

Benefits apparent in many areas

A BASIC knowledge of Islam should be enough to ease confusion about the Islamic State and whether they fight for the sake of religion or are tyrant terrorists that fight for desire in the name of religion. The series of massacres, burnings and beheadings of hostages who are not involved in the war are all brutal acts that prove that there is no Islam in that "state".

However, a recent video showing them destroying monuments and artifacts at Mosul Museum begs the question: are their acts in line with Islamic principles? The situation is aggravated by the lack of any response from Muslim scholars.

In fact, this act was not the first of its kind. Ten years ago, the Taliban destroyed the Buddhas of Bamiyan, the giant centuries-old carved statues of Buddha in Afghanistan. This is not surprising, as the IS and Taliban come from the same ideological root, and statues are considered to be of non-Muslim heritage. However, when a few sites of early Islam in the holy city of Mecca comes under threat of destruction, it seems that even Muslim heritage sites have no place in Islam.

In our beloved country, we have witnessed some Lembah Bujang archaeological sites destroyed by developers. While this issue has triggered outrage from politicians, historians, archaeologists and activists, they did not seem to attract Muslim scholars or the religious authorities to make any comments based on the Islamic perspective. At the same time, there are claims that most treasures from the

Malaccan sultanate have been sold on the black market.

There are a few Muslim scholars who claim that heritage conservation is prohibited in Islam, including of Muslim historical sites. The reason is clear, as most of heritage material, especially that from ancient civilisations, are statues or idols. In fact, Islam, through its main sources, the Quran and *hadith*, does not tolerate any kind of sacrilege. Moreover, those involved in or support this effort might be considered to be partaking in blasphemous activity. This view is exploited by certain governments to justify their acts in demolishing heritage sites for physical development.

While the Quran and *hadith* are the highest references for Islam, these two sources have their own methods of interpretation and implementation. With the heritage issue, it is necessary to understand the concept clearly, instead of jumping to conclusions. Nowadays, heritage conservation and restoration awareness have emerged all over the world under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco). Thus, to relate these efforts as sacrilegious acts is totally wrong.

While there are no clear verses from the Quran or *hadith* to indicate that this venture is prohibited, a few verses do show indirectly that ancient heritage is vital in Islam.

For example, in Surah Ar-Rum, Allah said: "Do they not travel in the land, and see what the end of those before them was? They were superior to them in strength, and they tilled the earth and populated it in greater numbers than these



If preserving heritage has many benefits, then it should be supported in Islam.

(pagans) have done, and there came to them their Messengers with clear proof. Surely, Allah wronged them not, but they used to wrong themselves." (Ar-Rum 30:9)

According to this verse, Allah asked people to travel and observe the ancient remains of bygone civilisations to learn lessons from their history. In other words, to manage and preserve ancient sites is necessary so that man can learn from history.

In addition, there are no historical records that the companions of Prophet Muhammad destroyed any idols, statues or artefacts related to ancient civilisations. When they conquered new lands, like Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Afghanistan, which are rich in heritage materials, they preserved them. In Islam, the companions of the Prophet were considered to be

the best persons in terms of understanding and implementing Islamic teaching. If such materials were against Islam, why did not the companions destroy them?

As long as there is no clear evidence from the Quran, Sunnah and the companions' acts that indicate that preserving heritage materials is disallowed, we should not be too hasty in coming to conclusions. In fact, heritage conservation is in line with the objectives of *maqasid syariah*, which are to promote the wellbeing of all mankind. These objectives comprise the following:

PROTECTING RELIGION. The sanctity and truth of religion must be protected by its followers. Preserving remaining materials of bygone civilisations could include evidences for ancient folk tales in sacred books. In other words, it proves that the revealed book is

truly from God. For example, the discovery of the royal ancient Egyptian mummies verified what was told in the Quran;

PROTECTING LIFE. The human self must be protected. Preserving heritage, especially monuments pertaining to wars and human conflict, could be the best reminder for the current and future generations to order keep their relationships harmonious and avoid bloodshed;

PROTECTING INTELLECT. Islam encourages people to learn and discover knowledge as far as it benefits their life. Protecting heritage is in line with this objective since it is the broad source for science, history, civilisation, sociology, religion and art studies as well as to build up human intellect;

PROTECTING POSTERITY. To maintain life and pass on the torch to generations to come, Islam aims to protect progeny. By preserving her-

itage, our history, culture and identity can be safeguarded. This is important, especially when a nation faces disputes with other nations, because heritage could be the main proof to a claim; and,

PROTECTING WEALTH. People need property and money in their life, and Islam asserts their right to gain, possess, and protect them. Maintained heritage sites and material can boost the economy through the collecting of tax, and the local people can benefit from its tourism.

In a nutshell, if preserving heritage is beneficial to religion, education, civilisation and boosts the Muslim economy, then this effort should be supported in the name of Islam.

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