The Pennsylvania State University  
Committee for Early Modern Studies  
2016 Symposium, Call for Papers

In the Face of Destruction: Historical Memory and the Preservation of the Past in the Early Modern Period

October 28-29, 2016  
State College, Pennsylvania

In August of 2015 a video was anonymously released that showed the fiery demolition of Palmyra’s 2nd-century CE Temple of Baalshamin. This shocking act, which purportedly occurred weeks before the world became aware, was the latest targeted attack on historically significant sites scattered throughout Iraq and Syria. For scholars of the early modern period (and beyond), this scene was sadly familiar. The demolition of Palmyra’s temple was simply the most recent chapter of a tradition that stretches back centuries: intentional destruction as a political or religious statement. Penn State’s Committee for Early Modern Studies (CEMS) is organizing a symposium, “In the Face of Destruction,” with the aim of inspiring discussion about the historical roots of cultural devastation.

We seek papers that take on the themes of destruction and subsequent preservation, writ larger than the iconoclastic acts that immediately come to mind. Defining the early modern period broadly in temporal terms (1300-1800) and geographic expanse, this symposium seeks to unite a number of topics related to destruction and preservation including iconoclasm, collecting practices, censorship, the Inquisition, warfare, extirpation campaigns, disease, historical suppression/erasure, martyrologies, natural disasters, commerce, and their related ethical dimensions. We hope to expand this theme to form a broader conceptual framework that includes “non-western” traditions, frontier regions, and colonial contexts. The natural corollary to destruction and its consequences for peoples and nations – human agency and initiative amid crises – are also of analytical interest.

Keynote and Plenary speakers will include:

Dr. Brian Rose (Professor of Archaeology, University of Pennsylvania)  
Dr. Alisha Rankin (Associate Professor of History, Tufts University)  
Dr. Barbara Mundy (Professor of Art History, Fordham University)

Paper presentations will be no longer than 20 minutes in length. Selected papers will provide a basis for an edited volume that prioritizes inter-disciplinary methodologies.

To apply, please email a 200 word abstract (with paper title) and a current CV to FoDSymposium@gmail.com by March 1, 2016 as a single pdf document. Please include a subject heading of “CEMS Symposium Proposal” in the email.