

Reza Nekumanesh: ISIS attacks on art are anti-Muslim

By Reza
Nekumanesh

In March 2001, the world witnessed as the leaders of the Taliban blew up two Buddhist statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, dating from the sixth century. Not even 15 years later, the world is witnessing in agony as the Taliban's radical kin, ISIS, is dedicated to carrying out more attacks on the world's heritage.

Where do these sick individuals get the idea that destroying art and civilization is a pious duty?

It is hard to focus on the destruction of things when this evil group is killing off humans, but it is becoming more and more a reality that my children and grandchildren are not going to be able to live in a world that is decorated by centuries of art and civilization because twisted ideologies find the need to eradicate our world of it.

ISIS has ransacked museums and sites in Palmyra, Raqqa and Mosul, to name a few, destroying millennia-old artifacts as well as architectural gems valued not only for their stone and structure, but for their religious significance. One such casualty was a statue dating back 2,700 years.

Does Islam sanction these destructions? When Mecca was conquered, peacefully I might add, by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers, they did go to the Kaaba, a cubical structure which is the holiest of places for Muslims and even other religions dating back to the time of Abraham and his family, and cleansed the inside of the 360 idols that littered it.

However, he and his followers did not do so anywhere else; not in homes, in the public, in religious gathering places, etc. They merely did so as an act of reclaiming the Kaaba as a sanctified house of monotheism from the idols that had occupied it.

Since then, for the past 13-plus centuries, architecture, statues, paintings and other expressions of art have been in lands under the control of Muslims; not only undestroyed, but cared for and appreciated. If this were not the case, the churches and synagogues of Palestine or Istanbul and the relief carvings of Jordan would have long ago been wiped off the face of the earth.

In addition, Islamic art has been produced and displayed in these countries as proud displays of culture and development. For evidence, you need look no further than the wonders of mosaic artistry in the mosques and shrines of Iran and Iraq, or the relief work in Morocco, or the ceramics and tiles of Muslim Spain, the innovations in glasswork of Egypt, or the miniature paintings of India and Turkey, or to the rock, precious stone, ivory and wood carvings throughout the region.

In addition, these Muslim artisans were not prejudiced about from whom they would draw inspiration as they were heavily influenced by Roman, Byzantine, Persian and African expressions.

So if all this is the case, where does ISIS or the Taliban get off going against the tide of more than 13 centuries of acceptance and even appreciation for the arts by the Muslim world? Unfortunately, at the direction of the desert mentality of one of our staunchest allies: Saudi Arabia.

To understand the disdain for culture and civilization, one needs to look up and read the history of Wahhabism and its rise to power under the Saudi monarchy. This destructive cult, rather than sect as some would refer to it as, spouts hatred of much in this world, including people and things that differ at all with who they are.

Wahhabism is responsible for the destruction of the Baqi' Cemetery in Mecca that housed the shrines and graves of

many early Muslim leaders and personalities as well as pieces of art that showed the evolution of Arabic calligraphy contemporarily through the years. They have destroyed the early homes and buildings used by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers.

They have even tried to force Muslims to stop visiting sites of Islamic heritage because they claim that it is a form of idolatry.

For one to understand ISIS' hatred of all things civilized, one must look to the influence of the recipient of so much of our oil dollars. One must look to the ideologies that have spawned so much radicalization and terror that art would be claimed victim. On the other hand, we must be just and remember that Islam and Islamic art is just as much victim to this hatred as any other.

Islam does not condone the destruction of the world's treasures but sanctifies property. And just as Muslim scholars from all around the world joined the global community in denouncing the Taliban and their attack on the Buddhist statues as human heritage, Muslim scholars today are lining up to denounce ISIS and their continued destruction.

Reza Nekumanesh is the director of the Islamic Cultural Center of Fresno and can be reached at reza@icfresno.org.