

ETHICS & CRITICAL THINKING *in Conservation*



EDITED BY PAMELA HATCHFIELD

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American Institute for Conservation
of Historic & Artistic Works



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Contents

Preface <i>Pamela Hatchfield</i>	vii
Chapter 1. Conservation in the 21st Century: Will a 20th Century Code of Ethics Suffice? <i>Barbara Appelbaum</i>	1
Chapter 2. Legacies from the Past: Previous Repairs <i>Deborah Bede</i>	11
Chapter 3. To Treat or Not to Treat: Decision-making in Preparing Archives for Digitization <i>Gabriëlle Beentjes</i>	23
Chapter 4. Resuscitating Bamiyan's Buddhas? A Dispatch from Dresden, Two Lessons Learned <i>James Janowski</i>	49
Chapter 5. Objects of Trauma, Finding the Balance <i>Jane E. Klinger</i>	79
Chapter 6. On Time and the Modalities of Conservation <i>Frank Matero</i>	91
Chapter 7. The Frankenstein Syndrome <i>Salvador Muñoz Viñas</i>	111
Chapter 8. Restoration Ethics, Cleaning, and Perception: Case Studies from the Dutch Government Collection <i>W. Wei, Z. Benders, and E. Domela Nieuwenhuis</i>	127
Chapter 9. Book Review: Conservation Takes a Reflective Turn <i>George Wheeler, with an introduction by Nancie Ravenel</i>	139

Chapter 4

Resuscitating Bamiyan's Buddhas? A Dispatch From Dresden, Two Lessons Learned

JAMES JANOWSKI

ABSTRACT—This essay describes and evaluates the reconstruction of Dresden's Frauenkirche, a storied and iconic church desecrated by Allied bombs near the end of World War II. Focusing on two sorts of value, it urges that the project was largely, though not wholly, successful. The reconstructed church serves to restore, maybe even enhance, a broad type of religious-cum-spiritual value that went missing, temporarily, while the church lay in ruins; but the reconstruction does not—or eventually will not—score so well in terms of the restoration of historical value. The essay then goes on to discuss the Taliban's desecration, in 2001, of the Bamiyan Buddhas—1,400 year old sculptures that were long the centerpiece of Afghanistan's material cultural heritage. It shows how and why Dresden's church is a good analogue for the Buddhas. It describes the herculean work that has been done toward a possible reconstruction project. It depicts the status quo, from a conservation perspective, at the site. And it notes some questions that would need to be answered before one or both of the sculptures might actually go back up. Drawing on lessons learned from the experience in Dresden, the essay's conclusion, put forward provisionally, is that a case can be made for resuscitating Bamiyan's Buddhas.

1. An Unconventional (Video) Introduction

This essay begins unconventionally, strongly urging its readers to be viewers, returning to the text, moved and ready to think, after watching a short video—the link to which is provided in the references (Al Jazeera 2007).

1.1. A CONVENTIONAL INTRODUCTION

The aim here is to pose Bamiyan's dilemma—and then to suggest a working “solution” to the same. “Solution” requires emphasis. The philosopher Bernard Williams notes that moral dilemmas invariably have “remainders” (Williams 1973, 179). And something similar is at work in conservation. *If conservation projects were long division problems, they would not come out neatly.* Indeed, the cases discussed here *are* dilemmas. They involve judgments and choices, and they leave behind the very sort of remainders Williams has in mind. Conservation and restoration projects involve balancing various—often competing—meanings and values. And they involve trade-offs.

The essay begins by discussing Dresden's Frauenkirche. It then turns to Bamiyan's Buddhas, drawing some provisional conclusions—final conclusions, as will become plain, will require much more thinking than is possible here—regarding the site and the sculptures. The essay seeks to draw the moral of the Dresden story for Bamiyaners, Afghans, and the rest of us.

A caveat before pushing ahead: the discussion focuses on two sorts of value—religious, understood in a broad sense to be explained, and historical. Both cases raise many other value considerations and issues—aesthetic, economic, political, purely and properly philosophical, etc. The essay nods toward some of these, but makes no attempt to describe, much less disentangle, all such considerations and issues.¹

2. Dresden's Frauenkirche: Its History, Desecration, and Reconstruction

Dresden's Frauenkirche was iconic. Some version of the church had been on the site for nearly a millennium, and the one standing in early 1945, started in 1726 and completed in 1743, was a magnificent building with a storied history (fig. 1). The church played an important role in the history of Protestantism, modeling its egalitarian ideals. Its



Fig. 1. Frauenkirche in Dresden, Germany; photo taken between 1860 and 1890. Courtesy Library of Congress. Reproduction Number LC-USZ62-109077.

designer, George Bähr, was prescient; his “Spiramen,” supporting the church’s massive stone dome, anticipated technical developments in architectural design, and in statics in particular (Jäger et al. 2000; Peter and Hertenstein 2000; Wenzel 2000, 177). The building unlocked part of the history of masonry (Asch 1999); it was the venue for performances by Bach and Wagner; and it survived direct, repeated military strikes in the Seven Years’ War. Those who had restored the Frauenkirche previously—substantial restoration work had taken place in the 1930s, for example—called it a masterpiece, and many likened the building to St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome and the Cathedral in Florence. In short, the building was a grand and genuinely significant piece of architecture.

It was at the heart of Dresden's identity, and it was known and appreciated around the world. Thus J. Paul, striking some of these same chords and echoing the views of many others, says of the Frauenkirche: "a special instance...a curiosity with which there is really nothing to compare, and in the individual uniqueness of its architectonic solution...the most original Protestant church building" (Paul 1996).

Enter February 1945. Allied bombs fell for two nights. They gave rise to a massive firestorm that engulfed the city and obliterated 15 square kilometers of Dresden. Long renowned for its beautiful baroque architecture and often described as "Florence on the Elbe," the city's central core was completely devastated, taking on the look of a ghastly and unimaginably horrific nightmare.

Amazingly sturdy and built to last, the Frauenkirche survived the bombing itself. But temperatures inside reached 1000°C, the building's infrastructure buckled, and it succumbed, collapsing into a pile of rubble, on the morning of February 15. Only two lonely fragments, mournful but defiant, were left standing (fig. 2).

Dresdeners loved their church and venerated its remains. For decades they beat back repeated attempts to clear the site. Locals safeguarded the rubble. They carted away some especially important pieces, organizing and storing them off-site—much of this toilsome work, done with hand-winchers and shovels and wheel barrows and wagons, was carried out by the so-called *Trümmerfrauen* ("rubble women")—but for the most part the ruins remained in place, honored and largely undisturbed, for 48 years.

The ruin itself came to have a history, accumulating meanings and values of its own. Thus, for example, in the discussion about how to proceed, some urged that the Frauenkirche ruin be preserved as a mark of humanity's *inhumanity*. (The bombing of Dresden also took 30,000 lives.) Others urged that, as a powerful symbol of peace, it ought not be destroyed. (Locals held candlelight ceremonies at the site each year to mark the anniversary of the bombing.) The ruin was also a political football—and a bargaining chip in the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) ideological battle with the west (Vees-Gulani 2008). But while its meanings were contested, after nearly four-and-a-half decades the ruin had definitely become a locus of value unto itself—and it had plainly been incorporated into the life of the city.



Fig. 2. Remains of Frauenkirche after bombing in Dresden, Germany, circa September 1945. *Dresden nach der Bombardierung vom 13./14. Februar 1945, nach 1945.09.17.* Courtesy Deutsche Fotothek/Richard Peter. Accession Number 88950515.

That said, with the fall of the Berlin Wall Dresdeners returned once again to thoughts about raising their church. November 1989 energized the community to resurrect plans that had long lain dormant, and in February 1990, on the 45th anniversary of the bombing, the “Call from Dresden” was issued. The Call was hugely effective. Donations poured in from all over the world, and two years later 80% of Dresden’s city council voted to rebuild. Site clearing began in January 1993. After a de facto archaeological dig, fragments were painstakingly photographed, analyzed, sorted, and stored. Conceptual and practical spadework thus complete, in May 1994 a so-called “archaeological reconstruction” commenced and the phoenix began its slow and deliberate ascent. Indeed, uninterrupted work—tireless, exacting, and remarkably dedicated—proceeded apace for over a decade. Here are some highlights. (See the essays in Part Two of Jäger and Brebbia 2000. This is one of many sources describing the reconstruction.) In March 1996, the first keystone was completed, and in November of the same year 15 cubic meters of sandstone was put in place daily. In July 1997, construction started on eight slender inner piers, each of which had to support a load of 1,800 tons. By March 1999, the church’s outer walls and staircases had reached a height of 24.3 meters. In February 2000, a new cross arrived from Britain; it had been created by the son of an airman who bombed the city. In May 2003, the stone dome was completed. In June 2004, with

60,000 in attendance and eight million television viewers, the cupola and spire cross were put in place. Finally, in October 2005, the “new” Frauenkirche, 12 years in the remaking, was re-consecrated.

Now here are some details. Painstaking research and analysis was done on the Frauenkirche and its remains. Materials scientists, structural engineers, architects, conservators, and various other professionals conducted a deliberate and meticulous, stone-by-stone and joint-by-joint investigation of the building, which some have called one of the most studied structures in history (e.g., Wenzel 2000, 179). IBM software was used to “virtually reconstruct” the fragments, and then the building slowly took shape around the standing sections of ruin. In the end 8,425 ashlar stones—what are now the readily discernible darker pieces speckled throughout the church—were re-integrated. Thus roughly 45% of the reconstructed building consists of original stones, exactly placed back in their original locations. The remainder of the building is the same type of stone from the original quarry. And the church was resurrected—with unflagging and scrupulous attention to detail—in accord with the original blueprint. (Thus, for example, 1,642 fragments were returned to their positions in the altar, 80% of which now consists of original material.) Indeed, many stress the unfailingly faithful nature of the reconstruction. And distinguishing between “Bähr’s construction” and “Bähr’s constructional concept,” some actually urge that the reconstruction is *more* faithful to Bähr’s original plan than was Bähr’s original building (Zumpe, Rothert, Lugenheim 2000). (Again, the 1743 church was magnificent, but modern-day tools and techniques allowed for a more mathematically precise implementation of Bähr’s original plan. Dresden lore has Bähr with stick in hand, scratching out drawings in the dirt, as he orchestrated the Frauenkirche’s construction. Needless to say no sticks were involved in the building’s reconstruction, which some say more fully realizes Bähr’s inspired vision.)

2.1 THE RECONSTRUCTION: A QUICK AND PARTIAL ASSESSMENT

Was the reconstruction a success (fig. 3)? That’s a big question. Obviously the project has many, many dimensions. (One such dimension, just intimated, concerns the *status* of the reconstruction. Is the reconstructed building, having as it does the same “form,” in



Fig. 3. Reconstructed Frauenkirche, Dresden, Germany. September 23, 2011. Courtesy Brücke-Osteuropa. At http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Die_Frauenkirche_in_Dresden_4.jpg

some meaningful sense *the same* building? [Is it the new or the “new” building?] Or—here’s an even odder possibility—is the reconstructed building the *real* Frauenkirche, the 1743 building, inasmuch as it did not quite answer to Bähr’s ideal, having been something of an imposter? These metaphysical questions, though interesting, are bracketed here.) But in terms of resurrecting religious value—or, perhaps better, *spiritual* value—it seems it was a resounding success.

How so? Why? Well, if, as some would say, religion is about fostering connections and building community, the reconstruction project was a cookbook recipe for the same. From donors around the globe to cultural heritage experts to innumerable and varied professionals to skilled laborers and common folk in Dresden—think back now sixty-some years to the back-breaking effort of the *Trümmerfrauen*—literally

thousands of people worked together, shoulder to shoulder, to resurrect the church. Indeed, the reconstruction *unified* Dresdeners and others worldwide, linking people both within and across generations and from hugely disparate walks of life, fusing them all in the solidarity of a common project. The effort resurrected a Christian church, yes. But more than this it contributed to a cosmopolitan and universal end: it generated a *collective thing*—giving rise to what Max Scheler calls a “we” (Scheler 2008) and what Margaret Gilbert labels a “plural subject” (Gilbert 1989). Thus the *process* of reconstruction plainly resuscitated, even enlarged, a community. And it plainly recharged, even enhanced, religious-cum-spiritual value, understood in a broad and non-parochial sense.

With this in mind if the choice was, as it was, between a ruined Frauenkirche and a reconstructed Frauenkirche, it seems Dresden chose rightly. Surely the reconstruction houses value that was absent in the ruin and is important and worthy for this reason. Even so, perhaps the project was not a univocal success. Religious value resuscitated? Yes indeed. Check. But what about *historical* value? For now, all is well—original and non-original material is readily discriminable. But over time the latter will darken. In 50 years, more or less, it will be impossible to distinguish, visually, between original and non-original stone. And while this interestingly models the paradigmatic religious ideal of forgiveness or reconciliation, it is problematic from the perspective of history. Indeed, the meaning and value and import of history—currently exemplified in the darker stones as a tangible reminder of the dark days in 1945—will no longer be readily accessible. And in the worst case—seemingly all but inevitable—it will be altogether lost. (Doubtless conservators and other building experts, with their sophisticated instruments and keen eyes, will be able to distinguish original from non-original material in half a century—even perhaps forever [Wenzel 2000, 177]. But this misses the point. Indeed, while plaques and markers and slickly-produced literature describing historical events will tell against outright deception, this, too, is beside the point. Put simply, an encounter with the Frauenkirche in, say, 2105, will be disingenuous. Put differently, the first-person phenomenological experience [the *impression* one garners] of the Frauenkirche in that same year—at roughly the sesquicentennial of its destruction and at exactly

a century after its reconstruction and re-consecration—will be altogether misleading. This much, then, is clear: as the new stones darken, melding by degrees and incrementally with their counterpart stones, history will grow hazy. Indeed, lamentably, historical meaning and historical value will slowly ebb, slipping away altogether in time. And this, the resurrection of religious value notwithstanding, is plainly a cost.)

This gestures, again, toward the idea of the dilemma—and the remainder. Conservation and restoration projects are *not* algorithmic. They involve adjudicating between various meanings and values—and they have no “remainder-free ‘solutions.’” (This—that conservation is an art, not a science, of compromise—is something practicing conservators know, and something that, for example, each Barbara Appelbaum [2010] and Salvador Muñoz Viñas [2005] emphasize in their recent smart books.)

I turn now to Bamiyan.

3. Bamiyan's Buddhas: Their History, Desecration, and Possible Reconstruction

Bamiyan's Buddhas were the dignified guardians of Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley—a lush and tranquil rest stop, famous for its agricultural production and a powerful spirituality, for wayfarers on the Silk Road. The sculptures, standing serenely in their niches since the mid-6th and early 7th centuries (the smaller, eastern Buddha was the elder), were testament to the amazingly diverse array of peoples and cultures that had migrated through the region. They were an eclectic and complex combination of styles and influences—and telling instantiations of the history and art history of Gandhara Buddhism. Indeed, Bamiyan's Buddhas—at 55 meters, the western sculpture was the tallest likeness of the Buddha in the world and the two of them together were deemed by many the most important examples of Afghanistan's rich material cultural heritage—had calmly witnessed over 1,400 years of frenetic comings and goings.² Enterprising merchants crisscrossed Bamiyan as they transported goods along the Silk Road's snaking network of trading routes. Religious pilgrims traversed the mountain valley, some pausing long enough, obviously, to record their ideas in stone and create one of the world's most suggestive spiritual centers. And—this cuts in the other direction—the region had for millennia been the scene of



Fig. 4. Western Buddha in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, in 1963. Courtesy UNESCO/A. Iezine. At www.unesco.org/bpi/eng/unescopress/photos/afghan-heritage/close_upbudda.jpg

conflict and conquest as well: Alexander the Great stormed through Bamiyan in the 4th century BCE; Genghis Khan sacked the city in 1221; and, more recently, the Soviet Union disturbed the peace in Bamiyan's Valley. Some of these campaigns had exacted a toll on the sculptures. Earthquakes, weather, and the slow but inexorable effects of time had done damage too (fig. 4). But the Buddhas were for all that survivors. Their art-historical significance was beyond dispute and their status as a compelling repository of value undeniable. Yakut al Hamawi, author of a so-called "geographical dictionary" based on his travels in the Middle East and Afghanistan between 1212 and 1222, captured something of this even 800 years ago: "...two huge idols cut into the rock and

reaching from the bottom to the top of the mountain. One is called the red idol and the other one the white idol. You cannot find anything comparable to these two statues in the whole world” (al Hamawi circa 1221; cited in Blänsdorf et al. 2009, 237–38).

Enter March 2001. As the video attests, the desecration of Bamiyan was a costly, horrific event. While its motives remain debated and obscure (Flood 2002; Elias 2007; Semple 2011), many have labeled the Taliban's act an instance of “cultural barbarism.” Much was lost in March 2001. And various parties, all of whom presumably are both motivated by good will and concerned to do the meta-physically and morally right thing, differ hugely regarding the appropriate response.

Today we have empty niches (fig. 5). And the question is “*What is to be done?*” Should the Buddhas be resuscitated? If so, how? If not, why not?

Well, perhaps Dresden's experience is illustrative. The locals' “will to resurrect”—a fervent and unswerving desire to respond to and “un-do” destruction nearly-universally condemned as cruel and wanton—points to one similarity between Dresden and Bamiyan. In addition, the Frauenkirche and the Buddhas were iconic, sacred pieces of material culture. Indeed, both were part of “World Heritage” (the Bamiyan Valley was inscribed on UNESCO's list in 2003—ironically and all too late for the sculptures it was declared “endangered”—and Dresden's Elbe Valley was added in 2004). The artifacts in question were



Fig. 5. Empty niche of the Western Buddha in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, December 24, 2001. Courtesy Paul Bucherer-Dietschi/Foundation Bibliotheca Afghanica. http://i1360.photobucket.com/albums/r650/rivasr15/Buddha1-3_zps5f066a11.jpg

created by well-to-do, flourishing cultures; but the societies facing the dilemma were hugely poor, and thus reconstruction would require the world to step up with very significant international support. In both cases, photographs, documentation from previous conservation work, analytical studies of the materials, and the like provide something akin to the “ideal blueprint”—and so neither project would be conjectural. Finally, in both cases, substantial original material in usable form remains; and the resurrected artifacts would be motley.

Strong analogy aside, obviously there are differences too, and the Bamiyan case is challenging. While very considerable (even very remarkable) progress has been made since the sculptures were desecrated, important issues remain unsettled and the subject of debate. Here—in brief compass, absent detail—are some of the facts and open questions.

The site has been cleared, the niches largely stabilized, and the remains mostly secured (fig. 6). The material is being stored and protected, on-site and elsewhere, and many of the fragments have been inventoried and catalogued. Painstaking examination and research—rivaling, or at least on its way to rivaling, the kind of exacting, “no stones unturned” study of the Frauenkirche ruin prior to reconstruction—has been performed on a significant portion of the sculptures’ remains as well as on their niche homes (Petzet 2009a). And magnitude of the destruction aside, this assiduous and detailed investigative work has had encouraging results, inspiring both hope and optimism. Indeed, and amazingly enough, substantially all of the sculptures’ material has been accounted for and exists in some form. (Reports early on that relics were being sold in Pakistani bazaars turned out to be apocryphal.) Thus nearly all of the sandstone “core”—the Buddhas had been carved, relief-like, from the cliff—has been recovered; and much of this material, which includes sections weighing 60 or 70 tons, is intact and (under the circumstances) in comparatively good shape. By contrast, what had remained in early 2001 of the sculptures’ outermost portion—three meticulously-applied layers of clay that served as the Buddhas’ clothing and was affixed to the sculptures’ core, ingeniously, via ropes and pegs—was even more seriously compromised. While it seems all of this material is at hand, much of it was reduced to very small pieces and some of it was pulverized. Thus to focus only on the remains of the larger



Fig. 6. Remains of Eastern Buddha in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, December 24, 2001. Courtesy Paul Bucherer-Dietschi/Foundation Bibliotheca Afghanica. At http://i1360.photobucket.com/albums/r650/rivasr15/WesternBuddha2_zps7a426851.jpg

Buddha: both core and clay, from the aforementioned massive boulders to extremely fine powder, was carefully extracted from the western niche in 2004. This excavation work, much of it done by Bamiyaners themselves shovelful by shovelful while skirting unexploded ordinance and dodging landmines, issued in 1,400 cubic meters of material—the equivalent of 28,000 wheelbarrow loads (Praxenthaler 2009, 66).

Obviously, then, the recovery mission thus far has been a labor of love and an incredible challenge. To those directly involved, however, it seems equally obvious that materially-speaking all is not lost. What were once colossal sculptures are now colossal puzzles. But of course there are those who thrive on puzzles—the list in question will have conservators at or near the top—and are not easily daunted. Thus, for example, Edmund Melzl and Bert Praxenthaler, two German conservators, have been devoted to the Bamiyan project for a decade. Working diligently and tirelessly and in concert with many others—including cultural heritage experts, Afghan and Bamiyan government officials, and local laborers—they have collected, studied, sorted, catalogued, and helped to secure and store the remains. Among other things, Melzl

has concentrated on “sourcing” the huge cache of fallen material, carefully distinguishing cave wall fragments from the sculptures’ remains, and then, in turn, original from non-original surface. (The Buddhas had been restored previously, most recently between 1969-1978 by a team of conservators from India [Sengupta 1984, 1989].) Indeed, as of 2009, Melzl himself had catalogued some 10,000 fragments (Blänsdorf 2009, 199) and had worked to allocate them to their original position, whether in the cave or niche walls or on the sculptures themselves, as a function of either shape or remnants of layered paint (Blänsdorf et al. 2009). And Praxenthaler, once again among other things, has focused on stabilizing clay fragments that survived the attack but were loosened and thus only precariously attached to the wall in the eastern niche. In 2004 this could be accomplished only by while abseiling; by 2008, after the remains had been excavated, a scaffold was in place. But during all of this high-wire stabilization work—completed with the fearless help of an Afghan stonemason, Mujtabah Mirzai, and five Afghan laborers—Praxenthaler took care not to disturb original surface, which still clearly evidences the finger traces of those who originally applied the clay, while repositioning the loosened fragments exactly, “millimeter by millimeter” (Praxenthaler 2009, 137; Machat et al. 2010, 17).

And the recovery mission, methodical and detailed and dedicated as can be, has migrated to Europe as well. Indeed, to focus now on another part of the ongoing investigation, hundreds of the smallest Buddha fragments, hand-picked by Melzl, have been scrutinized at Munich’s Technical University (TUM). In fact a battery of sophisticated tests—Quantitative XRD, laser scattering spectrometry, AMS radio carbon dating, polarized light microscopy, etc.—have been performed on these remains (Blänsdorf 2009, 199-200). This analytical research has shed significant scientific light, heretofore unshed, on the time of the sculptures’ creation, the methods employed in their construction, their precise material composition, and the like. (Previously art historians and other scholars were flying blind, dating and characterizing the sculptures by broad style and making educated guesses about provenance and physical make-up. Ironically, then, the destruction significantly fostered understanding of the Buddhas and their history. It also made possible a surprising discovery in art history: analytical testing on cave paintings made accessible by the destruction showed that oil paint

was used in Asia many centuries before it was commonly supposed to have been “invented” in Europe [Highfield 2008].) The tests have also shed light on the prospects for re-configuring the puzzles’ pieces. And Erwin Emmerling, leader of the TUM portion of the Bamiyan conservation effort, has urged that at least a partial reconstruction of the smaller Buddha is “fundamentally possible” (TUM 2011, 2). In fact Emmerling and his colleagues have outlined a plan for reintegrating the sculpture—and have undertaken a Frauenkirche-style, 3D reconstruction of the fragments in the cliff face (TUM 2011, 2). The TUM studies, then, have gone more deeply into the broad and backbreaking work completed thus far on site. And the efforts on both fronts are, obviously, deeply interconnected. (Emmerling himself visited Bamiyan 15 times between 2007 and 2011 [Baetz 2011], and the hands-on on-site work has proceeded on the basis of technical advice founded in the TUM research [Praxenthaler 2009, 137; see, too, Emmerling 2009, 160, for his careful and detailed account of the conservation work undertaken in 2008 and 2009 in the eastern niche].) While all those involved in what is now an inter-continental collaboration have adopted a resolute and workmanlike approach to their labor—pushing ahead with dogged determination, as if there is simply no doubt but that one day the Buddhas will be back in their niches—synergies would need to continue to develop and conclusions would need to dovetail if the sculptures eventually were to go back up. Indeed, the TUM results, scientifically illuminating and hopeful as they are, would have to be carefully folded into the still-evolving findings on the ground at Bamiyan before any sort of resuscitation project could begin—before recovery and research, that is to say, could become reclamation.

And speaking, first, in terms of technical issues alone, such a reclamation project is certainly not on the immediate horizon. Indeed, despite the hope and promise in all this painstaking labor and research, difficult practical questions remain. How much original material is actually useable? How long will this material last—be suitable, that is to say, for use toward reconstruction—and can it be adequately protected in the meantime? Which specific conservation strategies would be appropriate and effective? Is it, for example, promising, technically-speaking, to *add* new material? Thus the TUM team has proposed injecting the eastern Buddha fragments with a newly-developed

silicon-based compound designed to halt disintegration, increase the longevity of this particular (especially porous and fragile) sandstone, and facilitate a lasting reintegration (Machat 2010, 18; TUM 2011, 2). But would this impregnation actually be effective? Would it *work*? And then of course there are questions about location. Indeed, is such a reconstruction project feasible in Bamiyan? (What kinds of infrastructural developments would be required? Are these developments themselves feasible?) Could the sculptures actually be re-integrated on-site? Or would two-ton boulders need to be transported to Germany, pieced together, and returned to Afghanistan?

In addition to these technical questions—conservation is about much more than practical problems and the empirical possibilities determined by conservation science; *can does not imply should*; and the feasibility of the project, by itself and without further argument, would not imply its rightfulness—there are practical questions more political and historical in nature. Who, exactly, should decide the Buddhas' fate? And whose interests should be privileged in coming to a decision? Whose sculptures *are* they? Who “owns” them? Bamiyaners? Afghans more generally? Buddhists? Or everyone? Are they the *world's* heritage? These are vexing questions with no clear answer.

And as if all this weren't enough, there are also, well, more purely philosophical questions. Restore *what* exactly? What would have to be rehabilitated—what would have to be somehow *gotten back*—in order to call the project a success? Are the sculptures' relevant properties and qualities—which doubtless bear some relation to the corresponding meanings and values—*restorable*? Or, alternatively, are they gone forever, the meanings and values at the site having shifted altogether and once and for all? (These latter questions raise challenging metaphysical and epistemological issues—for example, what *are* properties, qualities, meanings, and values; and how, exactly, do we *know* them?—that require far more careful consideration than is possible here. They are discussed some in another essay [Janowski 2011a], but await a more systematic treatment and sustained discussion as well.)

In short, then, the question “What is to be done at Bamiyan?” has many layers (just as, of course, the same question did at Dresden). It is no surprise that interested parties have been discussing this question for over a decade—and that they continue to do so.

4. Some Additional Issues—and a Segue to a Working Conclusion

While doubtless there is plenty more to be thought about and said, on both sides, about the reconstructed Frauenkirche, in hindsight and with the benefit now of nearly eight years of post-re-consecration experience, it seems right to say that Dresden's project was, on the whole and on balance, appropriate. But even if that's wrong, what's done is done. What happens at Bamiyan remains to be seen.

Although UNESCO has been skeptical about resuscitating Bamiyan's Buddhas—this is just what one would expect; it is UNESCO's job; and it is altogether appropriate—it also seems plain that no final decision has been made. Here is a quote from the report capping a March 2011 UNESCO meeting in Paris, a meeting held to mark the ten-year anniversary of the desecration: “a total reconstruction of either of the Buddha sculptures cannot be considered *at the present time*” (UNESCO 2011a, 2; emphasis added). This same qualifying language—“*at the present time*”—is repeated in the most recent, December 2011, version of the report (UNESCO 2011b, 3; emphasis added). The message here is mixed—cautionary, but not without a glimmer of hope. UNESCO is rightly concerned about the science—the material and technological possibilities and constraints—as well as the expenses. They are rightly concerned about the site more generally—the whole of the Bamiyan landscape, including, for example, more than 700 once-richly-decorated grottoes, is culturally significant and warrants protection—and properly focused on mitigating further cultural loss before seeking to make up for lost ground. That said, evidently UNESCO is not yet closing—and it is certainly not yet slamming and locking—the door on reconstruction. In fact the reports' very next line mentions a “feasibility study” for a “partial reassembling” of the smaller Buddha (UNESCO 2011a, 2; UNESCO 2011b, 3). And of course there is also this: other constituencies, too, have a say in the Bamiyan decision. Indeed, UNESCO itself, dubious but seemingly not immovable, is only one party to the debate. And while UNESCO certainly represents an important perspective and has a powerful voice, just as certainly it should act in concert and seek rapprochement with other interested parties and stakeholders. And some of the latter are, well, much more favorably disposed to a resuscitation effort. Thus it seems fair to say nearly all Bamiyaners strongly

favor reconstruction (partly but not solely for economic reasons). Many Afghans, too, have voiced support, pointing to the Buddhas as what once were and might be yet again genuinely *national* symbols. Finally, some highly respected cultural heritage experts are not as skeptical as is UNESCO. Thus, for example, Michael Petzet, President of ICOMOS from 1999 to 2008 and right from the start one of the principals in the Bamiyan discussions, urges that the remains be safeguarded so that future generations might help make the decisions and eventually, perhaps, implement a reconstruction plan (Petzet 2009b, 14). Indeed, Petzet recommends a slow, step-wise approach—one that might open up scientific options and opportunities (and perhaps financial and political ones as well?) that are simply not apparent now. In short, Petzet suggests that the remains be preserved while the practical, real-world possibilities catch up. (Playing theoretical catch-up would seem important as well. As this essay shows, the issues at work in the case have *not* been exhaustively explored.) And this of course is exactly what happened in Dresden, where, arguably, patience paid real dividends.³

Doubtless reconstructing the Buddhas would be a challenge. Numerous issues, on many and diverse fronts, would have to be sorted out before embarking on a reclamation project. (A number of these are listed in the report of the 10th Expert Working Group Meeting [UNESCO 2011b]; Petzet also provides a brief but more detailed description of some on-going work and the issues it raises [Petzet 2009c]). To note but one: which of the two sculptures would be first in line? While Emmerling, again, is hopeful about re-assembling the smaller Buddha, he is “more skeptical” about its companion (TUM 2011, 2). (The latter’s greater depth would make reconstruction more challenging.) But it is the *larger* sculpture, the Big Buddha (it had been affectionately known as Salsal, meaning “light shines through the universe”), that many Afghans seem most intent on resuscitating. It was *the* symbol of Bamiyan—indeed it was a central symbol of Afghanistan as a whole, appearing on the country’s postage stamps in 1951—and an exacting digital record, based on photos taken in the 1970s, could be used to reconstruct the frontal surface to within an average accuracy of 1.6 centimeters (Bucherer-Dietschi 2011). (Doubtless replicating this particular “look” would have an element of the arbitrary about it, as do all restoration projects. But it would nonetheless be an exacting depiction

of some one former instantiation—and would not involve the conjecture conservators rightly seek to avoid. Going back to square one, by way of contrast, would seem indefensible. The historical information to do so is lacking, and this *would* involve conjecture.) So which project takes priority—the one with more technical promise or the one with stronger symbolic resonance? Even about this question, then, the evidence is cock-eyed. Indeed, scientific data and human desires seem to point in different directions, and thus difficult decisions—careful and deliberate, just as they have been to date (and just as they were in Dresden)—would have to be made. And, to be sure, there will be no algorithms here either. (How to weight technical issues—assessing, for example, the pieces that remain from each sculpture in terms of their potential for lasting reintegration—against, say, social and symbolic concerns? While conservation, again, is about much more than science and technical matters, the realization that this is so only makes the decisions harder.) In short, then, the jury is still out on fundamentally important matters.

But even if this and numerous other thorny issues somehow could be settled, reconstruction would also be expensive. In fact estimates have ranged from \$30M to \$50M per sculpture. This sounds like a lot—until one pauses to reflect that a Formula One racing car costs about the same, and it may crash first time around the track (Bucherer-Dietschi 2011). Or even more to the point, while such a price tag might well sound indefensible given Afghanistan's immense and pressing needs, the money involved does not seem quite so exorbitant when one considers the cost of the armed conflict in the same country. According to some estimates (*AFP News* 2011), the U.S. alone has been spending \$300M per day to conduct a war in Afghanistan. Assuming this is accurate, the money required to resuscitate two 1,400-year old icons—even if the cost comes in on the high side—looks to be roughly what the U.S. spends *every eight hours* on its military effort. And \$100M for a reconstruction project might actually seem paltry, even trifling, by comparison—especially if, as is plausible, it would conduce to good ends.

5. A Long, Winding, and Provisional Conclusion

So what exactly is to be done at Bamiyan? While this essay has highlighted the dilemma, it is tempting to fall back on Socratic ignorance here. Indeed, there is wisdom in acknowledging a lack of knowledge

when, as is true here, a lack of knowledge is what you have. The Bamiyan situation is vexing—and there are plenty of questions, and indeed questions of various sorts, that remain unanswered.

But hedging aside, the following is a reasonable, or at least a not unreasonable, conclusion. Assuming it is feasible, it seems that integral restoration (Sagoff 1978, Wreen 1985)—anastylosis, broadly on the Frauenkirche model—would be appropriate, indeed even powerfully compelling and altogether rightful. (Such a project might be, perhaps should be, years away. Dresden’s ruin, recall, was in place for half a century. It is still early.) Resurrecting the Buddhas would resuscitate intrinsically worthy art-historical meaning and value held in abeyance since March 2001. It would answer as well to what philosophers call consequentialist considerations—contributing to, for example, each of economic and political value. (The reconstruction effort would certainly conduce to the material well-being of Bamiyaners. And in the best case it would be a unifying thread in a society that is notoriously fractious.)

There’s also this: a highly general operating principle in conservation—indeed, a first principle, or goal, that underlies and motivates and guides the conservator’s activity—is, it seems, the following: minimize meaning loss—or maximize meaning gain. Salvador Muñoz Viñas gestures toward something like this idea in his contribution to the 2009 Richmond/Bracker collection (Muñoz Viñas 2009). And it seems that Barbara Appelbaum sets out in her 2010 book to develop a heuristic, applicable to any and all conservation projects, which, if followed, would do just this (Appelbaum 2010). In fact maximizing meaning and value way out into the future, or something much like this at any rate, would seem to be the very aim of conservation. And with this in mind it seems a case can be made for resurrecting the sculptures—or at least *one* of them.

This last idea—the proviso—motivates an aside. Odd as this sounds, maybe Bamiyan is “lucky.” It has two empty niches and Dresden had one church. Is there an intuitively obvious “solution”? Perhaps one empty niche and one resurrected sculpture would answer to *both* the meaning and value in ruins (Zucker 1968; Ginsberg 2004) and the meaning and value that obtained (Klimburg-Salter 1989; Warikoo 2002), and might still obtain, in the Buddhas.

A second (rather longer) aside: plainly the empty niches and the

sculptures' remains are poignant—carriers of a rich and powerful message. But it also seems that the meanings and values they harbor are outweighed by the meanings and values that restoration might rekindle. If this is right—if there somehow would be something more valuable in restored and vertical sculptures as against empty niches and horizontal Buddha remains—then it seems there is a strong case to be made for resurrecting *both* sculptures. Reason seems to suggest— isn't this a basic dictum?—preferring more to less of what is good, and indeed more to less of what is (more) valuable.

But the “seems” is important and it points toward a possible objection. It might be that maximizing meaning gain involves *pluralizing* meaning—all else equal, more and different meanings are better than fewer (even if in a larger aggregate quantity) of the same meanings (and even if the latter are, in a non-trivial sense, more valuable than the former). And if this is right then it's back to the intuitive solution—one restored sculpture, one empty niche.

Which (if either!) view is correct? By now the philosopher's well-known visceral attraction to indecision will be evident. But the hesitation here is not at all waffle for waffle's sake; it is, rather, a completely justified “*don't yet know*” in the face of a seriously difficult question. In fact the Bamiyan case is exceedingly hard—and, again, zeroing in on the answers to its various questions requires more thought and analysis than is possible here. That said, this much is indisputable: the Bamiyan decision-makers—and “decision-makers” here would include any and all who have a significant role to play in the outcome, a group that plainly includes conservators—have a fiduciary responsibility to the site and to future generations of higher-order value perceivers, presumably more or less like ourselves. Thus these decision-makers are obliged to think through—carefully and deliberately, and with both sensitivity and moral imagination—what the site might mean, and what the site *ought* to mean, in the future. And while this is definitely a hard question, they do need to ask: just what should Bamiyan mean over the next millennium—or in, say, *another* 1,400 years? They need to seek clarity, that is to say, about exactly what configuration of Buddha remains and now-empty-but-potentially-fillable niches will maximize future possible meaning—or meanings—at the site. (This will seem challenging—and it is. But it is the decision-makers' *job*.)

Indeed, to make substantially the same point—and to begin to hint, too, at a provisional, working conclusion—by using and ever so slightly tweaking a phrase from the introduction to the Venice Charter, those charged with making a decision about Bamiyan need to take care to hand the site on to future generations “in the full richness of its authenticity” (ICOMOS 1964, Introduction). And if this is their charge, what, then, is their answer? What outcome and “presentation” would make for authenticity at Bamiyan?

Well, while the Bamiyan decision-makers are certainly right to query and wonder and work hard to understand whether resuscitating a Buddha, or Buddhas, would actually conduce to this end, it seems the case *for* this is at least as strong as the case for leaving the site as is. In fact maybe it is *stronger*. Pause. Consider. Reflect. Think. Is the site now, as things stand, one that has come down to us “in the full richness of its authenticity”? Or to appeal to Article 11 of the Charter proper (ICOMOS 1964): were the Taliban’s actions at the site a *valid* contribution to history? (Indeed, apropos this same Article, does the monument still exist? Are the empty niches and the Buddha rubble *still the monument?*) Must the Taliban’s “contribution” be *respected*? (What deserves more respect—the remarkable dedication and skill of those working on the giant puzzle [see, again, the whole of Petzet 2009a], dedication which itself has revealed the remarkable dedication and skill of those who labored to fashion the Buddhas originally, or the “dedication” and “skill” of those who desecrated them in March 2001? There is, it seems, no conceptual space between this question and its answer. To *ask* the question is to *give* the answer, unhesitatingly.) If not—and most, I daresay, would think not—then perhaps, consistent with the conservator’s principle of reversibility, the Bamiyan decision-makers should decide to intervene and *reverse* the result of the Taliban’s 2001 actions. Perhaps the *last* intervention—surely the site was wrongly co-opted; surely its meanings and values, rich and powerful as they once were, were wrongly undermined—should be rethought and then undone. Perhaps what is now in effect (and in substance) *the Taliban’s* Bamiyan should be reimagined and remade, and perhaps these formerly worthy statues should be returned to a condition that once was, and would once again be, authentic, or certainly *more* authentic than the rubble and emptiness that characterizes the site at present.⁴

Indeed, even the “pluralizing” reading of “maximize meaning gain” urges reconstruction of one sculpture in one niche. (While the thinking in this essay seems to suggest the reasonableness of this answer—and thus of a resuscitation project, one day, at Bamiyan—it is doubtless true that this thinking is not all the thinking that needs to be done. Hence the multiple instances of “perhaps” in the sentences above. [Four “perhaps” in three running sentences!] Indeed, the discussion here is a surface-scratching of a dilemma that plainly requires a deeper and more sustained analysis; and so the conclusion put forward here is put forward provisionally—and accompanied by a promissory note for further work.)

5.1 A DISPATCH FROM DRESDEN, TWO LESSONS LEARNED— OR REINFORCING AND SUPPLEMENTING THE PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION

In closing, it will be useful and important to go back quickly to the first part of the essay and the main thread of argument—leaving the just-discussed asides (*their* importance aside) to one side, in their own (shadowy and very-much-in-need-of-being-further-illuminated) niches. That is to say, in closing it will be useful and important to quickly and simply note the two lessons learned from the experience in Dresden.

Obviously bringing back Bamiyan's Buddhas—even one of them—would be a huge project, giving rise to a great big quantum of the same sort of religious-cum-spiritual value that arose in and through the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche. Some of this value, supervening as it does over collective and common-goal-oriented activity, has already been generated. Think de-miners. Think rubble-movers, shovels in hand and wheelbarrows in tow. (Remember the *Trümmerfrauen*?) Think what have now been ten UNESCO- and ICOMOS-sponsored Expert Working Group Meetings on Bamiyan. Think Edmund Melzl or Bert Praxenthaler. Think Erwin Emmerling or Michael Petzet. And then think Bamiyaners themselves, many of whom have dreamed of and hoped for and worked toward resuscitated sculptures since March 2001. Indeed, untold numbers of people, from many different backgrounds and many different places, have been working away for years now to see to the conditions that might make reconstruction possible.

And while the Bamiyan decision is hugely challenging, one might argue it would be a shame to squander the good will and extraordinary effort and amazing optimism that has characterized the project so far. In 2004, three years after the desecration and thus early on in the remarkable recovery mission that has unfolded to date, Edmund Melzl said: “Right now we don’t even know what’s there, and the engineering problems of reconstruction are immense. But we will do it, using all the pieces from the original, even the rocks that have turned to sand” (Power 2004, 72). Melzl has worked and struggled to this end—“*we will do it*”—to be sure. But he has certainly not worked and struggled to this end—many have been thinking “*we will do it*”—alone. And there seems to be a non-zero chance that his work and struggles, like the work and struggles of countless others, might not finally be in vain. Indeed, substantial focused energy has been directed toward resuscitating Bamiyan’s Buddhas. This on-going communal effort, as well as the very significant religious-cum-spiritual value it has created and is still creating, would come to fruition and reach its apex with a resuscitation project proper—something which, well, seems not impossible. (Remember Scheler’s “we” and Gilbert’s “plural subject.” And remember too what Dresdeners—undaunted, consciously and deeply committed, persevering against long odds and altogether and completely indomitable—*accomplished*.)

But were the Buddhas actually to go back up one day, it seems plain that—unlike the Frauenkirche—they should *proudly and permanently* display their scars. Indeed, it seems the project need not and ought not involve the loss of historical meaning that will evidently—eventually, in fact all-too soon—come to characterize Dresden’s reconstructed church. While this in no small part would be up to conservators, one hopes that Bamiyan’s Buddhas might be resuscitated in a way such that historical value would not—indeed would *never*—be lost. Thus if and when the sculptures are reconstructed in some fashion, the decision-makers and plan-implementers should do their utmost to ensure that the resuscitation project at Bamiyan would also lastingly resuscitate history—*all* of the history, including the horrific events of March 2001—and avoid both misleading impressions and the essential falsity of a disingenuous outcome. In short, those responsible for the final presentation at the site should learn from and seek to improve upon

what was otherwise a decidedly positive result in the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche.

In sum, important meanings and values were restored—and rightly so—in Dresden. And while this essay is notably short on hard-and-fast conclusions—its aim, recall, has been not so much to establish definitive answers as to articulate the pertinent issues and ask the right questions, the latter being, of course, essential conditions of thoughtful and defensible, even if not algorithmic and remainder-free, answers or “solutions”—it seems right to say that important meanings and values might still be rightly restored in Bamiyan as well. And it seems right, moreover, to say that this would be a good thing.

5.2 A 133-YEAR-OLD POSTSCRIPT

In the thick of the 19th century's heady and heated debates in conservation theory, Sir Edmund Beckett wrote the following: “When men talk against restoration they forget that non-restoration is destruction” (1880; cited in Tschudi-Madsen 1976, 71). There is something right in this. Indeed, following Beckett, one could argue that where restoration is possible, failure on this score, failing to restore, *is* destruction. And those who would weigh the future of Bamiyan should bring this idea before their minds as they think, and then think harder yet, about what is to be done about Bamiyan's dilemma. If restoration is possible and we don't restore, are we complicit? Are we party to the destruction?

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Notes

1. I also explore these two cases as well as these value considerations and issues in another essay (Janowski 2011b). The present discussion quickly summarizes the discussion there and goes on to both characterize more fully the status quo, from a conservation perspective, at Bamiyan and develop some initial thoughts about the future of the desecrated site. Simply put, this essay outlines the beginning of an argument, inchoate and provisional to be sure, about the appropriate “presentation” of

the site's now-empty niches. I say "provisional" because, as will be evident, the issues are many and complex—and a more thorough analysis awaits a book I am writing on Bamiyan and foundational issues in conservation theory. This essay is a stepping stone toward that larger project.

2. To compare a (much younger) watchful icon with similar cultural and national significance, the large sculpture was substantially taller than the Statue of Liberty—which has a height of 46.05 meters from top of base to the torch (NPS 2012).

3. It is perhaps worth noting that UNESCO also would have been dubious, maybe even outright dismissive, about the Dresden project. Indeed, UNESCO-esque strictures—founded in the Venice Charter—likely would have disallowed it. (Evidently there was in the end a shortage of "workable" original material in the Dresden case—the reconstruction, recall, contains 45% original stone—and of course the Charter proscribes intervention in cases where substantial original material is missing, or not usable. Thus the Charter permits restoration, but rules out "*a priori*" the re-fabrication of "things that no longer exist" (ICOMOS 1964, Article 15). And, once again, there is wisdom in this. Decision-makers should always be mindful of and on guard against "the Disneyland effect," and skepticism regarding such projects is altogether warranted and exactly the right approach—at least *prima facie*.)

But of course the caveat has place precisely because "no longer existing" is a matter of degree and authenticity is a multivalent notion. Think back to the Frauenkirche for a moment. Now that the building is once again standing, one might argue that the proof—and the authenticity—is in the (various ingredients in the) pudding. In fact Michael Petzet, nothing if not a thoughtful and perceptive conservation theorist, implies something much like this. Thus Petzet argues, or certainly strongly intimates, that reconstructions in post-World War II Europe were quite justified, and did not flout or fall afoul of an "all things considered" understanding of authenticity (Petzet 1995, 93).

These situations—Dresden, Bamiyan, and countless others could be cited—are invariably highly complex, and while original material is certainly an important criterion of authenticity there are other such criteria—use, original form, location, etc.—as well (Larsen 1995). Indeed, depending on the case these latter criteria may rightly outweigh the concern for material integrity. (Consider yet again the new ["new"?] Frauenkirche. It is being *used* in the same way; its *form* is the same [or, as was urged earlier, maybe even a more robust iteration of that which characterized its predecessor and of Bähr's ideal!]; it is in precisely the same *location*.) Here, then, is a dictum in conservation: all else equal, focus on, retain, and deploy or re-deploy only original fabric. But here, too, is a truism in conservation (as in life): all else is not always equal. And in this case maybe truism trumps dictum. Indeed, as was noted at the outset, conservation requires *judgments* and there will be no remainder-free "solutions." The moral for the present case, then, is clear: while it is right to be skeptical about reconstruction at Bamiyan, it is not right to rule it out *ab initio*, as some in UNESCO have perhaps been tempted to do.

4. This is consistent with Petzet's position. In fact Petzet urges that anastylosis is "the only appropriate solution," and explicitly recommends restoration over consigning the sculptures' remains to a museum (Petzet 2009b, 14). Indeed, Petzet notes—plausibly—that the sheer mass of this material, the huge number of fragments, would be altogether unsuitable for a museum. (Perhaps reconstructed sculptures *would* be the museum?)

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