



Mediterranean Insecurity

Mosul under the so-called Caliphate of the Islamic State: what really happened...between efficiency and brutality *PART II: BRUTALITY*

Laura Quadarella Sanfelice di Monteforte¹

1. Brutality

After having seen in the paper published last April the efficiency of the so-called Caliphate², we have to analyze the other main aspect: the brutality!³

Indeed, to have dispelled false myths on what happened in Mosul in the years under IS administration does not absolutely mean that we can forget the other fundamental aspect, characterizing this sort of state identity: brutality.

In fact, also due to this aspect the city of Mosul was for a long period “efficient” and, in part, for some even “happy”. All functioned, and no form of corruption was any more present, as all feared the consequences, often materializing through violent corporal punishments. These were punishments of a brutality which we have

¹ The opinions expressed in this article belong to the Author and are not necessarily corresponding to those of the Ministry where She works.

² See QUADARELLA SANFELICE DI MONTEFORTE LAURA, *Mosul under the so-called Caliphate of the Islamic State: what really happened...between efficiency and brutality PART I: EFFICIENCY*, in *Mediterranean Insecurity*, April 2020, 11.

³ For a complete analysis see: QUADARELLA SANFELICE DI MONTEFORTE LAURA, *Life in Mosul under the Islamic State: Efficiency and brutality of the Caliphate*, Mursia Editore, Milan (also in Italian version *Vivere a Mosul con l'Islamic State. Efficienza e brutalità del Califfato*, Mursia, Milano, 2019)



difficulty in imagining, but which in fact is proper also to other Islamic regimes with whom we keep normal international relations, as many were keen to highlight.

To understand the degrees of brutality reached by Al Baghdadi men, it is worth underlining how sometimes, as shown to the world by the official IS propaganda, the modalities used to execute capital sentences were terrifying also because they were the most variegated and unimaginable, to say better “imaginative”, if such a term can be used about a capital execution.

The reasons for this brutality were manifold: on one side, IS wanted to scare the West and the coalition of anti-IS countries, by shocking their public opinions and compel them to avoid acting; on the other the aim was also to exploit the atrocities and the seemingly gratuitous violence to exalt the sick minds of the most violent among the young foreign fighters come to fight, teenagers who were authorized to perpetrate actions typical of a horror film; finally, violence was instrumental to order and to the respect of rules.

2. Mosul was declared a Sunni city!

It should be considered also the fact that, as Cantlie himself said in his video in Mosul broadcasted by IS on January 2015⁴, all good, beautiful or efficient things done by the men of Caliphate, was meant for Sunnis only, and naturally to those complying with the rules. Mosul had been declared a Sunni town⁵ and the law to be enforced was the *Shariah*; consequently those who belonged to another religion or did not respect the rules had a difficult life and met with the most severe punishments.

The already mentioned “efficiency” and “happiness” were therefore related only to a part of the Sunni population, those who were observant, while who violated the Law was punished; similarly, other groups suffered for ethnic or religious reasons persecutions whose reach has not yet been well understood; on this, the testimonies of the civilian residents of Mosul with whom I spoke could not help me much, as

⁴ See QUADARELLA SANFELICE DI MONTEFORTE LAURA, *Mosul under the so-called Caliphate of the Islamic State: what really happened...between efficiency and brutality PART I: EFFICIENCY*, in *Mediterranean Insecurity*, April 2020, 11.

⁵ In this sense, on July 2, 2014 also the blogger MOSUL EYE reported the same consideration, by writing “They have declared that Shiaa are atheists and the city is a “Sunni city” only.” (<https://mosul-eye.org/2014/07/02/mosul-eye-reponse-to-mr-foss-a-norwegian-journalist/>).



naturally they were unable to become aware of mass graves, just outside the city, which are uncovered during these months.

A “Bureau for War Spoils” dealt with, among other things, of the division and re-assignment of all what confiscated to the non-Sunni, or in any case by what had been abandoned by the faithful of other religions, at the moment of the escape, as well as what had been paid by non-Sunni as a tax. The main beneficiaries of this bureau, about whom we have already heard when speaking of the video in which IS described in 2016 the state organization of the Caliphate, where it was called as “*Diwan of Fay’ and Ghana’im*”, were naturally those we call foreign fighters, that is all those persons arriving from other countries to join in the construction of the Caliphate, and evidently needed a house. Among the beneficiaries, however, there were also some Mosul citizens who were in the need to have a house, as their own had been destroyed by a bombing, or who started having a family for the first time⁶.

As we will see shortly, the various non-Sunni minorities suffered different destinies, on the basis of the religion they were worshipping, more than of their own ethnicity: due to the distorted interpretation of the Sunni extremism proper of IS, to be a Sunni Kurd was for instance less serious than being an Arab practicing another religion, as the Christian one, while to be a non-Sunni Muslim meant committing the gravest crime, often punished through death. Therefore the Sunni Kurds were in the majority of cases left free to go to the neighboring Kurdish cities (in fact, almost all fled); while to the Christians, after some weeks, an ultimatum was imposed, which forced them to choose between converting themselves, leaving the city or to pay the *Jizya*. To non-Sunni Muslims and to other groups following religions which included in their doctrine practices and beliefs of several religions, Islam included, the choice was not even offered, as they were infidels for excellence, who “have refused” and are therefore “renegades” to be eliminated; this, for different rationales, was the fate of Shiites and Yazidi.

⁶ About a “Ministry of War Spoils” writes also the famous Callimachi, who has found evidence of its existence in numerous IS documents. Callimachi writes: “*The confiscation didn’t stop at the land and homes of the families they chased out. An entire Ministry was set up to collect and re-allocate beds, tables, bookshelves — even the forks the militants took from the houses they seized. They called it the Ministry of War Spoils.*” (CALLIMACHI RUKMINI, *The ISIS Files: We unearthed thousands of internal documents that help explain how the Islamic State stayed in power so long*, in *The New York Times*, 4 April 2018, in <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/04/world/middleeast/isis-documents-mosul-iraq.html?smid=tw-nytimes&smtyp=cur>). From the documents it is evident that it was a structure mostly devoted to the re-assignment of confiscated mobile assets and estates, as well as the utilization of sums collected from non-Sunni subjects.



In the light of this last consideration, before going in depth on the numerous and different aspects of the crimes committed by IS men also in town, it is therefore necessary to make some clarifications on the *status* of non-Muslims according to the *Shariah*, which seems having been applied by IS men, even if with further restrictions, or to say better in accordance with much more rigid interpretations.

Since ever, the Islamic Law dictates that all non-Muslims who worship monotheist religions based on the *Torah* and come from Abraham, i.e. Christians and Jews, the so-called “People of the Book” (in Arabic الكتاب أهل), due to a historic “protection pact” can become “*dhimmi*” (in Arabic ذمي). By becoming *dhimmi* they can enjoy protection and the benefit of numerous rights, among them to freely follow their cult, in exchange of the payment of the individual tax⁷ of the *Jizya*, besides being loyal towards the Islamic State and the *Ummah*, the Community of the Islamic faithful⁸.

Historically the payment of the *Jizya*, often most onerous economically, albeit being for centuries a significant guarantee which allowed the survival also of numerous communities of Jews, would imply that the *dhimmi* submit themselves to the *Shariah*, in the sense of respecting and complying with it. This juridical institute would not imply, though, according to many scholars, a physical or social submission: there would not be therefore the creation of citizens of a “Second Class”, subordinated to the Muslims, citizens of “First Class”.

In reality, the fanaticism of Al Baghdadi men was such that not all benefits conceded by the *Sharia* were granted to those who paid the *Jizya*, among them, for the Christians, the right of drinking alcoholic beverages, as prescribed by their religion, even if it is worth noting that they were acknowledged several rights and benefits: IS granted, for instance, some juridical guarantees and economic subsidies in case of poverty, besides benefitting from all public services offered within the Caliphate, without distinctions of religion.

As we will see shortly, though, the *dhimmi* were not totally part of the society, and their houses carried an external identity mark which had the effect that neighbors and passers-by, even if they could frequent them, be aware of their *status*.

Besides the accounts made to me, it is worth noting that, after the fall of IS, the expression *dhimmi* has been found in many IS documents, in which its provisions, be they related to the attribution of a right, the imposition of a duty, or the

⁷ Often also an agricultural land tax, the *kharāj*.

⁸ For more details see NEWELL ABDUL KAREEM, *Dhimmi - Non Muslims living in the Khilafah*, 2017.



announcement of a ban, was expressly referred to “the Muslims and to the *dhimmi* present in the lands of the Caliphate”, without differentiating later between the two categories of subjects, as for the application of the text of the document⁹.

3. The treatment reserved to women

As far as the treatment reserved to women concerned, since the initial months, IS compelled women to wear the *hijab*, the Islamic veil in one among the simplest ways, which in the observant Mosul all women already wore, while with time the rules became increasingly heavier, and the woman’s body was little by little increasingly hidden, and the allowed color was only black, thus imposing to wear the *niqab*, which since the pre-Islamic tradition hides any centimeter of females’ body, leaving uncovered only the eyes. The body of women outside their house, and in any case in presence of strangers, should be totally covered, from head to feet, lest heavy rebukes were addressed to the woman and to her “responsible” man¹⁰, and, if in a closed place, to the owner/manager of the local who had “allowed” to a woman to uncover even a minimal part of her body¹¹. The mystery darkening any aspect of females’ body complicated very much to buy any type of females’ clothing: any acquisition of a robe should in fact happen almost incognito, in the back of the store, being impossible neither to try on the robe nor, even, to communicate the size to the shopkeeper, thus forcing ladies to go back and forth between home and shop, until the right size were found. Women, though, were allowed to study and to work, also as

⁹ See some among the documents reported in AL-TAMIMI AYMENN JAWAD, *Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (cont.)*, 11 January 2016, in <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-1>

¹⁰ The accounts by Mohamed have been confirmed also in this case: “*For at least a month, obedience to the new rules was not enforced. Then at the end of July, thousands of niqab sets were distributed to shops. The first of numerous decrees was issued, ordering women to don the niqab as well as gloves. Around the same time, residents began seeing vehicles painted with the logo of the Islamic State’s morality police, Ms. Aqeedi said. / Opposite the university, they opened the police unit’s headquarters, known as the Diwan al-Hisba. Its enforcement officers fanned out across the city, carrying books of numbered citations. / When the police caught a woman straying from the dress code, they issued a notice in exchange for her husband’s ID card. He then had to appear at a hearing before a judge. Depending on the offense, he was forced to pay a fine, or else either he or his wife was sentenced to a whipping, recent escapees said. / When the Islamic police barged into the home of Ms. Beder, they demanded her husband’s ID. Then when he appeared before them, he was forced to pay a fine of 50,000 dinars — around \$40, a sizable portion of the family’s monthly income.*” (CALLIMACHI RUKMINI, *For Women Under ISIS, a Tyranny of Dress Code and Punishment*, in *The New York Times*, 12 December 2016, in <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/12/world/middleeast/islamic-state-mosul-women-dress-code-morality.html>).

¹¹ I was told about husbands who were sanctioned because it was possible to glimpse a centimeter of skin through a hole in the socks!



female doctors in a hospital¹² or as teachers in the universities¹³, or as policemen in a special section of religious police¹⁴, but they were compelled not to be alone with men external to her family: the rule was that women should “never stay alone with a man, except their husbands, fathers, sons, uncles, nephews or other family members”. At work, therefore, doors had to be open (except when there were in the room more men and women) and, with time, as we saw, at the universities separate classes were established while, in the last period, a woman without a man of her family could not even take a taxi or public transport means.

It should be underlined that I was led to understand explicitly how the rigid rules imposed had some positive aspects also for the intimacy of the couple. If on one side, to see them outside home always dressed as “black bags” was very sad, on the other it made them at home more beautiful than before, at least for two reasons. First of all, as women could only at home and for their own family take care of themselves and show their femininity, unlike what happens in the West, they were well made up and dressed at home, not outside. Also, the husbands, not any more accustomed to see on the streets even a single centimeter of skin uncovered, were most excited with their own wives also when looking at a hand, an arm or part of legs. The rigid rules imposed, too, conferred both to women and to men a total security: women could go out at any hours, knowing that nobody would have harassed or molested in any way.

And I was also led to openly understand that women clothing facilitated also extra marital intercourses, as nobody could know who was hidden under a dress¹⁵. However, as for sexual intercourses, they had to take place only within marriage, in accordance to Islamic Law and, as it was what we would define a marital obligation, none between the two spouses could oppose it; consequently, the woman could not refuse herself. Within marriage almost all was permitted (for instance oral and anal practices were forbidden) within the decisional freedom of the couple, but no

¹² To have female doctors in hospitals allowed women to be cared, as a male doctor could not visit them, something which happened unfortunately in some fundamentalist countries as in Afghanistan under the Taliban.

¹³ Women could teach both in female and in male classes, but should keep the door open when alone with men, as what a male professor should do when with female students.

¹⁴ It seems that the female section of religious police were present only in Mosul and Raqqa, having the task to search and arrest women, as reported in SPECKHARD ANNE - YAYLA AHMET S., *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*, 2016, 191. The name of this section was *al-Khansaa Hisbah*.

¹⁵ In this sense, some young former supporters of IS who lived in Syria in the zone of Raqqa have, for instance, reported about a large number of women who had sexual intercourses outside marriage, most often for money, as widowers had no other way to feed their kids, and were able to be free in movements thanks to the imposition of the *niqab*, which allowed also the diffusion of numerous brothels. See: DEL GRANDE GABRIELE, *Dawala. La storia dello Stato Islamico raccontata dai suoi disertori*, op.cit., 333.



intercourses were allowed during the week in which the woman is “impure”, due to the menstrual losses, and in case of advanced pregnancy. Outside marriage, to have sexual intercourses of any kind was a great offence, which implied public flogging for singles (with 80 strokes, thus almost until death) and stoned if married, while in case of intercourses between two persons of the same sex the culprits were thrown from the roof of a building.

4. The treatment reserved to the minorities

Now, let’s have a look to the minorities, starting with the Kurds, historically hated by Arab-Sunni inhabitants of Mosul. Due to the fact that they are Sunni in their majority, very many Kurds did not suffer from IS, inside the city, the persecutions suffered by the faithful of other religions. These people, as we will see shortly more specifically, were placed in front of a choice between convert themselves, leave the city or to pay the *Jizya*, and, if they refused all these possibilities, were killed¹⁶, while for non-Sunni Muslims these choices were not even offered, as they were infidels by excellence, who “refused” and therefore were “renegades”. To the Sunni Kurds of Mosul, in spite of what was said in Western newspapers, was instead left the possibility to live in town, and, as it can be seen in numerous documents retrieved after the fall of the Caliphate, were treated almost as the other Sunni¹⁷. Consider that,

¹⁶ In this sense, the blogger MOSUL EYE wrote, for instance, at end July 2014, thus after the deadline received by Christians between converting themselves, leave the city, pay the tax for the non-Sunni or being killed: “*ISIS issued an issue yesterday which denies any displacement of Kurds in Mosul and considers this talk “purposed propaganda”. They consider Kurds as Sunni and brothers to them.*” (<https://mosul-eye.org/2014/07/26/al-baghdadi-claims-to-be-a-decedent-of-ali-ibn-abi-talib-and-kurds-are-considered-brothers-by-isis/>).

¹⁷ For a total confirmation to what Mohamed and his friends told me, see, for instance, a document (retraceable in its English translation) in which, at end July 2014 (therefore after the ultimatums to other religious communities) IS denies that Kurds have been invited to leave the Province of Nineveh, in AL-TAMIMI AYMENN JAWAD, *Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents*, 27 January 2015, in <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents>:

“*Islamic State*

Wilayat Ninawa: Media Office

27 Ramadan 1434 [sic: 1435] AH

25 July 2014

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[...]

The enemies of Islam continue to harm this young state, and defame the image of the Islamic Caliphate. The latest of their falsehoods that has been spread around recently is that the Islamic State is forcibly displacing Kurds from Wilayat Ninawa.

In response to this slander we say:



in front of the attitude almost hostile by the inhabitants of Mosul toward Kurds, numerous were the formal rebukes by IS, to the intent that no Kurdish (Sunni) citizen should suffer aggression or abuses, and defined them as “brothers”.

The treatment of the Yazidis was totally different. against the Yazidi populations the harsher persecutions were committed by IS men, so that it can be said, also due to the restricted number of the components of this population, of clear genocide acts. Against them, in fact, the plan prepared and put in practice by IS men could have brought to the annihilation of the entire “genus” of a “national, ethnic racial or religious group”¹⁸. Be they were acts of genocide or not, the numerous atrocities recorded against the Yazidi were probably motivated both by the reciprocal hatred between them and the Sunni Arabs, and by the fact that they practice a religion in which something of Islam is also present and refuse to convert themselves.

We know that Yazidi are a population of Kurdish language of the north of Mesopotamia, practicing an ancient religion mixing aspects of Zoroastrianism, of Islam, of Christianity and Hebraism, something which made them the object of a harsh persecution by Al Baghdadi men. The Yazidi are since ever very enclosed among themselves, to the point of practicing endogamy, and not to accept neither inter-religious marriages (not even with Kurds of Muslim religion) nor conversions; those who violate these rules are submitted to rigorous punishments, including also death. Due to their total closure and to the “strange beliefs and uses” characterizing them, they are particularly hated by the neighboring populations, so that they are

There is no truth to this tendentious rumour, and the Sunni Kurds are our brothers in God. What is for them is for us, and what is upon them is upon us. And we will not allow any one of them to be harmed so long as they remain on the principle of Islam and do not dress themselves in one of its nullifiers.

And God is witness upon what we say.

27 Ramadan 1435 corresponding to 25 July 2014.

And God is the guarantor of success and the One who guides to the straight path.

Islamic State

Wilayat Ninawa Media Office”.

¹⁸ Under a juridical standpoint, therefore, it was not only a persecution, albeit a genocide, in accordance with what is contemplated by the United Nations Convention for the repression of the genocide crime, signed in New York in 1948 and by the Statute of Rome of the International Criminal Court which in 1998 has included this crime in its Art. 6. Art. 6 of the Statute of Rome states: “*Article 6 – Genocide. For the purpose of this Statute, “genocide” means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:*

(a) Killing members of the group;

(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”.



defined since centuries as “adorers of the devil” and being called that way also nowadays by many among the citizens of Mosul with whom I spoke. The Yazidi worship Melek Taus, the “Peacock Angel”, who reneged and betrayed the Creator, but then would have repented and redeemed himself; from that stems in any case the expression of “adorers of the devil”, which seems having been coined centuries ago by the first Christian missionaries who entered in contact with their communities.

Without considering their beliefs nor their “closure” toward other ethnicities as an excuse for Al Baghdadi men, it should be remembered that thousands of Yazidi civilians have been the object of an attempt of genocide, perpetrated through the killing of men and the kidnapping of women and children, as well as the sexual exploitation of these women. However, even if the Yazidi women suffered atrocious crimes, not all written by Western newspapers is true, and due to Yazidi mentality women had to say they became sexual slaves even when it did not happen: it should be said that they, in their total closure to the outer world, traditionally cannot have any physical contact with a Muslim, so even those Yazidi women who were treated well by the Yazidi men who bought them and lived with them like wives couldn't tell. We have to remember that, after the fall of the Caliphate, the majority of Yazidi women liberated has abandoned their children in the orphanages, as they could not bring with them kids born from intercourses with Sunni men, as they would never be accepted in their villages, thus “preferring to have them in foreign orphanages than dead”.

Speaking about the Christians of Mosul we cannot report what happened during the period of the Caliphate without making a step back, to the year 2003: it should in fact be recalled that, starting with that date, almost two thirds of the Iraqi Christians living in the country fled to the Kurdish cities, if not even in the West, due to the surfacing of the Islamic extremism and of the profound hatred which, since the “US invasion”, terminated the pacific coexistence between different ethnicities and religions which had characterized the area since centuries. The available data mention one and a half million Christians in Iraq until 2003, and only 500.000 ten years later; for the city of Mosul, the number of Christians changed from 60.000 to 35.000 residents¹⁹.

Going back to the year 2014, I was told by many people (also Christians) that initially IS men did not bother at all neither the Christian authorities nor the Christian faithful, with whom, though, simply did not make business, so that many deluded themselves

¹⁹ In this sense, see: BBC, *Iraqi Christians flee after Isis issue Mosul ultimatum*, 18 July 2018, in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28381455> .

that it could have been possible resist to possible requests and nothing would have changed in the ever-cosmopolitan and tolerant Mosul. Soon, though, after less than two months, IS invited the Christian religious authorities of Mosul to invite their followers to pay the *Jizya*, the tax imposed by the Islamic Law upon all non-Sunni monotheist faithful descending from Abraham. As we saw, according to the *Shariah*, people belonging to the “People of the Book”, by paying the *Jizya* have the possibility to become *dhimmi*, thus benefitting of “protection” and “exemption from the *Zakat*”, and naturally enjoying the exemption from the duty of doing the military service. The Christian authorities refuse to negotiate with IS, which then, shortly after mid-July imposed to the Christian citizens of Mosul to choose between the payment of the “Infidels Tax” and the conversion or ... death²⁰. It seems that the deadline had been fixed shortly before July 20, 2014 (on the 18th, according to some witnesses, on the 19th, according to others). Many Christians were converted, and returned to Christianity after the liberation. Many others²¹, the majority, escaped instead, as they feared that IS would not respect any agreement²², and their possessions were identified, requisitioned and re-assigned to IS men. It should be considered that since July 20 the houses of Christians started being gradually marked, in order to distinguish them immediately, and then the re-assignment of abandoned houses

²⁰ To confirm what I was told by several citizens of Mosul, both Christian and Sunni, this is the detailed reconstruction of events made by Brusacco in his book: “*The Christians are not “damned pagans”, do not feel fascination for primogenital cults and astral energies. In the name of the common Abrahamitic faith, on July 16, 2014 the jihadists fix a meeting to “define the position”. Nobody shows on, thus a new communiqué formalizes three options: to convert oneself to Islam, to pay the Jizia (the Koranic tribute of “capitulation” which determines the acknowledgement of the Islamic authority) or to leave Mosul and the villages on the Caliphate of Nineveh by July 19, “or the sword as punishment”. This does not avoid to nuns, children and some priests of the orphanage in the Chaldees church of Maskanta to be kidnapped (only the children and the nuns will be freed) and to the Chaldean archdiocese of the city, with the priest and the archbishop Emil Shimoun Nona, who fell in the hands of the militia men. It is the beginning of the exodus [which] will lead [...] to abandon the houses, to escape by night, in a rush, in a column [...] toward] Erbil.*” (BRUSACCO P., *Dentro la devastazione. L’ISIS contro l’arte di Siria e Iraq*, 2018, 48).

²¹ Almost 120.000 were the Christian refugees who escaped from Mosul and from the province of Nineveh, according to the Catholic Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldees. Among the numerous articles in which the Cardinal mentioned this number, see, from instance, SALAHEDDIN SINAN, *AP Interview: Iraq patriarch looks to life after war with IS*, in *The Associated Press News*, December 19, 2017, in <https://www.apnews.com/1200145c66e94222be6b07d67c7f3a00>.

²² “*It is difficult to say that ISIS has been defeated in Mosul: the society which created it is still existing*” according to Amel Nona, former bishop of the city, expelled by the jihadists, who has difficulty to see a pink future for Christians. See: VV.AA., «*Difficile dire che l’Isis è stato sconfitto a Mosul: la società che lo ha creato esiste ancora*» - *L’intervista di “Aid to the Church in Need” ad Amel Nona, ex vescovo della città cacciato dai jihadisti, che fatica a intravedere un futuro roseo per i cristiani*, 2 August 2017, in <https://www.tempi.it/difficile-dire-che-isis-e-stato-sconfitto-a-mosul-la-societa-che-lo-ha-creato-esiste-ancora/>



started in a very short time²³. Those who stayed faithful to the Christian religion and payed the tax had many among the rights granted to the citizens of Mosul, however, according to some testimonies, they had to pay, though, a sort of “rent” to live in their own houses, which had been, in the meantime, marked by IS with clear letters identifying. The letter identifying their houses was the “N” (ن in Arabic) for Nazarene (الناصري), a term used in Arabic to identify Christians²⁴.

A worse fate, as compared to what happened to the Christians, was reserved in any case to the Shiites, who were declared almost from the very start heretics, if not even atheists, while the city of Mosul became a “Sunni town”, not a Muslim one²⁵. As we repeated many times, John Cantlie himself, in the IS video broadcasted in January 2015, while showing a reborn city, explained that “*thousands of people, thousands of Iraqis going about their daily business here in Mosul, after years of oppression under Saddam’s rule and the descent into chaos [which] followed the America invasion Sunni Muslims can now walk on the streets of Mosul without fear and sheer pressure*”²⁶: it is a “normal city”, Cantlie said, but *de facto* from his words it is possible to understand that such “normality” was aimed only to the Sunni Muslims.

The Shiites, in fact, were not offered even the possibility to stay and live in peace after having paid the *Jizya*, both because in theory it is historically the tax of faithful of monotheist revealed religions not belonging to the *Ummah*, and because, knowing the hatred existing between Sunnis and Shiites (and all what had fueled it in the Region), almost all Shiites fled in early June 2014, at the arrival of IS men. The problem of Shiites simply was not considered, in the eyes of the Sunni inhabitants of Mosul, who only after the fall of IS learned that the few Shiites who did not leave the city in time were executed, also because considered to be collaborationists of the corrupt Shiite government which preceded IS. So, their estates were marked with the letter “R” (ر in Arabic) for *Rafidi* (الرافضة), which means “those who renege” and is the expression used to identify the Shiites, and starting from July 2014 they were confiscated by IS and reassigned to Sunni citizens, in a way similar to those which belonged to the faithful of other monotheist religions who refused to pay the *Jizya*²⁷.

²³ In this sense, see LEFLER JENNA, *Life Under ISIS in Mosul*, in *Institute for the Study of War*, July 28, 2014, in <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/07/life-under-isis-in-mosul.html>.

²⁴ By this expression, the Jews called the first Christians, who were Jews followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

²⁵ The blogger MOSUL EYE wrote in his log on July 2, 2014: “*They have declared that Shiaa are atheists and the city is a “Sunni city” only*” (<https://mosul-eye.org/2014/07/02/mosul-eye-reponse-to-mr-foss-a-norwegian-journalist/>).

²⁶ These are the exact words of, pronounced at the minute 2.18 of the video, as we have already seen.

²⁷ On July 3, 2014 MOSUL EYE wrote “*ISIS declares the properties of Christians and Shias as their own. ISIS issues a decision which considers all the properties of Christians and Shia as their own and are subject*”



All Shiites were *de facto* forced to leave the city, as the letter “R” which identified their houses equaled *de facto* a death sentence and compelled to escape. At the beginning of July, therefore, the last Shiites left the city, and also in this case the most precise testimonies about it come once again from the blogger MOSUL EYE, who wrote in his diary on July 2, 2014 that the city had been declared Sunni by IS, which branded the Shiites as atheists, and then he told that the last Shiite faithful left Mosul on July 6²⁸. One thing Mohamed and his friends asked me to tell clearly is that the already mentioned profound divisions between Sunnis and Shiites started after the so-called “US invasion” of 2003 and the ascent to power of the Shiite governments which followed, while for centuries the city had witnessed the pacific coexistence among all Muslims, as with the faithful of other religions and those who belonged to other ethnicities.

As far as Jews is concerned, the first to be said is that there were really very few Jews in Mosul, if any, as among the tens of thousands who had inhabited the town for centuries almost all decided to move to Israel during the years 1950s and the very few remaining were persecuted during the period of Saddam Hussein, due to the wars against Israel and to the Palestinian issue. Mosul in fact, after having been for centuries the shelter for a great number of Jews since the times of the Crusades (whereby they looked for “protection” in accordance with what was prescribed for the *dhimmi* by the Islamic Law²⁹), saw the gradual departure of part of the local Jewish community since the beginning of the XX century, due to the decreased economic vitality of the city and to the Zionist appeal toward Palestine. After the birth of the State of Israel, finally, we can say that between the years 1950 and 1955,

to the commands of ISIS’ prince (the properties contain all the lands, houses, commercial and civil buildings in addition to religious buildings in Mosul)” (<https://mosul-eye.org/2014/07/03/isis-declares-the-properties-of-christians-and-shiaas-as-their-own/>).

²⁸ As MOSUL EYE wrote on July 2: “[...] a firm stand towards Shiaa, expulsion, killing in specific areas and displacement. They have declared that Shia are atheists and the city is a “Sunni city” only.” (<https://mosul-eye.org/2014/07/02/mosul-eye-reponse-to-mr-foss-a-norwegian-journalist/>).

Then, he reported on July 6 in his log: “*The last Shia man left Mosul this morning after he was smuggled secretly via the western border of Mosul towards Sinjar which is under Peshmerga’s [Kurdish force] control. He was hiding for two weeks in his house without food. I confirmed that he arrived safely.*” (<https://mosul-eye.org/2014/07/06/updates-from-mosul/>).

²⁹ As we saw, the *Sharia* prescribes since ever that the non-Muslims monotheists believers of religions based on the Torah and descend from Abraham, i.e. Christians and Jews, the so-called “People of the Book”, can become “*dhimmi*” thus enjoying protection and the benefit of numerous rights, among them the possibility to freely practice their own cult, in exchange of the payment of the personal tax of the *Jizya*, besides being loyal toward the Islamic state and the *Ummah*, the Community of the Islamic faithful. This norm allowed for centuries the Jews to take refuge in Islamic countries looking for protection, and Iraq, until the first part of last century, did not back out from granting such protection.



being persecuted by the government of Baghdad, all Jews left Mosul³⁰, similarly to what happened in the rest of Iraq, where it can be said that no Jewish communities exist anymore³¹.

Having said that, if in Mosul there had been Jews and they had decided to remain, their fate under a juridical standpoint would have been identical to the Christians, forced to pay the *Jizya* in exchange of protection and of the enjoyment of the rights granted to the citizens of Mosul. There was, therefore, no particular form of persecution neither toward the Jews nor toward their old district. Some among the ancient Hebrew buildings were incredibly saved.

5. The destruction of Mausoleums, of the ruins of Nineveh and of the artifacts present in the museums. The erasure of any form of image in daily life

One among the most dramatic aspects is, according to my opinion, connected to the destruction of the ruins of Nineveh and of the numerous mausoleums present in town, as well as the destruction (or sale) of the finds displayed in its museums, even if I should say that, while speaking to Mohamed and his friends, I felt almost uneasy in displaying these feelings. While I was underlining my bewilderment to them for the loss of a millennial patrimony, numerous inhabitants of Mosul have in fact asserted that it is not the disappearance of things, rather the sorrow of destroyed families, lives broken and mutilated bodies which should upset. I did not know what to say to them, probably they are right, but I cannot avoid being upset in front of deliberate destructions of the remains of ancient civilizations, which had resisted millennia and which bulldozers and explosive charges have destroyed in few hours. In accordance

³⁰ For more details on the history of the Jewish community of Mosul, see: VV.AA., *Virtual Jewish World: Mosul, Iraq*, in *The Virtual Jewish World*, in <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/mosul-iraq-virtual-jewish-history-tour> ; NEURINK JUDIT, *AFTER ISIS, MOSUL FINALLY VALUES ITS JEWISH HERITAGE*, in *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 March 2019, <https://m.jpost.com/Middle-East/After-ISIS-Mosul-finally-values-its-Jewish-heritage-581953/amp> .

³¹ “*The Jewish community of Iraq was one of the most ancient and storied of the Jewish diaspora. Jews came to the area after the destruction of the First Temple (586 B.C.E.) - and maybe even 10 years earlier with the exile of Jehoiachin. They integrated into their land of captivity and took part in its economic and cultural development.*

At its highest point, the Jewish population of Baghdad, Iraq’s capital town, amounted to nearly one-third of the total population. The rise of Islamic regimes and increased anti-Semitism drove away most Jews from Iraq. Today, the Jewish community in Iraq is non-existent.” (VV.AA., *Iraq Virtual Jewish History Tour*, in *The Virtual Jewish World*, in <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/iraq-virtual-jewish-history-tour>).



with the official data provided by the Iraqi authorities, in the province of Nineveh almost the 70% of antiques might have been destroyed³².

Before analyzing in details what done by IS³³, we cannot avoid considering that the precursors of any iconoclastic movement were the Christians during the Byzantine Empire Era, when, starting from the VIII century a sharp controversy arose, originated by the veneration of icons, which for some could result in idolatry. However, many centuries have passed since that time, and now that today the tutelage of cultural goods has become an absolute value at international level, it seems unconceivable that something might be destroyed only because Our Lord had said to adore him and not the idols. It is written in the Book of Exodus: *“Then God delivered all these commandments: “I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers’ wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation; but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation, on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments.”*³⁴.

The Islamic State’s Caliphate has been even worse of the Taliban³⁵, that destroyed the Giant Buddha of Bayan, as IS did not let himself being guided by the darkest among the iconoclastic follies, but also by economic profit: IS has often destroyed only what was too big to be sold on the black market, and we will never know whether it was a planned operation or an activity of leaders interested in their own profit.

Interesting stress that in 2015, in a long article in the English magazine *Dabiq*³⁶, IS described some destructions, by providing at least two justifications: on one side, the

³² See, on this subject, BEAUMONT PETER, *UK archaeologists help Iraqis restore their Isis-ravaged heritage*, in *The Guardian*, 1 April 2018, in https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/01/uk-archaeologists-help-iraqis-restore-their-isis-ravaged-heritage?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other&_twitter_impression=true.

³³ See BRUSACCO P., *Dentro la devastazione. L’ISIS contro l’arte di Siria e Iraq*, op.cit..

³⁴ Exodus 20, 1-6.

³⁵ The blind folly of IS men reminds us of the Taliban, who in March 2001 destroyed in Afghanistan the giant Buddha carved in the rocks in Banyan.

³⁶ See the article *“ERASING THE LEGACY OF A RUINED NATION”*, published at pages 22-24 of issue nr. 8 of the magazine in English *Dabiq*.

In the article it can be read *“Last month, the soldiers of the Khilāfah, with sledgehammers in hand, revived the Sunnah of their father Ibrāhīm (‘alayhis-salām) when they laid waste to the shirkī legacy of a nation that had long passed from the face of the Earth. They entered the ruins of the ancient Assyrians in Wilāyat Nīnawā and demolished their statues, sculptures, and engravings of idols and kings. This caused an outcry from the enemies of the Islamic State, who were furious at losing a “treasured heritage.” The mujāhidīn,*

glorification of pure monotheism, which has led to the necessary destruction of the polytheist of nations (as the Assyrians) since time disappeared from earth, to return to the monotheism of father Abraham, on the other, the justification that the destruction of the artifacts of the Museum aimed at upsetting the non-believers (*kuffār*), who “*had unearthed these statues and ruins in recent generations and attempted to portray them as part of a cultural heritage and identity that the Muslims of Iraq should embrace and be proud of*”. The references to archaeologists, diplomats and political leaders of Iraq and the West (mostly British) of last century (starting from Gertrude Bell), who, as IS asserted, had unearthed artifacts and ruins of pre-Islamic civilizations by attributing a political significance to them, with the aim to create the basis of an Iraqi nationalism, starting from the common Mesopotamic origins of ethnicities who belong in reality to different cultures and religious confessions.

Among the first destructions, we must remember the destruction of the “Mosque of the prophet Jonah”, a sacred place for all monotheist religions. It was flattened at end July 2014³⁷, as shown by the videos which IS men shot and posted on the net, almost

however, were not the least bit concerned about the feelings and sentiments of the kuffār, just as Ibrāhīm was not concerned about the feelings and sentiments of his people when he destroyed their idols. [...] The kuffār had unearthed these statues and ruins in recent generations and attempted to portray them as part of a cultural heritage and identity that the Muslims of Iraq should embrace and be proud of. Yet this opposes the guidance of Allah and His Messenger and only serves a nationalist agenda that severely dilutes the walā’ that is required of the Muslims towards their Lord. It was not the people of the kāfir nations that the Prophet (sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) was instructed to revere and identify himself with. Rather, he was instructed to identify with and emulate the example of his father Ibrāhīm (‘alayhissalām) and those with him. [...] Thus, we are meant to take a lesson from those disbelieving nations that came before us and avoid what led to their destruction, as opposed to unearthing and preserving their statues and putting them on display for people to admire.”

³⁷ The archaeologist Brusacco writes: “*The khalashnikovs were aimed against the humble devout who that morning of July 24, 2014 sat intent in praying, raised themselves, prostrated themselves, sat again, in the rhythmic liturgy which scanned the gestures of the pilgrims visiting the Mosque of Jonah in Mosul. The Islamists of the Caliphate ordered to abandon the shrine, in order to be able to place all around the deadly barrel bombs connected to a trigger. Then, the deaf thud of the blast, rigorously shot and posted on social media. This time the video of few minutes starts immediately with the deflagration, an act by now of praxis, to linger for more time on what existed afterwards, on the incredulous, defeated spectators. It was this way that it happened. So they have reduced to rubbles, within one second, centuries of history encapsulated in the Islamic jewel of the city. Then only rubble, mountain high, with people, especially kids and youngsters who clambered disoriented among the ruins [...]. Yet, Muslims and Christians had loved – almost venerated – Jonah, the prophet, and that mythical shrine which stood out on the hill of al-Tawba (“the Repentance”), as it was called by the Arabs, a high ground rich of archaeologic vestiges precisely on the western side of the ancient walls of the biblical Nineveh. A place of sharing which joined the monotheistic faiths, the “People of the Book”, as defined in the Koran. Here came in pilgrimage from anywhere, to celebrate, on the day of repentance, the conversion of the people of Nineveh by Jonah, told by the Bible and by the Koran. Jonah, who, contravening the divine command, instead of directing himself to Nineveh, escapes on the sea and is swallowed by a whale; Jonah who resurrects from its belly three days later – the “sign of Jonah” in the death and resurrection mentioned by Jesus in the Gospel of Lucas (11,30) – who at the end goes to “Nineveh, a very large city, three walking days wide”, as mentioned by the account of the Old Testament*



to show their “efficiency” in destroying any “forbidden” artistic/religious expression. Any “artistic” symbol or image connected to religion had to be destroyed, and it had to be done in an exemplary way, especially if it combined Muslim pilgrims with other who were not so, as the faithful of all monotheist religions (the “People of the Book”) went to pilgrimages where the tradition said that the Prophet Jonah were buried³⁸. It was a place, the “Hill of the prophet Jonah” (*Nebi Yunus*), which had witnessed on more than two millennia and a half succeed one after the other: first a majestic Assyrian mansion with huge winged hydrocephalus bulls, well visible under the shrine of Jonah, until their destruction by Al Baghdadi men, then a number of Christian churches, and finally the Mosque appearing on the high ground. A marvelous stratification of millennia of history, art and different religions has been swept away with only one stroke by the blind iconoclastic action of IS: on July 24, 2014 destruction hit a historic-artistic patrimony which for millennia had been preserved and admired, by one civilization after another, by a population after another, always by adding something, and never by eliminating anything. During almost three millennia it had been constructed, one layer over the other, without destroying what, even if represented a pre-existent culture and religion, remained accessible, from the ancient mansions to the Christian churches built between the VII and the IX century, to the Mosque dedicated to the prophet Jonah by the inhabitants of Nineveh, whom he saved by obtaining the pardon of God: “merciful Allah”, as the Mosque built over the Christian churches, and for centuries widened and modernized, reminded us³⁹.

(Gn3,3). *The prophet of people, who accepted the challenge launched by God to accept the otherness and to show tolerance and love toward the repented pagans, could not avoid hitting the pilgrims.*” (BRUSACCO P., *Dentro la devastazione. L’ISIS contro l’arte di Siria e Iraq*, op.cit., 74-75).

³⁸ The archaeologist Brusacco comments, to this point: “*In fact, thousands came to pray on his tomb, certainly not to verify how legend surpassed reality, rather to mull on the profound sense of the tale, on piety, cohabitation among different faiths, repentance, pardon and divine mercy. Even the militia men of the Islamic State should be entitled to acknowledge the prophet, as the account appears in the Shura 10 of the Koran, entitled precisely to Yunus (Jonah), where the mission of the biblical prophet is related to the one of Muhammad. Instead, they blew it up. And it does not matter if the tomb could even not be there, instead at its place there was a simple cenotaph, with a wooden sarcophagus which the devotion and popular mercy had covered with a green draping embroider with Koranic verses; less than ever it interested if, with all probability, the persons were only fruit of the colorful creative flair of theologians and biblical authors. The “symbols of polytheism” the “image which associates”, had to be annihilated in any case.*” (BRUSACCO P., *Dentro la devastazione. L’ISIS contro l’arte di Siria e Iraq*, op.cit., 76).

³⁹ In this sense, the archaeologists highlight also that the works made during the Ottoman age, as those performed through fixed term contracts under the British mandate (for the new minaret) and under the regime of Saddam Hussein (with the construction of the access staircase). See the description in: BRUSACCO P., *Dentro la devastazione. L’ISIS contro l’arte di Siria e Iraq*, op.cit., 79ff.



Then, the destruction of the ruins of Nineveh happened between 2015 and 2016: to be destroyed were the ancient gates of the biblical city and its cyclops walls, which, after some destructions operated in January 2015, were flattened in early June 2016 through bulldozers, as it can be seen in the video broadcasted online by the media organs of IS on the following June 6.

Shifting from the millennial artifacts, patrimony of humanity, which we hope will be in part restored also thanks to the action of UNESCO, to the daily life of the inhabitants of Mosul, I was told that IS men, almost possessed by a blind folly, destroyed in a systematic way, or in any case eliminated any form of art pre-existing to Islam and any portrayal of humans and animals. It was a capillary work, which took place in any corner of the city, almost house by house: it was therefore possible to have at home or to see exposed in a public place only “a statue or a painting with flowers, jewels or geometric drawings”, while all the rest was destroyed or covered. The statues were in fact, torn down, the paintings cut and burned, the wall paintings or mosaics covered with black painting, objects on bronze or gold, as cups, pitchers or candle holders were melt; even the famous tissues of muslin (taking their name precisely from the city of Mosul) were destroyed due to their figurative embroideries.

5. The executions

Let us go, at last, to one among the best known and most brutal aspects of the regime established by IS, the executions, to be considered both as capital sentences and as the performance of corporal punishments.

If on one side, to be fair, I must specify that normally there were no summary executions, albeit of executions carried out in pursuance of sentences at the end of more or less regular trials (always compared to the local situation and to the state of war), the cruelty of the images which have reached us is appalling and unmotivated. I speak about images as the executions were shot, sometimes in a most sophisticated way and from different angles, with more TV cameras, to have shootings that skilled directors organized and assembled so to distribute videos which, were they not true, could be mistaken for very high-quality “horror films”. These videos not only were displayed in IS towns, Mosul included, in the propaganda kiosks, but also broadcasted on internet to show them outside the Caliphate. These videos were, in fact, used both as instruments of what we called psychological warfare against the West, and to strongly lure all those youngsters, often slightly more than adolescents,



who full of hatred and fascinated by violence were indoctrinated also this way, to have them deciding to attack in the West or to fight in the lands of the Caliphate, with the latter appearing instead idyllic, to entice a totally different audience.

It seems strange the coexistence in the *jihadist* propaganda, as in daily life in the lands of the Caliphate, of two realities so different: it was almost a bifacial Janus, who on one side wanted to build, for the Sunni, an utopian state where everything worked well and in which any type of service were available for free also to the weakest layers of the population, on the other applied a distorted interpretation of the *Shariah* and, with apparent sadism, disseminated at home and outside images of the punishments inflicted to each one who violated the Law.

Starting with the punishments other than capital executions, it should be said that they upset us in depth, as in the West we are not accustomed any more to corporal punishments since at least one century, but it has to be recalled that they were included in our judicial systems for millennia, and only between mid XIX and mid XX century they were gradually eliminated from our penal codes. They remain, though, also today in numerous countries, especially in Asia and Africa and are quite common in the Middle East area⁴⁰.

Among the corporal punishments envisaged and applied by IS men, having already spoken about floggings inflicted in case of sexual intercourses outside marriage, it is worth for me to start a short in depth-analysis on the cutting of hands, to which thieves were sentenced, should the amount of the robbery was over a sum set forth. First of all, there were not executions of the punishment for individual convicts, albeit only when a small number of them were reached (at least three or four), something which was not frequent, as, probably, also due to the punishment envisaged, the number of robberies was incredibly low. The improvised platform for the “cut” consisted in a table in the middle of one among the squares or of main avenues, around which there were always several “personages”, among them two “hangmen” dressed in black with very big butchers’ knives, one assistant whose duty was to hold firm the arm of the convict, by pulling a lace placed around the wrist of the hand to be cut (the right one), some doctors and some escorts/companions of the convict, among them apparently someone charged with providing him with spiritual support.

⁴⁰ Corporal punishments have been gradually eliminated from almost all Western systems during the XIX century, and eventually in Great Britain in mid-XX century, albeit remaining also nowadays in several Commonwealth countries. They are corporal punishments, as for instance flogging, which in some cases are close to torture, and which are in force even today in several countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, almost all having an Islamic majority.

In the videos, it can be seen that the convicts approached the table always in a dignified attitude, even if evidently frightened, with a sort of hemostatic lace at the forearm and a black cloth covering their face, and just after the cut and the medications they often shouted *Allah Akbar*, in a sort of status of trance or excitement, among the joyful screaming of the attendees. Then followed the disinfection of the blades (in reality, one, transversally positioned over the wrist, did cut, while the other was used to give the first the stroke, so to cause a sharp cut). Immediately after the cut, the injured man was hospitalized for some days, where he received all necessary cares for free.

Coming now to the execution of capital punishments, and always speaking only about male convicts (as women were not filmed), the executive modalities were so varied that it is impossible not only to describe them, but also a thorough listings. There were, in fact, specific modalities for death sentences in consequence of some types of crime, while in other cases all was referred to the fantasy of the executioners or of the directors shooting the scenes. This was particularly true, especially in the case of death sentences for espionage inflicted to foreigners, whose scope was above all to scare the West, or intimidate or humiliate individual countries, whose motivation would have been the retaliation against the actions by the respective governments: the well-known beheadings carried out by the so-called *Jihadi John* in 2014, between the end of August and the beginning of November, might have been the response to the initial bombings by the anti-IS coalition⁴¹.

Speaking about brutality, with my mind I cannot avoid going to the images of the Jordan pilot inhumanely burned alive in early 2015, probably near the city of Raqqa, where he had been captured after the crash of his F-16 fighter, on December 24, 2014. The video, which was broadcasted on February 3, but from the state of tumefactions on the pilot's face, a consequence of the crash of his fighter and visible in the video of his capture, should have been shot in the very first days of January, represents the lowest point reached by Al Baghdadi men. They, during the weeks

⁴¹ In this sense, see also the accounts reported by Del Grande in his book on the Islamic State based on the accounts of former combatants in the zone of Raqqa: DEL GRANDE GABRIELE, *Dawala. La storia dello Stato Islamico raccontata dai suoi disertori*, op.cit., 208f.

We remind that in the videos "Jihadi John" addressed directly Obama and Cameron, after a speech by the hostages, and then the beheading took place. The following videos were distributed: beheading of James Foley with a video disseminated on August 9, 2014, Steven Sotloff with the video disseminated on September 2, 2014, Alan Henning with a video of early October 2014, and Peter Kassig with a video disseminated on November 16, 2014 (it was the only video in which it is displayed the head already detached from the body, i.e. the phase of beheading is missing, probably because the hostage might have irreparably compromised this phase by doing or saying something).

preceding the dissemination of the video, launched also a poll on the modalities to be utilized for the execution, which, as already said, had already taken place in the meantime. Without entering in any way in the details of the video, to respect the Jordan pilot and his family, I can only say, for those who did not have the bad luck to witness similar episodes, that it is unimaginable how long a man can live while his body burns literally until melting, while he walks, struggles and grabs the bars of the cage where he is shut into. Due to my work I had to watch time and again the video, tens of times, to analyze it in the meanders details: I am accustomed since many years to watch every type of execution or torture, but the images of the Jordan pilot will accompany me for the rest of my life. But let us go back to Mosul: why speaking about this execution which took place in Raqqa? Because the media channels of the *Islamic State* disseminated a video having the title “*Joy of the Muslims With the Retribution From the Jordanian Pilot – Wilāyat Nīnawā*”⁴², in which some not really joyful citizens of Mosul are seen watching astonished to the projection of the horrific video in front of one among the kiosks for propaganda. The young man, even if he was a military captured while bombing, was killed in a such horrifying and spectacular way that the citizens of Mosul were stunned. The brutal and spectacular execution of the young Jordan pilot was really too much for Mosul citizens, even if the images of executions had become in the city something “almost normal”, which was shown even to kids, and to which often people witnesses in real time.

Normally, the capital punishments happened through a stroke on the head, but for some categories and some crimes specific modalities were envisaged. As we saw, homosexuals and pedophiles were thrown from the top of a building, while for spies beheading was envisaged, both in the case of foreigners and of citizens of the Caliphate deemed being spies paid by other governments.

On the subject of executions through beheading, most often applied by Al Baghdadi men especially against Western prisoners sentenced for espionage and considered most barbaric by the Western public opinion, who has witnessed for years videos where their own fellow citizens were beheaded trough sharpened knives, it has to be said, not to justify IS, albeit for a correctness and completeness of information, that it is still used for the execution of death sentences in some countries, who continue to execute it “by hand”, even if I do not know how much the European revolutionary

⁴² While I will not, of course, give any indication favoring the vision of the video of the killing of the Jordan pilot, the video showing Mosul inhabitants watching it can be found at the following internet address <https://jihadology.net/2015/02/07/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-joy-of-the-muslims-with-the-retribution-from-the-jordanian-pilot-wilayat-ninawa/>.



guillotine makes this act much less bloody. Hoping not to scandalize anyone, I allow myself to underline how, even if the West is upset by the vision of the videos disseminated by IS, death sentences through beheading have been widespread also in Europe, until not many time ago. It is a detail which many seem unwilling to recall, but also after the French Revolution the cut continued to be performed manually almost everywhere⁴³. This, of course, does not rub out the atrocities committed by IS men, but certainly puts them in their context.

5. Conclusions

Analyzed in the April paper of *Mediterranean Insecurity*⁴⁴ the "efficiency" aspect and in this paper the "brutality" aspect it is clear that what happened in the period of the Caliphate is much more complex than what is normally believed.

Moreover, for a lot of reasons, there are many Mosul residents who regret some aspects of the Islamic State period, also because, after its fall, inefficiency and corruption have returned to govern the province of Nineveh and almost nobody help the citizens of Mosul in the reconstruction.

If nobody will act rapidly, by reconstructing in an equitable and just way buildings and social relations, Mosul, the city which saw Jonah, after three days, resurrect from the belly of a whale, vary soon will see resurrecting again also the Islamic State⁴⁵ and its inhabitants might fall again in its arms⁴⁶.

⁴³ Death sentences and the executions are then a reality still sadly in force in tens of Countries and, as it can be deduced by the most recent report issued in April 2019 by *Amnesty International*, while a reduction in the number of capital execution has been recorded, net was in 2018 the increase of death sentences, especially in the Middle East countries (even if overall, the state with the highest number of sentences and of capital executions is still by a high margin China). AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *DEATH SENTENCES AND EXECUTIONS 2018*, April 2019, ACT 50/9870/2019, in <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ACT5098702019ENGLISH.PDF>

⁴⁴ QUADARELLA SANFELICE DI MONTEFORTE LAURA, *Mosul under the so-called Caliphate of the Islamic State: what really happened...between efficiency and brutality PART I: EFFICIENCY*, in *Mediterranean Insecurity*, April 2020.

⁴⁵ In Winter 2019 the first news started circulating about IS flags returning to wave in some points of Mosul: "Even in parts of Mosul itself, reconquered in 2017 by government forces after a long and costly campaign, the ominous black-and-white ISIS flag has flown again in recent months" (AHMAD AZIZ, *Undeclared, ISIS Is Back in Iraq*, 13 February 2019, in *The New York Review of Books*, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/02/13/undefeated-isis-is-back-in-iraq/>).

⁴⁶ "Today, the group has evolved further. It has adapted to the antipathy found among the millions forced to flee their homes or chafing under the yoke of Shia militia rule, certain of the Islamic State's inevitable return. Mosul, for instance, is exactly where ISIS wants it to be, filled with popular resentment that will gradually push locals back into the group's orbit without its active intervention. ISIS has instead put its



resources into a campaign at the village level, in rural areas where security is nonexistent at night—and that has paid off. Through 2018, dozens of village chiefs have been killed across northern Iraq in assassinations, bombings, and kidnappings. At least thirteen have been killed since December, including four in Mosul.” (AHMAD AZIZ, *Undeclared, ISIS Is Back in Iraq*, 13 February 2019, in *The New York Review of Books*, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/02/13/undefeated-isis-is-back-in-iraq/>).

