

# From destruction to Resilience

## The history of the National Museum and Its experience of Management During War

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# What happens to museum when the country is it a war?

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Afghanistan is one of the most important historical and cultural places in Asia.

The National Museum of Afghanistan represents a significant part of this heritage.

However over several decades of war, this institution faced severe CRISIS and challenges.

Despite all of this, the museum did not completely disappear.

The central question of this is how can a museum survive and remain resilient in times of war?



# History of the national museum of Afghanistan 1919-2026

Establishment of the Museum 1919 AC in  
Kote-Baghcha palece

Its initial collection included manuscripts,  
miniatures, weapons and objects belonging to  
the royal family.

The museum collections gradually expended  
with the development of archaeological  
activates and excavation in Afghanistan from  
1922.

In 1931, the collections were moved in present  
museum building 🏛️ in Darul-Aman aria.



# History of the national museum of Afghanistan 1919-2026

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## **Expansion of the collections.**

Over time, the National Museum of Afghanistan gradually developed collections representing different historical periods and cultural traditions, including:

Prehistory: Stone Age, Chalcolithic Age, and Bronze Age

Historical periods: the Achaemenid period, Greco Bactrian period, Kushan period, Buddhist and Gandaharan art, Islamic period, Ethnographic and contemporary art and culture.

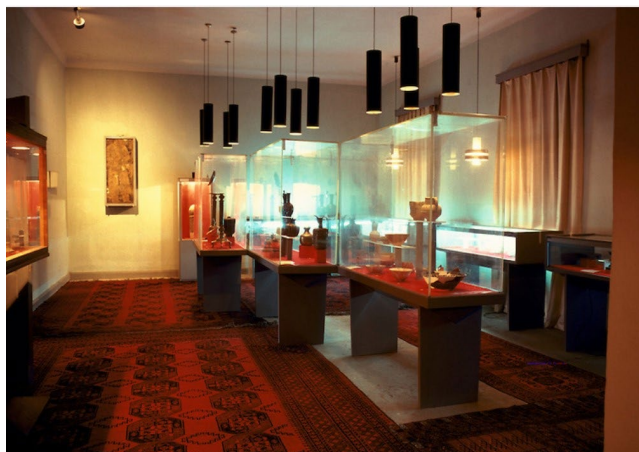
The National Museum of Afghanistan represents several thousand years of the country's history, civilization, and cultural diversity.



# History of the national museum of Afghanistan 1919-2026

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MUSEUM PHOTOS BEFORE CRISIS



MUSEUM PHOTO DURING THE CRISIS



# History of the national museum of Afghanistan 1919-2026

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## War and Destruction Of the Museum

During the years of the war, the national museum suffered extensive of damaged. A significant portion of its collections was looted, destroyed, or lost, while many of its record and documentation were also damaged or disappeared.

The war did not only threaten the physical survival of the museum, it also threatened the historical knowledge and cultural memory preserved by institution.



# National Museum during the War



# The role of Museum staff in saving cultural heritage

The story is not only about the destruction of the museum, but also about how museum staff resisted the crisis and worked to protect the country's cultural heritage.

The secret relocation of important artifacts to safer places.

Emergency protection of collections.

Hiding valuable artifacts to protect them from destruction or looting.

Protecting and preserving damaged or fragmented artifacts.

Continuing museum work despite extremely limited resources and difficult circumstances.

The survival of many important artifacts was not simply a matter of chance, it was also the result of the courage, commitment and dedication of museum staff who took risks to protect Afghanistan cultural heritages.



# The Beginning of the New Phase 2001-2021

After 2001 a new phase began for the National Museum of Afghanistan.

The main priorities during this period included

Assessing damage

Recovering and collecting the surviving artifacts.

Reconstructing the museum building

Conserving and restoring damaged artifacts

Rebuilding the collection registration and documentation system.

Developing international cooperation

Training museum staff.



# Documentation and the reconstruction of collections.

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After the loss or destruction of significant part of the museum's records and documentation, documentation become one of the priorities of the recovery process.

This section has two main parts: physical documentation and digital documentation.

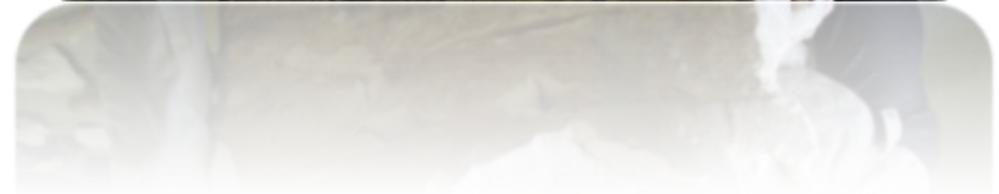
Documentation by physical card

Digital documentation by professional database.

The experience of National Museum of Afghanistan demonstrates that documentation is not simply an administration task, it is an essential part of protecting cultural heritage during and after a crisis.



# Conservation and restoration from broken fragments to reconstructing identity



# Photos after restoration of the National Museum

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# My personal experience at the National Museum of Afghanistan

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I began working at the National Museum of Afghanistan in 2018. at that time museum staff consisted of a combination of young professionals who had joined the museum in recent years and experienced staff members who had continued working at the museum through previous periods of crisis and conflict.

During this period, important work was being carried out on the registration of the collections, as well as the conservation and restoration of damaged and fragmented artifacts.

One of the major challenges was that a significant part of the museum documentation and record had been damaged or lost during the years of conflict. This made the process of registering and documenting the collections extremely difficult, and as the result, the registration of the museum's artifacts continued for many years.



# My personal experience at the National Museum of Afghanistan

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How ever the museum had learned important lessons from its past experience. This time in addition to on maintaining physical records, we began creating digital records for the collections in a database and maintaining several backup copies. We also printed the documentation and stored physical copies in two different locations. This approach helped strengthen the security and preservation of the museum's documentations. Based on this experience, I would recommend to museums operating in situations of war or crisis that they maintain their collections records in both digital and physical formats and keep multiple backup copies in separate locations. This ensure that if one set of records is damaged or lost, other copies can remain safe and available.

After August 2021, museum staff, drawing on the experience they had gained from previous CRISIS, took immediate precautionary measures despite the potential risks. On the first day, all internes and doors of the museum were sealed and secured. After that, two museum staff members were present each day and night to provide security and monitor the building and collections. Fortunately, this time the museum was fully protected and did not suffer any damage. To day the National Museum of Afghanistan is gradually developing its activities and moving forward.



# Lessons of Afghanistan for world museums

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Museums need emergency preparedness plans.

Documentation is as important as the objects themselves.

Museum staff are part of the emergency response system.

Digital documentation can protect knowledge when physical collections are threatened.

International cooperation is essential during and after CRISIS.

Museum can contribute to social resilience even during conflict.



# My suggestion for future

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Emergency preparedness plan

Risk assessment

Digital documentation is more important

Multiple backups of collections records.

Conservation emergency kits.

International professional network.

Cooperation with police / customs for preventing trafficking.



# Conclusion

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The history of the National Museum of Afghanistan is not a history of destructions. It is also a history of survival, resilience, dedication and hope.

When a museum survives a war, it is not only the building that survives with it.



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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