

# Iran's Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage



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Cultural heritage serves as a testament to humanity's shared history and identity. Unfortunately, the intentional destruction of cultural heritage has plagued societies throughout history. One such regime, the Islamic Republic of Iran, has a long and troubling history of cultural vandalism and deliberate targeting of historical antiquities, some of which date back millennia. This article explores the significance of cultural heritage, examines Iran's destructive actions, compares them to other groups like ISIS and the Taliban, and highlights the severe impacts on communities.

## Iran's Regime and Cultural Vandalism

The Iranian regime has left a trail of destruction across the country, mainly targeting historical sites. One recent example is the Jobji historical site in Ramez, north of Ahwaz, which dates back to the Elamite era (3500 BC – 500 BC). Despite its historical importance, the regime demolished the site, erasing a significant piece of human history. Furthermore, in Ahwaz, the government has systematically destroyed numerous Elamite, Islamic, and contemporary sites, including castles, palaces, ancient homes, places of worship, bridges, markets, and cemeteries. This widespread destruction has resulted in a significant loss of cultural heritage.

## **Comparisons with Other Destructive Groups**

While Iran's regime has engaged in cultural vandalism, it is essential to recognize that it is not an isolated case. The Islamic State (ISIS) has infamously conducted deliberate destruction and theft of cultural heritage in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. Places of worship and ancient historical artifacts have been targeted, leaving irreversible damage to these regions. Similarly, the Taliban's destruction of cultural heritage sites in Afghanistan, such as the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001, showcases their disregard for history and cultural significance.

## **Motivations for Cultural Heritage Destruction**

Throughout history, various motivations have driven the intentional destruction of cultural heritage. Economic factors, often linked to profit, have played a role. However, political causes were most prominent in ancient times, serving to assert dominance and erase rival cultures. In contemporary contexts, ideological differences and conflicts have fueled the destruction. Furthermore, strengthening bonds between groups with common enemies, as seen in Iran's past collaboration with the Taliban despite ideological differences, can perpetuate destructive actions.

## **Impacts of Cultural Heritage Destruction**

The destruction of cultural heritage has far-reaching and severe impacts on communities, particularly minority communities for whom these sites hold special significance. When cultural heritage is lost, communities lose access to their history, traditions, and spiritual practices. It disrupts their rights and abilities to practice their culture, religion, or spirituality, leading to a loss of identity and connection to their roots. The destruction extinguishes sources of history and erases the tangible evidence of a people's existence.

## **Iran's Regime in Comparison to ISIS and the Taliban**

Intentionally targeting historical antiquities is not unique to Iran's regime; it is a tactic shared by ISIS and the Taliban. While their ideological differences may be apparent, they all share a willingness to destroy cultural heritage to further their respective goals. Iran's regime has collaborated with the Taliban, driven by their common enemy, the Islamic State Khorasan (ISK). This relationship suggests a shared disregard for cultural heritage.

The intentional destruction of cultural heritage is a global issue that has persisted throughout history. Iran's regime, like ISIS and the Taliban, has contributed to this destruction by deliberately targeting historical antiquities. The severe impacts of such actions on communities, particularly minority groups, cannot be overstated. Cultural heritage plays a vital role in preserving history and identity; its destruction results in the loss of tangible connections to the past. Efforts to preserve and protect cultural heritage are crucial to safeguarding our shared human legacy for future generations.

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