# Sudan’s national museum suffers severe looting and destruction amid ongoing conflict



Sudan’s cultural heritage has suffered severe damage amid the ongoing conflict that erupted two years ago, with the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum experiencing extensive looting and destruction. The museum, renowned for its priceless artefacts from ancient Nubian civilisations and delicate Christian wall paintings, had long been a key cultural landmark, attracting school groups, tourists, and hosting events such as concerts. However, the recent war has left this symbol of Sudan’s historical identity in ruins.

The conflict, primarily between the Sudanese military and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), saw the latter controlling central Khartoum, including the area where the National Museum is located. During this period, tens of thousands of artefacts were reportedly either destroyed or removed and sold off. Ikhlas Abdel Latif Ahmed, director of museums at Sudan's National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, described the damage, asserting to BBC’s Newsday programme, “They destroyed our identity, and our history.” Upon inspection, museum officials encountered shattered glass, bullet casings, and clear signs of looting throughout the building.

Located near the confluence of the Blue and White Nile rivers and adjacent to the Presidential Palace, the National Museum once conveyed the rich succession of great civilisations that shaped the region. Before the conflict, it was undergoing rehabilitation, and many of its treasures were packed away, a factor that may have inadvertently facilitated their removal. Sudanese officials allege that many valuable items, including a gold collar from the pyramid of King Talakhamani dating back to the 5th Century BC, were stolen, possibly taken abroad to the United Arab Emirates. The UAE has faced accusations of financially supporting the RSF, although these claims have been denied by both parties.

Ms Ahmed also revealed that the museum’s secure strong room, which housed a collection of gold artefacts, was broken into and emptied. “Maybe they kept it for themselves, or maybe they traded it in the market," she stated. The cultural loss is immense, with Ms Ahmed emphasising that the artefacts "are more expensive than you could imagine," reflecting their priceless historical and cultural value rather than monetary worth.

Looting is not confined to the National Museum; other Sudanese museums and ancient sites have also been targeted. In response, UNESCO issued a warning last September, highlighting the threat to Sudan’s culture and urging art dealers to refrain from importing or exporting smuggled artefacts. The current de facto Sudanese government has announced plans to engage Interpol and UNESCO to help recover stolen items, although officials acknowledge this may be a challenging and hazardous endeavour with limited immediate prospects.

Observers and officials regard the RSF's actions as a deliberate effort to undermine Sudan's national identity and historical continuity, accusing the group of targeting not just institutions but the collective memory of the Sudanese people. Amgad Farid, head of the Fikra for Studies and Development think-tank, criticised the looting in strong terms, stating, “The RSF's actions transcend mere criminality... They constitute a deliberate and malicious assault on Sudan's historical identity, targeting the invaluable heritage of Nubian, Coptic, and Islamic civilisations spanning over 7,000 years... This is... a calculated endeavour to erase Sudan's legacy, to sever its people from their past.”

The National Museum’s fate is echoed in the wider human cost of the war. According to the United Nations, nearly 13 million Sudanese have been displaced since hostilities began in 2023, with an estimated 150,000 fatalities. Many individuals have had their homes occupied or destroyed, and personal valuables, including gold, stolen amidst the chaos.

Despite the devastation, Ms Ahmed and others are committed to restoring the museum and other cultural institutions. She expressed hope for the future, saying, “Inshallah [God willing] we will get all our collections back. And we build it more beautiful than before.”

This account from the BBC illustrates not only the toll the conflict has taken on human lives but also the profound cultural losses suffered by Sudan, as irreplaceable treasures that commemorate millennia of history are jeopardised in the turmoil of war.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/kelsey-museum-blog/2025/04/10/extensive-damage-to-the-sudan-national-museum/> - Confirms the widespread looting and damage to the Sudan National Museum, including broken and missing artifacts both on display and in storage, and a heavily damaged building.
3. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/sudan-museum-war-raided-mummy-b2732733.html> - Reports on the destruction and looting of the Sudan National Museum, with authorities blaming the Rapid Support Forces for stealing most of its artifacts. It describes the current state of the museum with empty display cases and debris.
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