is where a careful study of the nationalization of the various *awqaf* across the Muslim world (stating with colonial reorganizations of the 19th century and then the rise of new nation states in the 20th) can provide context and the possibility for an alternative. What would such new religious foundations look like? The Agha Khan Trust for Culture has positioned itself as one possibility, yet it remains closely aligned with Western preservationist expertise tempered with a commitment to local communities and training them in the heritage arts. Even then, it too must operate within the framework of national authorities, thus lacking the level of independence, at least in theory, from the state that defined the *awqaf* of the premodern period. Similarly, its tight connection with the Isma'ili community, a Shi'i minority within the broader Muslim world, raises concerns among Sunni religious authorities wary of how its connections and control over certain heritage resources can grant it legitimacy and even political power within the Muslim 'Umma. As increasing numbers of heritage professionals from the region get their training in Western institutions or those within the Middle East founded on the universalized principles of heritage practice, these questions may be moot. My hope is that they will engage with the critiques that Dr Rico has presented here and recognize that alternatives can exist, particularly ones rooted in a long history of varied Muslim (and regional non-Muslim – e.g. Coptic, Syrian Orthodox, Jewish) engagements with the heritage of their material and spiritual past, present and future.

Heritage preservation and religious sites or a selected history of UNESCO?

Ruth Young

School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester, UK
Email: rly3@leicester.ac.uk

The stated aim of this paper, to 'consider tensions between heritage preservation practice and religious traditions that share the same landscape or material culture' (p. 111), is one that will greatly interest many heritage practitioners and academics. We know the power of religion, heritage and religious heritage, and exploration of the many tensions is a rich subject area ready for careful and nuanced debate and Rico does raise many areas and issues that I think would be very interesting to pursue further. The external view of heritage in the MENA region has focused on a history and analysis of UNESCO work and impact here.

UNESCO has undoubtedly had a major impact on global heritage since its inception, and it has also been the subject of a great deal of analysis and critique (e.g. Huber 2021; Labadi 2013; Meskell 2018). The challenges to ideas such as a global heritage and the expert voice in heritage (Smith 2006) have allowed many of us to question the value and role of UNESCO, particularly outside Europe. I include myself in this group (Young 2019), and am aware that it is definitely time to move the agenda on and start asking different questions and finding different perspectives. Some questions that Rico has touched on in this paper that I think could usefully be a starting point for debate include: why has UNESCO endured? And what is the actual impact of UNESCO World Heritage listing in many parts of the world? Are there quite specific local impacts and values to listing? The differences in the ways in which sites linked to living and extinct religions are

managed, preserved, presented, valued and so forth offer a really fruitful area for working through some of the tensions and problems that arise when religious sites become heritage.

Moreover/furthermore, the term 'Muslim world' is a tricky one. Of course, we all use shorthand descriptive phrases to convey generally accepted and understood meanings, but we need to use labels such as the 'Islamic period' in archaeology (Wilkinson 2016) or the 'Muslim world' with care. The complexity of sectarianism within any religion, alongside varied ethnic groups and very different political approaches to heritage (and religion), needs to be recognized in any discussions of how heritage institutions and practices have been received in different areas of the world (Brooks and Young 2016). My own experience of undertaking archaeological and heritage projects in MENA countries (e.g. Lebanon, Oman, Iran, Iraq) has taught me that class, gender, educational background and so forth all count for just as much as religious affiliation in many discussions of how any heritage site might be preserved and presented. This is not to argue against Rico's key aim of exploring the dissonances between heritage preservation and religious traditions, but to flag that taking a nuanced approach to the subject is critical, and will bring us an arguably more interesting understanding.

The global preservation tradition that is at the heart of Rico's critique does not just stand at odds with Muslim communities, and it does not always stand at odds with Muslim communities. Obviously no single article (or even book) can cover such a complex topic in any depth, so a future interesting angle for other scholars might be to think through examples where global (Western-/European-driven?) heritage preservation practices have worked effectively in religious-heritage site management in the MENA region. This, of course, requires some consideration of what 'effectively' means in different kinds of situations. The city of Yazd in Iran, for example, is an interesting case study in exploring the impact of WH listing from political, value and community perspectives. The protection and recognition of Zoroastrian sites are of great importance to living communities (and contrast with the fate of Bahá'í sites and monuments), and have also given local and national political leaders a nifty narrative of religious tolerance.

Rico's paper sets out to look at challenges for the MENA region, which is a big geographical area, and hugely varied in terms of the factors noted above in relation to the 'Muslim world' as well as such things as wealth and living standards. Rico presents a short case study of the Hagia Sophia (Turkey) and a short case study of pharaonic Egypt. The Hagia Sophia case study offers a way of linking heritage immediately with UNESCO, and there are further questions and issues here to explore, such as working through some of the tensions of the site as a place of religious worship and as a museum, and how it is preserved and managed. I am also not sure that I agree that the history of the Hagia Sophia does neutralize its spiritual functions. It has shifted from being a church to a mosque, then a secular museum and now a mosque again, but even the most determinedly atheist visitor to it while it was a museum would have been hard-pressed to experience it without being aware of it as a place with immense spiritual history regardless of its specific religious orientation.

While I am completely on board for anything that raises discussion around heritage and religion, there was potential here to do much more, particularly by actually engaging with the '*from*' and the '*by*' that Rico explicitly disengaged from. My main issue here remains that Rico has settled by deciding to focus on what is a historical overview, and from the Western viewpoint ('construction of narratives *about* ... MENA' (p. 111)). Rico clearly has knowledge and views on ICESCO and ALECSO, for example, and I completely agree that these institutions warrant separate discussion and analysis. In fact, I wish that Rico had written that paper here instead of what feels like yet another critique of UNESCO and the attempts of something so truly rooted in Western/European scholarship and practice to describe and shape heritage values in the rest of the world. It is, of course, a really annoying academic habit to want an entirely different paper and I am sorry for being such a cliché. But I really would like to read about all the 'other organizations with global and regional reach that operationalize different ideologies in alignment with, resistance to or ambivalence towards UNESCO's work' (p. 115) and to set out new and challenging discussion areas around heritage in the MENA region.