



## AS IT IS

# As War Destroys Yemen's Present, Museums Struggle to Save Its Past

June 12, 2021

A metal **statue** lies in a dark and secure room of the Sanaa National Museum. It was from the kingdom of Saba in what is now the Yemini province of Marib.

The piece was made in the first half of the sixth century BC. It survived the latest war in Yemen. Many other **artifacts** have not.

The Sanaa museum escaped years of bombing by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in their war against the Houthi group.

Ibrahim al-Hadi is the museum's director. He said, "Other areas around the museum were targeted and that led to the destruction of some artifacts and to cracks in the walls of the building itself."

Most of the collection was moved to safe rooms in the museum when the Saudis began bombing Yemen in 2015.

Collections of Arabian swords, rifles and helmets, some covered with gold, are packed in boxes. Two metal lions from the kingdom of Qataban sit in the back. They were **restored** at the Louvre Museum in 2008.

Yemen's museums are the richest in the Arabian Peninsula. But they are a reminder of the cost the war has taken on the country's cultural history.

Nature and war combined to destroy the National Museum in Taiz. Inside lies burned **manuscripts** and broken glass. Trees are growing through the building and have helped pull down the walls.

Ramzi al-Damini is the Taiz museum director. "**Shelling** destroyed the buildings," he said. "The collection was **looted** and fires burned down" rooms.

The Yemeni General Authority for **Antiquities** and Museums is working with the Global Heritage Fund to rebuild parts of the buildings.

The Taiz museum has lost around 70 percent of its collection. Some stolen artifacts have been found in local markets. Volunteers have also brought back other pieces.

Ahmed Jassar is with the Taiz museum. He said some pieces have been taken illegally outside the country.

"It is not easy to get them out of Yemen, only powerful people with international connections can do that," he said.

I'm Dan Novak.

*Aziz El Yaakoubi reported this story for Reuters. Dan Novak adapted it for VOA Learning English. Susan Shand was the editor.*

---

## Words in This Story

**statue** – *n.* a figure usually of a person or animal that is made from stone, metal, etc.

**artifact** – *n.* a simple object (such as a tool or weapon) that was made by people in the past

**restore** — *v.* to return (something) to an earlier or original condition by repairing it, cleaning it, etc.

**manuscript** — *n.* the original copy of a play, book, piece of music, etc., before it has been printed

**loot** – *v.* something that is stolen or taken by force

**antiquities** — *n.* objects from ancient times

**shell** — *v.* to shoot shells at (someone or something) using large guns

---