

The second report

cultural heritage situations in Sudan

Sudan Heritage Protection Initiative (SHPI)

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News from Sudan Heritage Protection Initiative

A Lecture about the Situation of cultural heritage in Sudan

Dr. Isber Sabrine from SHPI is holding a conference in Camprodon, Spain, on August 12th about the situation of cultural heritage in Sudan and the work of the Sudan Heritage Protection Initiative.



Sudan Heritage Protection Initiative in Irish time

[A new article in The Irish Times](#) discusses our Sudan Heritage Protection Initiative, a Sudanese civil society initiative dedicated to developing a network of contacts and volunteers for safeguarding Sudan's cultural heritage amidst the devastating war.

Sudan Heritage protection initiative met the Sudan delegation at the World Heritage committee in Riyadh in September.



The Sudan Heritage Protection Initiative had the opportunity to meet with the Sudanese delegation at the World Heritage Committee in Riyadh in September. During the 45th World Heritage Committee Session in Riyadh, the initiative was presented, and we were thrilled to discuss future collaboration with the Sudanese delegation at UNESCO.



Sudan heritage protection initiative at the Sudan Solidarity conference

Dr Ismail Hamid from SHPI represented the Sudan Heritage Protection Initiative at the Sudan Solidarity Conference on September 30th in London. For more information, please refer to the following [link](#).



Updates on Damage

With the increase in the pace of fighting and the displacement of a large portion of the population, obtaining and verifying information has become increasingly difficult, particularly in Khartoum State, which serves as a vital centre for museums, archives, universities, publishing houses, public libraries, permanent book fairs, art galleries, and more. In general, violations against cultural property have not ceased. The ongoing conflict now targets civilian buildings and their possessions on a daily basis, resulting in significant damage to some and looting of others. Meanwhile, the fate of many remains unknown.

Museums

There are thirteen archaeological museums in Sudan under the management of the National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums (NCAM). Three are located in the Khartoum State, three in the Darfur region, three in the Northern State, and one each in the North Kordofan, Red Sea, Sennar, and Gezira states. Due to the situation surrounding the museums, the museums are facing numerous threats and risks, and the employees of NCAM are not able to access the museums to examine the situation.

Khartoum State

- Since the outbreak of battling between the army and the Rapid Support on 15 April 2023, the employees of the **National Museum of Sudan** have not been able to enter the building, as the museum has been caught in the crossfire. Police force safeguarding the museum has been forced to withdraw due to the conflict, leaving the building unprotected. On 18 May 2023, satellite images from the [Cultural Heritage Monitoring Laboratory](#) revealed minor damage to the Sudan National Museum. It shows traces of fire at two of the temples displayed in the museum's garden where shells struck the roofs of the iron structures of the shelters over the Buhen Temple and the Akasha Temple. Our sources confirm that these forces are still present in the



museum premise. Snipers have been spotted on the roof of the museum building, according to one of the museum's employees who resides nearby on Tuti Island. The circumstance makes the museum vulnerable to theft and vandalism, as looting gangs have become prevalent in the capital and antiquities-smuggling gangs may emerge.

- **The Khalifa House Museum** The Museum of Photos was inaugurated in 1928 within the historic building of Caliph Abdullah Al-Ta'ayshi (also known as Khalifa Abdullahi ibn Mohammed). The building dates back to 1878. The museum houses artifacts from the Turkish and Mahdi periods, as well as personal belongings of the Mahdi (Mohamed Ahmed) and Caliph Abdullah Al-Ta'ayshi. Unfortunately, the museum is located in an area of armed conflict, and one of its rooms is currently occupied by the Rapid Support Forces.



- **The Republican Palace The museum** has suffered damage from shells and bullets, placing it at risk of complete or partial collapse and the potential loss of significant Sudanese heritage



connected to the periods and events leading to independence and the country's post-independence history. Both the new and old Republican Palace buildings adjacent to the museum have sustained considerable damage from numerous shells and bullets (see pictures). The extensive damage includes exterior walls, roofs, entrances, and windows, as well as partial fire damage to some furnishings. Pictures circulating on social media in recent days reveal the extent of the destruction to the new presidential building.



- [Saraya al-Sharif al-Hindi](#) reportedly ceased operations as a result of the battling in the Buri Al-Lamap neighbourhood of Khartoum (photo). Several shrines located in Saraya al-Sharif al-Hindi are dedicated to notable political and religious figures, such as Sharif Hussein al-Hindi and Sharif Zain al-Abidin al-Hindi, the history of the place extends over a century.



Darfur Region

- Since the beginning of conflicts in mid-April, El Obeid has been the centre of the conflict. The Directorate building, also known as the Bean Bag Building (see photos), is a historic structure from the Turkish era, built in 1883, and it is adjacent to the museum.
- **Sheikan Museum** is situated in a precarious location, in close proximity to key sites such as the state government building, the radio building, and the stadium. The museum is surrounded by military forces, exposing it to a significant risk of destruction due to armed conflicts and making it susceptible to looting and vandalism. Fortunately, there have been no reported incidents of major damage.



- At the **South Darfur Museum in Nyala**, the main building, warehouse, and the storage roof were initially damaged. The museum's close proximity to a military facility has made it vulnerable to crossfire. The museum features artifacts from various historical eras, ranging from the earliest Stone Age to the introduction of Islam in Sudan, along with an ethnographic collection depicting Darfur's way of life and livelihoods.



Additionally, it houses collections and documents related to Darfur's kings, sultans, and national administrations.

- **Al-Geneina Museum** was established in the palace of one of the Masalit sultans, Sultan Bahr al-Din. It is presumed that the museum is facing significant threats of destruction and looting. In the past, the museum has partially destroyed and the collection was damaged during a conflict between the Masalit and the Arab tribe in 2021.



Gezira State

- **Al Gezira Museum** is located in the capital city of the Gezira State, Wad Medani. The museum building is a cylindrical, single-story structure with a wooden roof, built in the 1930s when the Ninth Gezira Project was initiated. There are remarkable artefacts from the early Stone Age, the Meroe and post-Meroetic periods, the modern colonial era, to the Islamic era in Sudan. The collection also includes artefacts from the sites (Arbaji and Shabarga) on the island, and a heritage hall is also located in the premise. The museum location is far from danger, but the building requires repair and protection from looting and vandalism. Currently the museum lacks a guard or police, security surveillance and fire alarm systems.



Blue Nile State

- As part of the Sennar Capital of Islamic Culture Project, the Sinnar Museum was officially opened in 2017 as part of an integrated cultural complex. Unfortunately, due to construction flaws, the museum building has developed numerous sizable cracks that allow rainwater to enter. With a lack of security, protection, insurance, and monitoring, the museum building is not secure, especially in a region experiencing ongoing tribal conflicts. The museum's most significant collection includes artifacts related to the Islamic Kingdom of Sennar and other heritage objects of the Sennar State, including manuscripts and historical literature. Furthermore, it houses artifacts from all historical periods, ranging from the Stone Ages to the introduction of Islam in Sudan. Consequently, it is imperative to relocate these artifacts to a secure location immediately.



Northern State

- **The Merowe Museum** is at a significant risk due to its location. It is in a military zone and close proximity to the Merowe Airport which was the clashes occurred on 15th April 2023.

Archaeological sites

Northern State and River Nile State

- A large number of displaced people (over 877,000 individuals, [IOM September report](#)) from Khartoum have arrived and sought shelters in the Northern and River Nile States. There are displaced individuals who live in informal shelters in and near some archaeological sites and museums (e.g. the site and museum of Jebel Barkal, [el-Kurru](#), and the Royal City and Pyramids of Meroe in Bejaraweyya) while other people visit archaeological sites. The numbers of people in/around these sites are overwhelming the capacity of the security and NCAM personnel, the situation difficult to ensure the safety of people and cultural heritage with available resources.
- An on-site visitor shelter at **Amara West** has been completely destroyed. The two storerooms in the shelter that stored archaeological material from British Museum excavations (2008-



2019) have been entered, with material littered everywhere. Some of this remains in containers with labels, while other items are loose. Information panels, building debris and broken shelves scatters around at the place where the shelter was located.



Archives

The fate of the **National Records Office** (located close to the Sudanese Army Headquarter) is still unknown, although many sources have reported damages to the house. However, the administration of the Archive House has not yet issued any formal information. The same applies to the important archives in the centre of Khartoum and Omdurman; **Audio Archive of the University of Khartoum, Photographic Archive of the Ministry of Culture, Judicial Archive, Kardas Archive (civil service), Sudanese National Radio and Television which contains the largest Film Archive in Africa.**

Some satellite channels broadcast images of a massive fire in the Ministry of Justice building in central Khartoum (see photos) on September 18th, which contained important archives.



No detailed statement was issued by the authorities regarding the status of government and judicial records. Yet, [General Al-Burhan in his speech in the United Nations assembly on 21 September, 2023](#), enumerated the violations by the Rapid Support and it ‘tries to obliterate the history and identity of the Sudanese people by attacking museums, land records, civil records, and judicial records’.

Universities, libraries and research centres

The Ministry of Higher Education issued a (general) statement about the great damage occurred to higher education institutions in Sudan. It stated that the sabotage affected all higher education institutions and scientific research centres in Khartoum State and other states. Completely or partially affected institutions numbering 104 governmental and private higher education and research centres. Serious damages extend to universities’ laboratories, workshops, libraries, halls administrative offices by fire, looting or vandalism.

In Khartoum Sate, all government universities, more than ten private universities, two private universities and twenty government universities and colleges, and six public universities in other states suffered. All means of transportation in these universities were stolen. Pictures of the destruction of Zalingei University were published by some activists (photos).



In August 2023, [Radio Dabanga](#) published an interviewed [Dr. Mahmoud Mohamed Abdel Aziz](#), Director of the Center for Training and Capacity Building at the **University of Nyala** (Picture, © Radio Daanga). He was residing in the university housing on campus and witnessed the theft of the university’s “laboratories, equipment, devices, furniture, and even the doors, floors and ceilings of the halls.” There is nothing inside the buildings, everything has been stolen.” According to Dr. Abdulaziz’s testimony, three of the university’s four educational complexes were destroyed and stolen. In addition, he mentions the destruction of the main laboratory of the five Darfur universities (a joint laboratory established at the University of Nyala).



In a report published by [Al Arabiya](#) on August 21, 2023, a number of students at El Geneina University confirmed that the university had been completely destroyed and looted.

Artists' works, art exhibitions, and private art collections

The fate of a substantial number of private artworks remains unknown. Many artists in Khartoum have reported that they were unable to move their artwork to safe places when forced to leave the city. Consequently, their works were left behind in areas affected by bombing and widespread looting. According to eyewitness testimonies, most of the exhibitions in Khartoum are concentrated in areas of heavy exchange of fire. There is evidence to suggest that exhibitions displaying high artistic and creative values have suffered partial damage, destruction, and looting.

Art exhibitions and Galleries in Khartoum:

- Exhibitions of the College of Fine and Applied Arts - Sudan University of Science and Technology - Al-Muqrin - Exhibitions of the College of Design and Fine Arts - Al-Neelein University
- Downtown Khartoum Exhibition
- Al-Jaloos gallery, Khartoum
- Mojo gallery, Khartoum 2
- Dabanga gallery, Khartoum 2
- Heritage House Exhibition, Khartoum 2
- Papa Costa gallery, Republic Street
- Aziz gallery - Hilton

Rahim Shaddad reported that they had information that the **Downtown Gallery** had been stormed by an armed group and the paintings and other art works had been partially destroyed. The gallery contains about 500 artworks, by artists such as Abdullah Muhammad Al-Tayeb, Essam Abdel Hafeez, Suzan Ibrahim, Muhammad Fadl, Muhammad Abdel Aziz, Al-Tayeb Daw Al-Bayt etc. and the works displayed in recent exhibitions organized by the Downtown Gallery entitled "Women and the State".

Printing houses, publishing houses, and permanent book fairs

Many permanent book fairs belong important publishing houses in Sudan. Along with book distribution centers and printing presses, the book fairs such as **city's cultural center, Khartoum Publishing House, Azza House, Madarik, Al-Musawwarat** are located in the area that have seen intensive fighting in Khartoum. Some of them have been reportedly damaged in varying.

Osama Al-Rih, the owner and manger of Dar Al-Musawwarat (a publishing house, distribution center, and distribution agent for a number of Arab publishing houses) says,: "The war has affected all cultural activity in the country. We do not know the fate of our printing presses, libraries, and warehouses, which are located in an area that has been looted and vandalized". This is the same situation referred to by Muhammad Omar, the owner of Al-Waraqeen Bookstore, "From the first days of the war, I was unable to reach the library that also sell books take my belongings. I was threatened with death by members of Rapid Support Forces. I was not able to return again. Within a



month since the beginning of the war, Taif's houses were evacuated but looted in an organized manner. All I know is that the library that also sells books was looted.

In Khartoum, an important area for used book sellers on streets (Mafroosh) was looted and destroyed, including the Khartoum Group, the Arab Market: Camponi, Al-Qasr Street, Printing Press Street. Similarly, in Omdurman, from the first month of the war, the book sellers in Al-Bosta and the Omdurman Market have been completely destroyed and looted. In the city of Bahri, the book distribution shops in the central station were also destroyed. Equipment and possessions at Azza press, Abdul Karim Maghani Center, and Aydabi Center were looted

All the Tayeb Salih Prize publications were burned as a result of the fire of the warehouse that stores Zain's award publications. There were also reports that the warehouses of the Khartoum University Publishing House were completely burned.

Cultural centres

- The area surrounding the Sudanese Studies Center in Khartoum remained the target of intense exchange of fire. No confirmed news about the center's fate.
- Pictures of [House of Heritage](#) located in Khartoum 2 was damaged by artillery shelling during the conflict, reported by a post on X (former Twitter) on 5 September. Heritage House has an art gallery and among its possessions is a collection of paintings by the artist Hassan Musa.



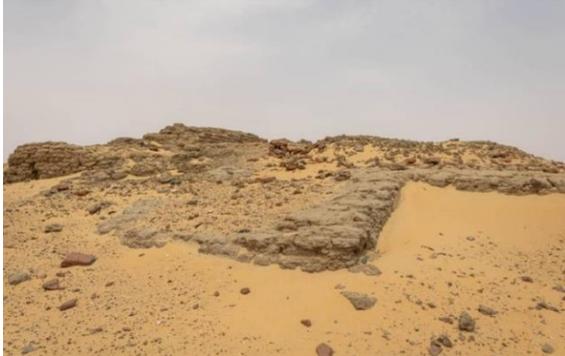
Updates on Looting

Northern State

Saqiet Elabd



The site features a mud and red brick building from the Medieval period, likely a church. Unidentified individuals, possibly gold miners from the local area, dug large holes in the building's roof in multiple directions and at various locations on the site. Additionally, they have damaged significant portions of the building.



Reports and updates from the Sudanese People

- [Community engagement program](#) for displaced children was organised by NCAM in collaboration with an archaeological team of University of Michigan on 2 October 2023 at Jebel Barkal. The current situations of the World Heritage sites of Jebel Barkal and el-Kurru as well as the engagement program were also reported by in the Flash Talk series of Kelsey Museum of Archaeology on 6 October 2023.

Policy Changes and Updates from Sudan

The Director of the National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) called for international assistance for protection of Sudanese cultural heritage and funds to support the employees of NCAM in a statement released on 4 August 2023.

International Activities

- ICCROM in partnership with UNESCO and cooperation with ICOMS and the Egyptian Heritage Rescue Foundation (EHRF) organised [a workshop in Cairo](#) to support NCAM to protect cultural heritage in the current conflict from 3 to 5 June 2023. It identified 77 at risk heritage sites and collections and NCAM established a strategy for safeguarding cultural heritage.



- [Expert meeting on Living Heritage and Emergencies: Planning the Response for Safeguarding Living Heritage in Sudan](#) was organised by UNESCO and British Council from 10 to 13 September 2023 in Cairo to discuss and determine the emergency response plan for intangible heritage in Sudan.
- [Modern Sudan Collective/Docomomo Sudan Chapter](#) has released the [Modern Heritage Map](#) that focuses on modern buildings designed and constructed between 1800 and 1989 CE.
- Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw released [a statement](#) concerning the current conflict in Sudan and called for fund raising for Sudanese colleagues.
- Saving Sudan's Living Heritage Project was initiated by the British Council Cultural Protection Fund in partnership with DCMS, and launched a [website](#).
- American Sudanese Archaeological Research Center (AmSARC) has announced [a new grant program](#) for Sudanese archaeologists, and continues [their donation campaign](#).

News Update

Several news outlets ([Reuters](#), [Qantara](#), [Voices of America](#), [Irish Times](#), [Al hurra](#), [The Globe and Mail](#)) covered the current situation of cultural heritage in Sudan.

This report was compiled together with our collaborators currently in Sudan who are archaeologists, historians, archivists, librarians, polishers, artists, university professors, students and volunteers. For security reasons, we do not mention their names in the report, except those who wished to be mentioned.

