

# CIVIL WAR IN SYRIA HARMS LOCAL HERITAGE



It is not solely civilians in Syria who fall prey to the bloodshed of the civil war but also the world's most precious sites. There are forty monuments within Syria recognized as UNESCO sites which have been attacked, looted and even destroyed for the past three years of war.

One of the biggest covered markets and a UNESCO world heritage site, Aleppo's ancient Al-Madina market serves as an example. **A minimum of five hundred trade pavilions and shops within the old city of Aleppo were turned to ashes as a result of conflicts which led to war between the rebels and government troops.**

Meanwhile, the unrestrained looting and destruction of historical monuments in Syria has become a difficult and nagging issue which is being discussed both at the national and the international levels. UN Security Council last year adopted a resolution forbidding the sale of smuggled Syrian artifacts. According to Maamoun Abdul Karim, General Director at the department of conserving Syrian cultural heritage, the Syrian government has conjointly been attempting to stop the smuggling and selling of ancient artifacts since the rebels exchange them for arms.

With over 10,000 cultural monuments located far from populated areas, rebels are looting and destroying them due to the freedom and less security associated. This is with a motive of vandalizing the treasured findings, selling them for money or exchanging them for arms. The Syrian army and local police are trying to stop the looting and in the process, some of the rebels have been caught red-handed. According to Abdul Karim however a number of the ancient castles have been destroyed by use of bombs.

According to experts, the Syrian civil war has led to increased sales of illicit antiquities at the international black market. Professional smugglers from Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan are now camping in Syria due to the presence of many ancient artifacts in this country which date back to the middle and golden ages of Ancient Greece and Roman Empire. Due to the availability of these artifacts, Sergei Demidenko an expert at the institute of strategic studies and analysis said there are possibilities that only looters and smugglers will benefit from the ongoing war.

The smuggling of the historic artifacts and treasures is a matter of great concern. This is what happened during Libya and Iraq civil wars. Despite the chances being low, something needs to be done to save what can be saved and to reduce the smuggling, explained Sergei Demidenko.

**Tourism contributed up to 12% of country's GDP before the conflicts.** If the ongoing looting of historic treasures is not brought into control as soon as possible, there are possibilities the Syrian tourism will be drastically hit. The looting will not only negatively affect the Syrian economy, but will leave the world without the precious monuments as well.

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