted after Ukraine gained independence in 1991, the Italian system was established much earlier.

Following the Unification of Italy (1861–1871), the Italian model was developed as part of government legislation in the first four decades of the 20th century ([Legge 185 1902](#); [Legge 364 1909](#); [Legge 3164 1923](#); [Legge 823 1939](#); [Balzani 2003](#)). At the time when Prime Minister Mussolini declared war in allegiance with Germany on 10 June 1940, the protection of cultural property was directed by a cabinet minister, the Minister of National Education (“Ministro dell’Educazione Nazionale”), and his immediate deputy, the Director General of Antiquities and Fine Arts (“Direttore Generale per le Antichità e le Belle Arti”). The actual work of cultural heritage protection was delegated to senior civil servants known as “soprintendenti”, or superintendents, who were appointed to the territories into which Italy was divided for the purpose, such as the province of Florence. The superintendents typically were responsible for one (though sometimes two or all three) of antiquities, monuments, and galleries, and their role was to put into effect both the parliamentary laws and the “circolari” or directives issued by the Minister. This was a hierarchical system, requiring that the superintendent submit proposals and cost estimates to the Minister and Director General to obtain permission and funding, including for wartime protection. State responsibility officially only encompassed cultural property that was registered or listed as of national stature, though laws were passed in the first years of World War II to extend the responsibility for protection to a larger number of ecclesiastical properties, as will be mentioned ([Ministero dell’Educazione Nazionale 1923–1936](#); [Ministero dell’Educazione Nazionale 1931–1938](#); [Levi 2008](#), pp. 112–14, 125–26).

In Ukraine, federal declarations on the importance of cultural heritage began in the *Verkhovna Rada* or Constitution of Ukraine in 1996, and legislation specific to the management of immovable and moveable cultural objects appeared in the Law of Ukraine in 2000 ([Constitution of Ukraine 1996](#); [Law of Ukraine 2000](#), pp. 5–17). Similar to the Italian model, protection was centralized in the executive power of the federal cabinet and the Ministry of Culture, and there were also authorized cultural protection bodies in the oblasts (or provincial governments) and in cities. However, the Ukrainian system was less hierarchical than under Mussolini’s Fascist regime, since each level of government had its own responsibilities: the monuments registered as of national importance fell under the ministry for decisions on conservation and protection, while those of local importance were managed by cultural bodies in the oblasts or cities, and this encompassed protection to prevent damage ([Law of Ukraine 2000](#), pp. 17–19). Nevertheless, the ministry could, if necessary, overrule decisions made at lower levels of government ([Law of Ukraine 2000](#), p. 6). Regarding protection under emergency circumstances, the funding originated in the federal budget and was transferred to the cultural bodies at the state, oblast, and municipal levels ([Law of Ukraine 2000](#), pp. 30–32).

The second reason why Italy has been chosen for comparison with Ukraine regards the somewhat similar experiences of war by Italy in 1940–1945 and Ukraine beginning in February 2022, in contrast to Britain and France during World War II. Britain was attacked from the air but not invaded, and France quickly capitulated to Germany, signing an armistice on 22 June 1940, although later, in coordination with the Normandy landings of 6 June 1944, the Allies attacked northern and northeastern France. On the other hand, Italy endured five years of conflict. From the moment that Mussolini joined the war alongside Hitler in June 1940, cities were attacked from the air. After the Italian king and government deposed Mussolini and signed an armistice with the Allies in September 1943, the country suffered from battles on Italian soil between the occupying German army and the Allies ([Overy 2013](#), pp. 486–546; [Gioannini and Massobrio 2007](#), pp. 29–31, 409–10). The impact of years of war on monuments in Italy corresponded in some ways to the recent destruction in Ukraine, since Ukraine has been subject to invasion, occupation, and attacks from the air by Russian forces. The Balkans Conflict of the 1990s has not been chosen as a comparative example because very little on-site protection was put in place in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, and rarely were the rules of the Hague Convention of 1954 followed ([Maniscalco 2002](#), pp. 150–51; [Maniscalco 2007](#), pp. 76, 87).

One final reason why the historical case of Italy has been selected for comparison with Ukraine involves the plight of churches. As this investigation will reveal, ecclesiastical properties in Italy did not receive sufficient protection during World War II. Because the same problem is evident today in Ukraine, it is critical to draw attention to the continuing vulnerability of churches during war.

3. Registering the Importance of Protecting Monuments from Destruction: Cultural Memory and International Law

Before considering the protective methods employed in Italy and Ukraine, two different manifestations of the importance of cultural sites and their preservation will be introduced. The first concerns scholarly recognition of the value of cultural markers for social groups and nations, and the second records the necessity of heritage protection as part of the international laws of war.

The academic field of memory studies took root before World War II in the influential writings of the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs on “collective memory”, in which he argued that memory was a social construction created collectively by each social group and often in association with cultural monuments or landscapes (Halbwachs 1992, p. 47; Erl 2011, pp. 13–15). Several decades later, Pierre Nora, in his magisterial work on French cultural history, introduced the phrase “lieu de mémoire” to evoke the resonance of specific places and objects in the formation of collective memory (Nora 1996–1998; Nora 2001–2009). More recently, the ideas of Halbwachs and Nora are being applied to the interpretation of attacks during wars on monuments that represent social identity. The term “identicide” is used to describe the deliberate ruin of buildings belonging to persecuted minorities, especially when the destruction is a prelude to genocide, for instance, the attacks on synagogues in Germany on Kristallnacht, 9 November 1938, and the destruction of mosques during the Balkans Conflict of the 1990s (Kristallnacht 2019; Riedlmayer 2002; Meharg 2001; Bevan 2006, pp. 25–60). In turn, the reconstruction of significant monuments in facsimile form after the end of the conflict is interpreted as part of rebuilding the identity of the community (Lévi-Strauss 2002, pp. 146–48; Hadžimuhamedović and Bouchenaki 2018; UNESCO 2018; Espon/Heriwell 2022).

On the basis of this established understanding of collective memory and representative monuments, the Russian attacks on hundreds of nonmilitary targets in Ukraine, among them village churches and libraries, are being classified by many within and outside Ukraine as “identicide” (Roslan 2022, p. 196; UNESCO 2024a). Peter Stone, the President of Blue Shield International, underlines the value of the Ukrainian monuments, describing them as “an integral part of people’s identity, belonging, and sense of wellbeing”, and characterizing what is being lost as “not only knowledge and memory of the past, but [also] the building blocks of peace for the future” (Stone 2023).

As representative monuments are essential to the identity of societies, their preservation during wars must be a priority. Indeed, already at the close of the 19th century, the protection of cultural property was encoded in the international laws of war. Because these rules of military conduct define certain methods for the protection of immoveable property, it is necessary to introduce the legislation at the outset. In Europe, the damage to town centres during the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) and the devastating events of World War I (1914–1918) and World War II (1939–1945) for civilians, the built environment, and the landscape combined to fuel the writing and revision of the international laws of war, signed at The Hague in 1899, 1907, and 1954. Among the sixty regulations articulated in the first Hague Convention of 1899, five pertained to the protection of cultural property, with Articles 23, 28, and 47 prohibiting “the pillage of a town or place” and the destruction or seizure of the property of “the enemy” and Articles 27 and 56 rendering illegal damage to or theft from “historical monuments” and “edifices” or “institutions” devoted to religion, art, science, charity, and medicine. Article 27 also stipulated the use of agreed-upon signs to mark protected sites (Hague Convention 1899). These regulations were only slightly

revised in the Hague Convention of 1907, which was in force during World War II ([Hague Convention 1907](#); [Kaye 1997](#)).

However, the heavy damage to urban centres and their monuments during World War II, along with the revelation of the systematic looting undertaken by the Nazis from 1933–1945, prompted the drafting under the auspices of UNESCO of a new international convention solely devoted to the protection of cultural property during war, which was signed at The Hague in 1954 ([Hague Convention 1954](#); [Nicholas 1997](#), pp. 40–42; [Plant 1997](#)). To enhance the preservation of what the convention termed “immoveable” and “moveable” cultural property, rules were established to ensure that each state prepared in advance, during peacetime, to “safeguard” their monuments and works of art in the event of conflict in the future ([Hague Convention 1954](#), Article 3). Furthermore, during war, “respect” was to be accorded to cultural property by the country itself and by the enemy in the case of attacks or occupation ([Hague Convention 1954](#), Articles 4 and 5). The distinctive emblem of the Blue Shield was chosen to denote the legal protection given to immoveable cultural property and to places that were being used as “improvised refuges” for moveable objects ([Hague Convention 1954](#), Articles 6, 10, 16 and 17; [Maniscalco 2002](#), pp. 149–51; [Stone 2015](#), p. 41). The convention also encoded rules for the establishment of enhanced or “special protection” for a small number of highly valued immoveable sites, including historic city centres, and for a few refuges where the most important moveable cultural property was stored ([Hague Convention 1954](#), Article 8). In 1999, a revised Second Protocol of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property of 1954 was signed, and the Second Protocol has been in force during the Russian war against Ukraine ([Second Protocol 1999](#)).

Therefore, from the perspective of international law, there has been strong evidence of the motivation to safeguard cultural property during war since 1899, and the legal framework has been further strengthened in the development of laws specific to cultural property in the Hague Convention of 1954 and its Second Protocol of 1999. Though less concrete, the meaning of cultural property to societies and the resulting impact of heritage destruction have been elucidated by scholars in the field of memory studies. Because collective identity is understood to be tied to cultural monuments, the importance of preservation during war is underlined. Certainly, the effort devoted to the safeguarding of cultural heritage during war is a telling indicator of its significance for the nation, as this comparative examination will show.

4. Terminology and Scope: Monuments and Immoveable Works of Art

When scholars in the fields of international law and heritage studies discuss the protection of heritage, they often adopt the language of the Hague Convention of 1954, where the term “cultural property” is used and it is characterized as either “immoveable” or “moveable”. When the “protection” or “safeguarding” of moveable cultural property is considered, the convention speaks of the “transport” or “transfer” to a place intended as a “shelter”, and the location is called a “refuge” ([Hague Convention 1954](#); [Pollard 2020b](#), pp. 667–68). In this article, however, a more flexible vocabulary associated with art history will be adopted. When protection in Italy during World War II is discussed, the language in the Italian ministerial documents and the military records of the Allied Monuments Fine Arts and Archives Subcommittee (MFAA) will be used. This includes the term “deposit” in the sense of a shelter or repository.

Regarding the scope of this investigation, the focus is on the protection of works of art and sculptural monuments that can either be classified as immoveable, such as large public statues, or that fall in between the categories of immoveable and moveable because they could be dislodged in theory or under optimal conditions but in practice are nearly impossible to move on account of their size, weight, location, or fragility. Among the artistic objects that fall in between are a multi-paneled altarpiece (polyptych), an iconostasis, and a stained-glass window in an elevated position in a church. Particular attention is given to the plight of religious properties and their decoration, including churches that are situated

at a distance from major centres and consequently suffer from isolation. This study will concentrate on the protection put in place at the outset and in the first few years of the conflicts, not on later developments, which normally encompass the documentation of damage, urgent rescue of damaged sites including the clearance of rubble, and initiation of restoration or reconstruction. The methods employed in Italy to safeguard monuments in 1940–1942 will provide a framework of traditional practice against which the techniques used to protect similar works of art and architecture in Ukraine can be evaluated.

5. Proactive Measures: Planning for Protection of Cultural Property during War

The necessity of preparing in advance for the safeguarding of cultural property is a strong theme in recent publications and policy documents. For instance, Fabio Maniscalco, an Italian archaeologist who worked alongside NATO peacekeeping missions to protect heritage during the Balkans Conflict, has asserted that when war is imminent, cultural bodies and museum directors are responsible for activating the system of protection that has been prearranged during peacetime. This planning should include ensuring that the necessary supplies and staff are available “should any conflict or attack arise” (Maniscalco 2007, p. 67). Others have judged countries to have erred if they failed to establish heritage protection in advance of conflicts (Daniels 2022; Campfens et al. 2023, p. 12). Nevertheless, an abundance of evidence demonstrates the difficulty of preparing ahead of time and in a sufficient manner. Common obstacles are that countries, on the eve of war, are focused on military concerns and not heritage protection, and that budgets, staffing, and supplies for safeguarding cultural property are completely inadequate. These factors influenced the extent to which proactive planning paved the way for effective implementation in both Italy in 1940 and Ukraine in 2022.

In the case of Italy, extensive planning for the protection of immovable cultural property took place between the two world wars, but when the actual work had to be undertaken, a few days before Italy entered World War II, the regional superintendents faced several significant roadblocks. In the Italian ministry archives in Rome (Archivio Centrale dello Stato or ACS), many files of documents from the 1930s attest to the preliminary preparations for what is termed anti-aerial protection (“Protezione Antiaerea” or PAA) (Coccoli 2007; Nezzo 2011, pp. 103–5). The procedure initially involved the Minister or Director General sending directives to the superintendents to request that each regional office submit a list of the most important immovable monuments of national stature that were a priority for protection, among which were the churches deemed to be of greatest importance (“importantissimo”) which did not fall to the Vatican for their preservation (Circolare 1933, January 24). This process was repeated several times with only minor variations during the 1930s, in part due to the short terms in office of the ministers and their deputies (Circolare 4965 1936, July 11). For example, a sequence of replies to ministerial directives by the superintendent responsible for monuments, galleries, and excavations in the province of Siena, Pèleo Bacci, demonstrates that the planning for anti-aerial protection (PAA) moved slowly, as well as that critical issues were not given serious consideration. From 1930–1937, Bacci expressed confidence about the storage of moveable art, but had great concern about Siena’s late medieval architecture and immovable art because of the proximity of the city to two military air fields, which would be enemy targets (Circolare 24 1930, December 18). In 1937, however, Bacci was told conclusively that Siena was not on the Ministry of War’s list of cities requiring special protection (Bacci 1930–1937).

Beginning in the summer of 1938, the directives about PAA from the ministry to the superintendents increased in number, even if the same requests for lists were issued (Circolare 79 1938, June 7; Circolare 158 1938, October 13). By the following spring, six months before Britain declared war on Germany, the ministry required lists with more details, such as a brief description of how each monument would be protected and a cost estimate, and by October 1939 the ministry was requesting photographs of monuments before they were damaged in order to prepare for post-war restoration (Zocchi 1939; Circolare 210 1939, October 29; Fortino 2011). In January 1940, superintendents were instructed to mark the

roofs of the most prized monuments and the deposits where moveable property would be sheltered with large painted symbols, following the rules of the Hague Convention of 1907 and the Hague Rules for Air Warfare of 1923 (adopted by the League of Nations, September 1938). However, the superintendents were hamstrung because Rome did not provide funding for the scaffolding needed to take photographs and to reach the rooftops or for the workers and the special paint ([Circolare 7 1940](#), January 13; [Hague Convention 1907](#); [Hague Rules for Air Warfare 1923](#)). A very difficult road lay ahead for the regional offices when the Minister of National Education, Giuseppe Bottai, told superintendents to activate their plans for PAA only days before Italy entered the war.

Regarding the proactive planning in Ukraine, cultural bodies and museum directors have been hampered by the fact that Ukraine is the poorest country in Europe and funding for the Ministry of Culture is limited ([Law of Ukraine 1992](#); [2000](#), pp. 30–32). Although numerous cultural properties are registered as having national or local importance, the budget determines the ability of cultural bodies at all levels to maintain monuments and to prepare for war ([Law of Ukraine 2000](#), pp. 17–19). Nevertheless, preliminary planning was initiated by the Ministry of Culture after the Russian territorial expansion into Crimea in February and March 2014 engendered fear that more aggression would follow. For moveable cultural property, museums and libraries were directed in advance of the invasion of February 2022 to submit ranked lists categorizing holdings as of high, medium, or low significance for Ukraine as a nation. Only a small percentage of the cultural objects, in some cases one percent, could be placed in the highest category and thereby designated for transportation to refuges ([Hoeniger 2022](#), pp. 33–34). It was also planned that museum and library directors would begin the actual protection in the first ten days after the Russians arrived ([Ostrowska-Liuta 2022](#), March 8). In some cases, national museums collected metal crates and other packing supplies in advance for their most valuable objects ([Bochkovska 2022](#), April 27). However, in other instances, national and local museums and libraries had not stockpiled crating materials or not in sufficient quantity ([Armanagué 2022](#), March 6). A similar process of ranking was followed at the federal level for national monuments and at the levels of the oblasts and municipalities for monuments of local significance. Supplies for protection were accumulated proactively by cultural bodies in some cities, but, outside the large urban centres, little preparation took place, as will be explained below. Perhaps because many Ukrainians did not believe there would be war, the Ministry of Culture did not issue the instructions to commence protection before the Russian invasion began. The most highly valued moveable property was not crated, and barriers were not erected around the public statues in Kyiv ([Roslan 2022](#), p. 196).

6. The First Stages of Protection: Facing Obstacles and Establishing Priorities

On the eve of Mussolini's declaration of war, Minister Bottai issued an urgent directive to superintendents to implement protection ([Circolare urgente riservatissimo 1940](#), June 5). When it came to the actual safeguarding of monuments, however, the superintendents were placed in a difficult position because of the country's depleted economy and the leadership's exclusive focus on war. As historians have revealed, Italy entered World War II with a completely inadequate military capability and a broken economy. The federal resources had been sapped by the high cost of the territorial and colonial wars that Mussolini launched in the second half of the 1930s ([Della Volpe 1986](#), pp. 16–31; [Mack Smith 1976](#), pp. 76, 120–21). With victory in World War II as Mussolini's exclusive objective, there was little available for anything other than the war effort. Under these conditions, the funding from the Ministry for PAA was meager and there were long delays in getting the money transferred into superintendency bank accounts.

The regional offices were confronted by other serious complications as well. For instance, the superintendents had to face head-on the realities of modern warfare and the virtual impossibility of shielding immovable cultural property from direct hits by explosives. Italy had gained experience of the impact of bombing on monuments during World War I, when the Austrian Air Force dropped small explosives on northeastern Italy

and the city of Venice was hit by over a thousand bombs (Della Volpe 1986, pp. 16–24). It was obvious that Italy's immovable heritage could not be fully protected from strikes by the much heavier explosives carried by British bombers in the early 1940s. As a result, concerted efforts were directed towards the transport of works of art to shelters that were situated away from urban and military targets. This endeavour encompassed not only moveable works of art that could be crated and transferred relatively easily, but also works that were traditionally classified as immovable and fell under the purview of the superintendents for monuments. Because so much effort was devoted at the outset of World War II in Italy to the transport of art to deposits, it is important to devote a few sentences to this subject before turning to the on-site protection of monuments.

Two case studies will suffice to demonstrate how the superintendents for monuments and galleries devoted great energy to the safe storage of artistic works that were both moveable and, at least on paper, immovable. The superintendents for monuments were responsible for historic and artistic buildings and public sculpture as well as for the ornamentation of architecture, which included bronze doors, stained-glass windows, mosaics, and wall-paintings. Very few stained-glass windows were dislodged and moved to shelters in Italy during World War II (Hoeniger 2024a, Ch. 4). Typically, scaffolding, an experienced workforce, and a large truck would have been necessary. Florence is an exceptional case, where the superintendent for monuments, Carlo Calzecchi Onesti, organized the removal of stained-glass windows from six churches and the Laurentian Library, which were stored at a villa outside the city (Paoletti 1985, pp. 10–12). The earliest were twenty 14th-century windows from the Franciscan church of Santa Croce, but perhaps the most valuable were the seven circular windows from the drum of the dome of Florence Cathedral, which had been designed by prominent artists including Lorenzo Ghiberti and Donatello in the first half of the 15th century (Il Duomo 2009, v. 1, pp. 87–89). While Calzecchi's office was removing precious windows, Giovanni Poggi, the superintendent for galleries, during June and July 1940, led the work of transporting 807 paintings, 652 sculptures, and almost 10,000 other cultural objects to deposits in the city and outside Florence (Poggi 1945, June 5, pp. 3–4; Sframeli 2011, p. 15). Poggi knew the importance of a quick and efficient response because he had been the superintendent during World War I, when paintings from the Veneto and Lombardy were sent to Florence to be stored (Fogolari 1918, pp. 187–88, 191–96). The second example features Ferdinando Forlati, the superintendent for monuments in the province of Venice, who had also been a member of the superintendency during World War I when Venice was bombed. Forlati took the extraordinary step of organizing the detachment of a small number of wall-paintings, including early 14th-century frescoes by Giotto from the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. Two of Giotto's scenes could be dislodged without too much trouble because they had already been detached as part of a restoration in the late 19th century. However, at Forlati's request, three frescoed tondos in the chapel vault were extracted for the first time by the restorer Mauro Pellicoli and taken to a large shelter outside Padua (Forlati 1945, July 20; Forlati 1947).

In Ukraine, with knowledge of the difficulty of safeguarding immovable properties against modern warheads, an impressive effort was made in the first months of the invasion to transport cultural objects away from danger. Although the locations of official refuges remain secret, when possible crated objects have been moved towards the western part of the country and away from the southeastern and eastern regions that have fallen under Russian occupation. Treasures have also been transported out of the country with the help of international organizations (ICOM 2023, February; IFAR 2023, October 13). A team from the International Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH) based in Geneva facilitated the evacuation of sixteen icons from the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko Museum in Kyiv, and the icons were taken to the Louvre in Paris for an exhibition of early sacred images and for conservation treatment (Nowakowski 2023, June 6; Standing with Ukrainian Museums 2023).

Several of the objects that were transferred to refuges were so large and heavy that they could have been classified as immovable. For example, a very large iconostasis was

removed from the Holy Trinity Church in Zhovkva, north of Lviv. This wooden church is on Ukraine's state register for immovable historical monuments, and is listed as part of the UNESCO inscription of sixteen wooden *tserkvas* of the Carpathian Region ([UNESCO World Heritage List no. 1424 2013](#); [Schipani 2022](#), April 15). The huge iconostasis dates from the early 18th century and houses about fifty icons in a Lindenwood frame (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Iconostasis, detail, c. 1720, Holy Trinity Church, Zhovkva, Ukraine. Photo: Mykola Swarnyk, Wikimedia Commons, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

Therefore, in Ukraine, as in Italy in 1940, precious works of art and other cultural objects, a number of which were so large and heavy that they were very difficult to dislodge, have been prioritized for transportation away from the lines of fire.

7. Approaches to the On-Site Protection of Monuments and Immoveable Works of Art

Although the superintendents for monuments in Italy recognized that immovable properties could not be fully shielded from direct strikes, regional offices throughout the country began to implement the preauthorized plans for on-site protection in response to Minister Bottai's directive of 5 June 1940. The objective was to protect a small selection of monuments from the consequences of a nearby, not a direct, explosion. A blast in proximity to a statue, mosaic, or wall-painting could spark a fire, cause vibrations, or produce a strong vacuum that might engender fragmentation, while shrapnel could disfigure the surface of a work of art ([Maniscalco 2007](#), pp. 71–72). For these reasons, the plan was to put in place coatings and barriers of various kinds, often using sandbagging, since it had been found that sandbags would trap bullets and debris. Only a small quantity of on-site protection was approved in advance for most of the superintendencies. For instance, the inspector

within the superintendency for Tuscany, who was assigned to Pisa, submitted a chart in March 1939 that summarized the very limited on-site protection plans, and approval was granted by the ministry. Pisa's famous Romanesque and Gothic cathedral buildings were the priority. Sandbagging would be used to protect five of the bronze doors, the two late medieval marble pulpits by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano in the baptistry and the cathedral, and, in the Camposanto, two frescoes from among Benozzo Gozzoli's twenty-three Old Testament scenes (1468–1484) (Zocchi 1939).

When the Minister sent the directive to begin protection on the eve of Italy's entrance into the war, however, the superintendents encountered many problems. The most immediate were the difficulty of obtaining supplies for protection, inadequate staff complements (especially because men joined the army), and the fact that ministry funding was meager and slow to be released to the superintendencies. Under these conditions, most of the regional offices struggled to establish even the modest amount of protection that had been approved. For Pisa, it was recorded on the chart of protection plans in March 1939 that the military would supply the required 300 wood planks and 6250 sandbags for the cathedral pulpit. However, as several superintendents discovered when the war began, including Alberto Terenzio, the superintendent for monuments in Rome, the military could not provide jute bags, wood planks, iron tubing, or sand (Terenzio 1940). The new superintendent for Pisa, Nello Tarchiani, sent urgent messages to the ministry in June and July 1940 because he could not obtain enough jute bags and would have to use paper ones for sandbagging. He also said that the superintendency did not have enough money to erect sandbagging around the four most highly ranked sculptural monuments in the territory, since supplies had to be purchased and workers had to be paid (Tarchiani 1940).

Only a small proportion of the cultural monuments in Italy were protected. In fact, one Italian scholar has described the on-site protection as so limited as to be "almost negligible" (Nezzo 2011, p. 117, n. 35). In addition, despite the modest application of PAA, the ministry initially used the defensive coverings to advertise the masterful protection of Italian culture by the Fascist government, particularly in Rome, the heart of Mussolini's new Italian empire. The protective armature surrounding monuments demonstrated readiness for war, as Director General Marino Lazzari explained in a propagandistic ministry publication (Lazzari 1942, p. vi; Nezzo 2011, p. 107).

Nevertheless, many of the superintendents strove to establish on-site coverings that would provide some protection, and impressive work in this regard was carried out under the superintendent for monuments in Rome, Terenzio, who specialized in the restoration of medieval architecture. Terenzio demonstrated expertise by adapting a set of basic techniques to the specific nature of each monument with sensitivity to the kinds of damage that could be experienced. For the ancient Column of Marcus Aurelius, with its spiraling band of marble relief carving, a layered approach was used. For the inner layer, sandbags were supported by scaffolding that was built around the monument. As metal tubing was rarely available at the outset of the war, fire-proofed timber was often used for the scaffolding. The sandbagging was established at a distance of thirty to sixty centimetres from the relief sculpture to allow air to circulate and to prevent damage were an explosion to jostle the wooden armature. A second layer was then added by building a wall to create a stronger barrier around the column (Terenzio 1940–1942). For the ancient column, bricks were used for the barrier, but there were other instances, such as the bronze doors of the Florence Baptistry, where manufactured wood boards of the type used in construction were chosen (Calzecchi Onesti 1940) (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Column of Marcus Aurelius, Rome, c. 180–185 CE, protected during World War II with an inner layer of sandbagging and an outer barrier made from bricks. Photo: National Archives, RG 239-PA, College Park, MD.

A second example demonstrates how artistic ornamentation in a few early churches in Rome was carefully protected under Terenzio. For the apse mosaic in Santi Cosma e Damiano, which dated from the first half of the 6th century, restorers applied squares of jute fabric with a soluble gelatin glue to the surface in a technique described as bandaging, designed to prevent the mosaic *tesserae* from falling if a blast caused vibrations. For another early mosaic, an additional layer of aluminum foil was applied to protect against the possibility of an attack involving chemical warheads (Terenzio 1940; La protezione 1942, p. 6).

A final example of on-site protection in Italy features one of the most complicated and revered medieval tombs, the monument to King Robert of Anjou (1343–1346) in the church of Santa Chiara in Naples. Giorgio Rosi, the monuments superintendent for Campania, was in charge of the project, which involved tailoring the on-site protection to suit the colossal multi-tiered tomb and its overarching sculptural canopy. The lower stories of the king's tomb were barricaded together with the two smaller royal tombs that stood to either side to form one protected unit. Sandbagging was employed using volcanic sand and wooden scaffolding. For the delicate upper tiers of the king's tomb and the marble canopy, a quilt made from silk scraps and dried seaweed was wrapped around the intricate carving (Rosi 1940; Dell'Aja 1980, pp. 193–94) (Figure 3).

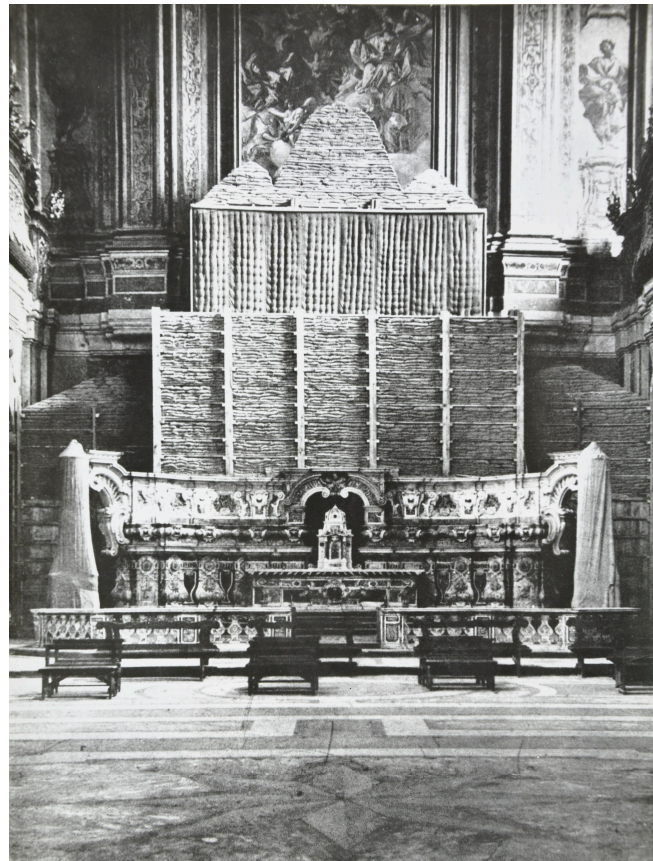


Figure 3. Giovanni and Pacio Bertini, Tomb of King Robert I of Anjou, c. 1343–1346, Santa Chiara, Naples, with anti-aerial protection in place during World War II. Photo: National Archives, RG 239-PA, College Park, MD.

Tragically, a fire was sparked when Santa Chiara was hit by Allied bombs in August 1943. After the wooden vaulting collapsed, the blaze engulfed the church interior and lasted for six days. Large parts of King Robert's tomb were ruined. Scholars have contended that under these circumstances the wood used in the protective barriers "added fuel to the fire", only worsening the effect on the marble sculpture (Pollard 2020a, p. 297, n. 4; Coccoli 2017, p. 94). It has also been said that the "disaster" at Santa Chiara in Naples set in motion a revision of PAA practices for immovable cultural property in northern Italy in the middle of the war (Coccoli 2010; Headquarters Allied Commission 1946, pp. 19–20). The near-complete destruction of the Romanesque bronze doors of Benevento Cathedral northeast of Naples after the church was struck by Allied bombs in September 1943 and set on fire may also have contributed to a change in approaches to protection. The fire spread inside the sandbagging that encased the doors, and the protective enclosure became an oven in which the bronze panels were melted and charred (Newton 1944; Hoeniger 2019, pp. 247–50). There had been earlier warnings from restorers and the ministry about the use of sandbagging, at least for frescoes and mosaics, in case a fire broke out and the delicate surface was accidentally burned (La protezione 1942, p. 6). To protect them more securely, the famous early Renaissance doors of the baptistery in Florence, which had initially been protected on site, were detached and taken to storage more than two months before the sad events in Naples and Benevento (Istituto Nazionale Luce 1943, May 25).

Regarding the king's tomb in Santa Chiara, two experts in Naples interpreted the fire damage in a nuanced way. Sergio Ortolani, Director of the Naples Pinacoteca, examined the tomb in the wreckage of the church after the fire. He explained that the top half, including the marble canopy, had been reduced to a friable material and basically destroyed, but that most of the lower levels had been saved, and offered the opinion that both the sandbagging

and the accumulation of rubble from the fallen roof had sheltered the lower sculpture from the fire ([Ortolani 1944](#)). Gaudenzio Dell’Aja, the Franciscan representative chosen for the committee on the restoration of the church, lamented the fact that bricks had not been used to build the barrier. He pointed out that some of the materials were flammable, such as the wooden scaffolding, and that when they caught fire, the flames and the heat came right into the crevices of the marble carving ([Dell’Aja 1980](#), p. 193).

Many similarities to the Italian approaches can be detected in the on-site protection that has been established in Ukraine. While the specific techniques are comparable, some significant differences will also emerge. In terms of the scale of the enterprise, in both Italy in 1940–1942 and Ukraine from 2022–2024 only a small selection of highly valued works was prioritized for on-site protection. Both countries had poor economies, which effected their ability to install sophisticated protection for cultural property, but the reasons were different, since Italy’s coffers had been depleted by previous military campaigns whereas Ukraine’s economic woes were chronic. Indeed, one scholar has characterized the emergency circumstances for cultural heritage in Ukraine when the Russian invasion began as resulting from the disproportion between the “huge needs” and the “limited resources that were at the disposal of the central authorities” ([Roslan 2022](#), p. 196).

In the many months since the Russian war began, on-site protection has been undertaken for selected sculptural monuments and immovable works of art in major cities, most notably for public statues in the capital, Kyiv, where the Ministry of Culture is located. Barriers have been erected around sculptural monuments that represent individuals of importance for Ukrainian history and identity. One of the most heavily protected is the equestrian statue of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, which dominates Sophia Square. Similar to the techniques applied in Italy for enormous ancient monuments such as the Column of Marcus Aurelius in Rome, protection with inner and outer layers has been constructed. Sandbagging was established around the monument, and then, using a wooden framework, the huge ensemble was encased in boards. In a final stage, metal tubing was used to create a protective fence, or “hoarding” (Figure 4).

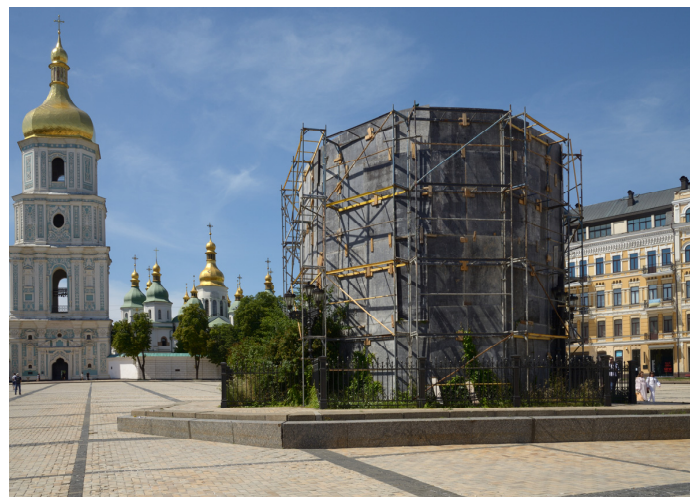


Figure 4. Mikhail Mikeshin, Equestrian Monument of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, 1888, bronze, Sophia Square, Kyiv, protected with boards and metal hoarding, 31 July 2022. Photo: Власенко, Wikimedia Commons, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

However, the way in which the barrier was created for the Khmelnytsky Monument was more systematic than the traditional made-to-measure Italian technique. A modular system was employed for the inner layer, using the measurements of the equestrian statue and its base to determine the number of modules required. The structure for each module was built from cross-beam scaffolding in readily available sizes of plywood, and the scaffolding then supported the sandbags. Using the modules, a protective box was erected

around but not touching the monument. Finally, a shell was built outside the sandbag modules with Bakelite plywood, which is a material that is resistant to fire, moisture, and temperature changes (Balbek Bureau 2022). Innovative in comparison to the techniques employed in Italy in 1940 was the introduction of a hoarding, a method traditionally used to close off access to construction sites, which was adopted for on-site protection to prevent damage from powerful warheads and projectiles (Maniscalco 2007, p. 78). If the metal framework is dislodged and scattered by an explosion, the encased statue may survive unscathed. In Italy during World War II, although metal tubing was hard to source, it was sometimes used to support the wall of sandbags, but not to construct hoardings. Therefore, the modular method for the sandbag barrier, the use of Bakelite plywood for the exterior boards, and the incorporation of a final protective layer using a hoarding all represent new adaptations rather than the strict continuation of traditional methods.

For some other public monuments in Kyiv, fewer layers of protection have been applied. In the case of the statue of Dante Alighieri in Volodymyrska Hirka Park, only sandbagging has been used, and the bags have been piled in an unsystematic manner around the sculpture without a framework made from tubular iron or wood (Myrie 2022). Despite the makeshift appearance, a substantial barrier against shrapnel has been created. This method was used for smaller statues in Italy during World War II, and one example of loose sandbagging has been documented in Sarajevo during the Balkans Conflict to protect a late medieval carved tombstone (stećak) in the courtyard of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Maniscalco 2007, figs. 8 and 11). A similar sandbagging method was created by volunteers at the start of the war for the statue of Mykhailo Hrushevsky in Kyiv, and a hoarding was erected outside the sandbag barrier. Later, with the support of the cultural heritage office and the restoration institute in Kyiv, the on-site protection of the Hrushevsky Monument was updated. Leaving the sandbagging in place, a framework was created around the statue using boarding from winter ice rinks in the city, and then, sheets of Bakelite plywood were used to build an enclosure. The front face of the plywood was painted, and the graffiti artist Nikkipop contributed the graphic outline of the statue (Balbek Bureau 2022).

In a similar manner, an artistic barricade was established for the large monument of the poet Taras Shevchenko, which stands on the grounds of Kyiv National University. On the front of the encased statue, the board has been painted with an olive tone that acquires a golden hue when illuminated at night. The colours for this and other similarly encased monuments were chosen so that the exterior would blend with the surrounding urban landscape. As for the Hrushevsky statue, the face of the Shevchenko Monument was decorated with an outline drawing of the hidden figure and textual information about the sculpture and its significance, including a QR code leading to the Wikipedia page. (Higgins and Mazhulin 2022; Balbek Bureau 2022) (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Matvey Manizer, Monument of Taras Shevchenko, 1939, bronze, Kyiv, protected with boards, 31 July 2022. Photo: ВВЛАСЕНКО, Wikimedia Commons, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

A similar barricade with a line drawing and text was installed by a team from UNESCO around the Memorial to Victims of the Holocaust by Zurab Tsereteli in Odesa ([U.S. Embassy 2023](#)). The extensive contributions from outside Ukraine to the protection of cultural property signal a form of international support that is remarkably different from the situation in Italy in 1940. Italy was isolated in the first years of World War II as a result of the politics and pride of the Fascist regime, and the representatives of the Ministry of National Education repeatedly rebuffed proposals for a pan-European approach to the protection of moveable cultural property ([Congresso per il Patto Roerich 1931–1932](#); [Bottai 1938](#)). Only much later, after Italy signed an armistice with the Allies in early September 1943, did some assistance come for the preservation of art and architecture from the German Kunstschutz officers during the German occupation and from the Allied Monuments officers (MFAA) during the Allied occupation ([Klinkhammer 1992](#), pp. 493–95; [Hartt 1949](#), pp. 5–8). In contrast, as of February 2024 UNESCO has allocated about USD 66 million in emergency funding for Ukraine, which has been contributed by bilateral donors, and about one-third of the donation has come from Japan. A portion of the UNESCO funding has been put towards “emergency heritage preservation operations”, which include materials for the on-site protection of monuments such as the Holocaust Memorial in Odesa ([UNESCO 2024b](#)). The recent inscription of Odesa on UNESCO’s World Heritage and World Heritage in Danger lists is allowing the agency to prioritize immovable cultural properties in the city for monetary assistance and to delegate international specialists to help with protection, rescue, and restoration ([UNESCO World Heritage List no. 1703 2023](#)).

The role played by local people in a volunteer capacity in Ukraine should also be highlighted as a distinct characteristic, in contrast to the implementation of protection in Italy exclusively by professionally trained civil servants and their superintendency office staff. When Russia invaded Ukraine, in Odesa, which is located just over 300 km from the border with the Crimean peninsula, it was initially local museum directors and volunteers who worked to safeguard moveable and immovable cultural property. The Ministry of Culture was overstretched by the emergency, and outside organizations had not yet begun to send in aid. Local people packed up objects from regional collections and transported them in their own vehicles to safer parts of the country. Locals also installed on-site barriers comprised of sandbags, wooden boards, and various wrapping materials to protect monuments ([Roslan 2022](#), p. 196). In Italy, knowledgeable local individuals were sometimes appointed by the ministry as “honorary inspectors” for towns at some distance from the regional superintendency offices, and, after monuments were damaged, local committees were established to guard sites from looting ([Legge 386 1907](#), 27 June, p. 3997; [Hoeniger 2024b](#)). However, in comparison to the impressive efforts of community members in Ukraine, locals were not involved in the protection of immovable property in Italy at the start of the war.

8. The On-Site Protection of Churches and Their Immoveable Decoration

Clearly, both in Italy in 1940 and in Ukraine in 2022 many obstacles stood in the way of the implementation of on-site protection. In the case of religious properties, the inability of the Italian superintendents and the Ukrainian cultural bodies to establish sufficient protection has been particularly significant. Numerous precious and unique buildings and their artistic furnishings suffered damage in Italy in 1940–1945, and similar circumstances are unfolding today in Ukraine.

In Italy, when the war began only a small number of highly revered ecclesiastical properties were registered for state protection ([Elenco dei Monumenti Nazionali 2024](#)). Among them, a few examples of protection for selective features have already been mentioned: sandbagging and a barricade of boards were erected in front of the bronze doors of the baptistry in Florence; the early apse mosaic in Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome was “bandaged”; and several techniques were used for the multi-tiered tomb of King Robert of Anjou in Santa Chiara, Naples. The most famous example, however, was the sandbagging of Leonardo’s *Last Supper* in the Dominican monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan,

which contributed to the survival of the wall-painting when the roof and the adjacent wall of the refectory were destroyed by air strikes in August 1943 ([Artioli 2022](#), pp. 27–29).

The recognition that very few ecclesiastical properties fell to state management, with most being the responsibility of the church, prompted new federal legislation about six months into the war to transfer to the regional superintendencies the protection of a long list of churches that held the status of cathedrals ([Regio Decreto 1746 1940](#)). As other religious sites and their decorative ensembles continued to experience damage, Minister Bottai issued a directive in December 1942 instructing superintendents to protect monumental churches and their art from war damage, though without an additional financial contribution from Rome ([Circolare 157 1942](#), December 29).

From the outset of the war, some superintendents, distressed by their inability to protect religious properties of great importance for their communities and for Christian history on the peninsula since the early Middle Ages, tried to extend their compass in spite of insufficient funding, supplies, and labour. For instance, the monuments superintendent for Campania, Giorgio Rosi, supervised on-site protection in some historic churches in Naples even though the parish, not the state, was responsible ([Rosi 1940](#)). Nonetheless, most ecclesiastical properties were left to the care of church custodians during the war, and clerics were neither trained in protection nor did they have the means, supplies, or equipment for the task. One sad story about ecclesiastical treasures that were left unprotected in a church highlights the Basilica of Impruneta outside Florence, a site of pilgrimage because of a miraculous image of the Virgin. The church was also known for the art-historical value of two 15th-century glazed terracotta “tempietti”, or shrines. However, they were not taken apart and removed. When an Allied bomb struck the roof, the terracotta shrines were broken into numerous pieces and the fragments were buried in the wreckage ([Hartt 1949](#), p. 129). In short, the events of World War II in Italy had a disastrous impact on many church properties.

Very sadly, the same has been true for Ukraine in the twenty-four months since the Russians invaded. Ukraine has numerous religious properties and many are precious and unique. If the Crimean peninsula is included, Ukraine is home to over two hundred and fifty monasteries, convents, and churches pertaining to the Christian Orthodox faith (Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox), and there are properties belonging to other religious communities as well. For example, in the old centre of Lviv there are churches of different denominations, synagogues, and mosques ([UNESCO World Heritage List no. 865 1998](#)).

While some churches on the national register in Ukraine have been given selective on-site protection, in general very little safeguarding using sandbagging or other barriers has been established for the decorative features of religious properties. The most revered Orthodox church in Ukraine is Saint Sophia Cathedral, which, together with its contiguous monastic buildings in Kyiv, was the first cultural site in Ukraine to be inscribed by UNESCO ([UNESCO World Heritage List no. 527 1990](#)). Among the celebrated works that ornament the cathedral interior are the 11th-century mosaics and frescoes (Figure 6).

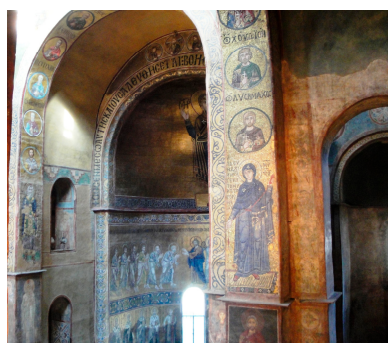


Figure 6. View of Chancel with Virgin Orans and Eucharist, Byzantine mosaics, 11th century, Saint Sophia Cathedral, Kyiv. Photo: Xristoupolitits, Wikimedia Commons, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International.

However, it seems that immovable works of art inside Saint Sophia Cathedral have not been protected on site. The level of security has been increased, and a team of trained maintenance and rescue workers are in place for the church. In addition, laser scanning has been used to create accurate digital documentation of the exterior and interior of the cathedral ([Protecting Heritage 2023](#)).

Only a modest number of churches on the national register seem to have been given some on-site protection. As was the case in Italy for large and complex ecclesiastical properties, only selected features have been protected. Two examples in Lviv are the stained-glass windows of the Dormition Church and St. George's Cathedral, where plywood and aluminum sheeting have been used to create a barrier over the glass for protection from shrapnel ([Frayer and Harbage 2022](#)). However, as mentioned in relation to Italy during World War II, the only way to save valuable church windows from aerial warfare is to remove them, a difficult procedure that requires special equipment and expertise. Early in the war, the Holy Dormition Cathedral in Kharkiv, a large baroque church with five domes and a bell tower, was heavily damaged by Russian artillery strikes, and the stained-glass windows were broken ([Ukrainian Institute 2024](#)).

Another instance of on-site protection involves the Holy Trinity Church in Zhovkva, within Lviv Oblast, which is a national monument and one of the wooden *tserkvas* listed by UNESCO ([UNESCO World Heritage List no. 1424 2013](#)). Attempts have been made to protect the triple-nave church, the interior of which is decorated with icon paintings, but the wooden construction renders the church inherently vulnerable to damage from fire during the war. Before the invasion began, the wooden roof with its domes was being restored, but this was suspended when war broke out. For protection from the weather during the conflict, the World Monuments Fund (WMF) has supported the work of applying a waterproof membrane to areas of the roof ([Culture in Crisis 2023](#)). The wooden exterior and roof have also been treated with a fire retardant, and the church has been equipped with a water-mist fire extinguisher in a project involving the donation of more than four hundred fire extinguishers to properties in Ukraine coordinated by the WMF and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) ([Schipani 2022](#)). UNESCO inscription is facilitating international collaboration for the protection of this church and other similar wooden *tserkvas*.

With the knowledge that immovable properties of this size and complexity cannot be adequately safeguarded from direct strikes by modern warheads, it has been critical in Ukraine to signal the protection of national sites according to the Hague Convention of 1954 by marking them with the emblem of the Blue Shield. However, religious properties carrying the official signage have been hit by the Russian forces. The damage experienced by an increasing number of Orthodox churches has prompted investigations by various organizations to ascertain whether the attacks are deliberate ([Vasin et al. 2022](#), p. 7; [Skorkin 2023](#)). As of 13 March 2024, UNESCO has documented damage to 127 religious sites in the country ([UNESCO 2024a](#)). Whether religious sites have been specifically targeted is also being investigated by the UN Security Council within the framework of human rights legislation, as these laws include clauses on freedom of religious belief and practice, and, as UNESCO has reported, "[the] intentional destruction of cultural sites may amount to a war crime" ([United Nations 2023](#); [UNESCO 2023a](#)).

Nevertheless, Russian strikes have even occurred inside the zones designated as World Heritage by UNESCO. For example, a Russian attack in July 2023 caused damage to the Transfiguration Cathedral within the newly inscribed World Heritage property for Odesa. In response, UNESCO issued a statement to remind Russia that the city and its treasured monuments were protected by several layers of legislation, including the Hague Convention of 1954 and UNESCO's World Heritage Convention of 1972 ([UNESCO 1972](#)). In addition, UNESCO placed the World Heritage sites in Kyiv, Lviv, and Odesa on the Danger List because of the "threat of destruction" and "the risk of direct attack" ([UNESCO 2023b](#)). The significance of the Danger List is that now the 195 states that are party to the

World Heritage Convention (1972) have an obligation to assist Ukraine with the protection and monitoring of the three UNESCO sites.

In other words, the UNESCO initiative has drawn widespread attention to heritage damage of a potentially unlawful kind and has also built an international network of responsibility for the protection of immovable properties such as the Transfiguration Cathedral in Odesa. Several organizations outside Ukraine are sharing the responsibility with those on the ground by actively researching the condition of cultural properties. A number of these groups bring sophisticated scientific and engineering equipment to the task. The Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab, which represents a research collaboration between the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative (SCRI) in Washington, DC, and the Virginia Museum of Natural History, is using state-of-the-art satellite and computer technology to monitor thousands of sites in Ukraine from space and to determine which locations may be in danger as a result of fires or direct strikes (Bunch 2022; Smithsonian 2024). Another documentation project is funded by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). This group has assembled evidence of the damage by Russian forces to cultural property in Ukraine since the invasion began (FCDO, United Kingdom 2023). The information on damage is communicated to cultural bodies and heritage workers in Ukraine so that teams can reach the locations and attend to urgent rescue work more quickly than would normally be possible. One team on the ground is HeMo, or the Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab. They have been reaching sites in danger, normally within a few days of the damage, and carrying out systematic documentation of the nature and degree of ruin (Makar 2023).

Both satellite monitoring and on-site documentation draw attention to the large number of church properties that have suffered damage since the beginning of the conflict. As well as the cathedrals of national importance in urban centres that have already been noted, many churches in small towns or in the countryside have been ruined. These local churches depend on clerical custodians and the parish community for their preservation. Obviously, those made of wood are inherently fragile. Because they are situated at a distance from cultural offices in provincial capitals, formal kinds of protection have rarely been implemented at these sites. In addition, emergency rescue vehicles and crews may not be available in the event of an explosion or fire. Such was also the case in Italy during World War II, as the example of the Basilica of Impruneta with its village location has suggested.

A few instances of damage to local churches may suffice to demonstrate the art-historical uniqueness and the spiritual nature of the properties that are being left in ruins. The church of St. George (Tserkva Heorhiyivs'ka) on the edge of the village of Zavorychi, Kyiv Oblast, was discovered to be on fire as a result of an explosion in the second week of the war. It was a traditional wooden church with two steeples, and had been built in 1873. Vividly painted in blue and green on the outside, the inside of the church was decorated with a large iconostasis in a richly ornamental frame, wall-paintings, and numerous icons. Among the wall-paintings were images of the *Coronation of the Virgin*, the *Virgin Orans*, and several saints (FCDO, United Kingdom 2023, "Tserkva Heorhiyivs'ka 1878R"). Also in Kyiv Oblast, about 40 kms west of the capital, the church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the village of Yasnohorodka has been damaged by Russian projectiles. Though the body of the church is built from yellow brick, the dome and bell tower were struck, and this caused heavy damage to the wall-paintings on the inside of the dome and in the apse. The apse paintings depict the *Virgin Orans with the Twelve Apostles* and, above, the *Ascension of Christ*, but the plaster is cracked and some paint has fallen (Religion on Fire 2023). The third example is the larger and more strongly built Church of the Ascension in the village of Lukashivka, Chernihiv Oblast, about 150 kilometres northeast of Kyiv. Although it was listed as a monument of local significance, and as such should have been out-of-bounds to military forces, Russian troops took up residence there in March 2022. When battles broke out, the church was struck by artillery shells and set on fire. The attractive temple-style building, with a central vault and two domed towers, was constructed from brick masonry in the early twentieth century (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Church of the Ascension, Lukashivka, Chernihiv Oblast, 1913. Photo: Кирюша Олексій Володимирович, Wikimedia Commons, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International.

The damage was carefully investigated as part of a collaborative heritage project which involved inspection by Ukrainian architects and engineers and analysis by an interdisciplinary international team affiliated with First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis Programme (FAR), which is an initiative of ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property). Their report enumerated the damage to the outside of the church, including cracks and chips in the walls and the collapse of the roof and vaulting ([Church of the Ascension 2022](#)). Severe damage to the interior was documented, since the fire had destroyed the iconostasis, most of the wall-paintings, including images of saints, and all of the historic flooring ([Ministry of Culture of Ukraine 2023](#), pp. 4–10).

9. Conclusions

In this article, the establishment of on-site protection for immovable cultural property in Ukraine since the Russian invasion began in February 2022 has been set alongside the well-known historic project in Italy to safeguard the rich artistic heritage of the nation in the first years of World War II. Despite the fact that about eighty years have passed since the Italian ministry and superintendents worked to put in place anti-aerial protection, many similarities have been discovered to the enterprise undertaken in Ukraine. In both contexts, the preparation in advance of the conflicts was focused on creating prioritized lists of the monuments to be protected, but the necessary supplies were not stockpiled and very little on-site protection occurred before the countries were at war. When the conflicts began, the preparatory work did not occasion a smooth transition into implementation because the funding from the central government ministries was inadequate and it was difficult to obtain the high quality of materials that were necessary. The most overwhelming obstacle, however, was the realization that immovable properties could not be protected with sandbag barriers from direct strikes by modern warheads. As a consequence, in both countries much energy was devoted at the outset to moving objects to shelters, and this included works that might be classified as immovable, such as stained-glass windows in Italy and an enormous iconostasis in Ukraine.

With little funding and recognition of the inadequacy of sandbagging in a modern war, only a modest amount of anti-aerial protection was erected in Italy and, in Ukraine, the selection has been even more limited. In Italy, barriers were built around ancient monuments in public spaces and the most valued features of a number of early churches

were protected, including the bronze doors of the cathedral and baptistry in Florence. While barriers have been built around many public monuments in Ukraine, there has been very little protection for the interior ornamentation of cathedrals. The stained-glass windows of a few churches have been safeguarded on site and some famous wooden churches have received attention, such as the application of a fire retardant to the exterior of one of the *tserkvas* in the Carpathian region that is inscribed by UNESCO.

Both similarities and differences can be detected in the techniques adopted for the on-site protection of ancient monuments in Italy and public statues in Ukraine. The layering method used to protect the Column of Marcus Aurelius in Rome was followed with some variations for public statues such as the Khmelnytsky Monument in Kyiv, with a first layer of sandbagging and a second outer barrier. Among the revisions to traditional methods in Ukraine was the use of a modular approach for the sandbagging, which allowed plywood in readily available sizes to be employed for the scaffolding, in contrast to the laborious made-to-measure technique of the 1940s in Italy. Another innovation is the use of Bakelite plywood for the outer barrier, chosen because it is fire resistant. For some of the public monuments in Ukraine, an artistic innovation is to add an image of the encased statue on the face of the barrier with a QR code in case more information is sought.

Whereas concerted efforts were made to safeguard some of the decorative features of the most lauded churches in Italy, such as the application of a jute and gelatin-glue coating to the mosaics in Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome, it seems that very little on-site protection has been installed in the most revered churches in Ukraine. The evidence collected for this study suggests that while cathedrals such as Saint Sophia in Kyiv have heightened security in place, no barriers or coverings are in place for the interior decoration consisting of mosaics and wall-paintings. However, the Blue Shield has been applied on the sides and roof of Saint Sophia to signal the cathedral's protected status according to the stipulations of international law.

Both countries have numerous religious properties, many of which are not located in urban centres in proximity to cultural heritage offices and their trained personnel. As in Italy during World War II, village churches with local rather than national status in Ukraine have suffered damage. Local clerics and their parishioners have been burdened by the heavy responsibility of protecting churches and their interior furnishings from war without having the resources and expertise to do so. Sadly, the problems that Italy experienced eighty years ago find an echo in the fact that unique ecclesiastical properties in Ukraine have been ruined.

However, one very positive development is the international collaboration with Ukraine for the preservation of cultural property. In contrast to the isolation experienced by Italy's Fascist government in the first years of World War II, Ukraine has benefited from extraordinary gestures which demonstrate international appreciation for the unique cultural heritage of Ukraine. One high-tech collaboration features satellite monitoring by the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative and brave teamwork on the ground to allow for quick emergency response to ruined sites and the collection of precise information on heritage damage. As UNESCO has reminded Russia, evidence of the deliberate targeting of cultural property and the violation of international laws of war may be used to bring the perpetrators to justice.

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