

# Libraries Reborn:

## A Historical Analysis on the Evolution of Library Destruction & Restoration During Times of Conflict

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### Introduction

Over the past century, conflicts across the world have resulted in an unprecedented number of libraries, archives, and museums being purposefully targeted for destruction. Historically, the most common responses to these intentional attacks tended to be the direct preservation or recovery of the original physical materials after they were damaged, destroyed, or taken. However, with the rapid development of digital technologies over the last couple of decades, a multitude of new and innovative solutions have been crafted that are now being utilized to combat and prevent the destruction of cultural heritage materials perhaps more effectively than was previously possible. This research project seeks to closely analyze this historical transition between the traditional methods and the newly emerging technologies to determine: 1) Have digital technologies changed preservation priorities in times of conflict, and if so, how? And 2) What affordances are possible due to digital technologies that were not possible before, and how have they impacted preservation strategies used during conflict?

### Why Destroy Libraries?

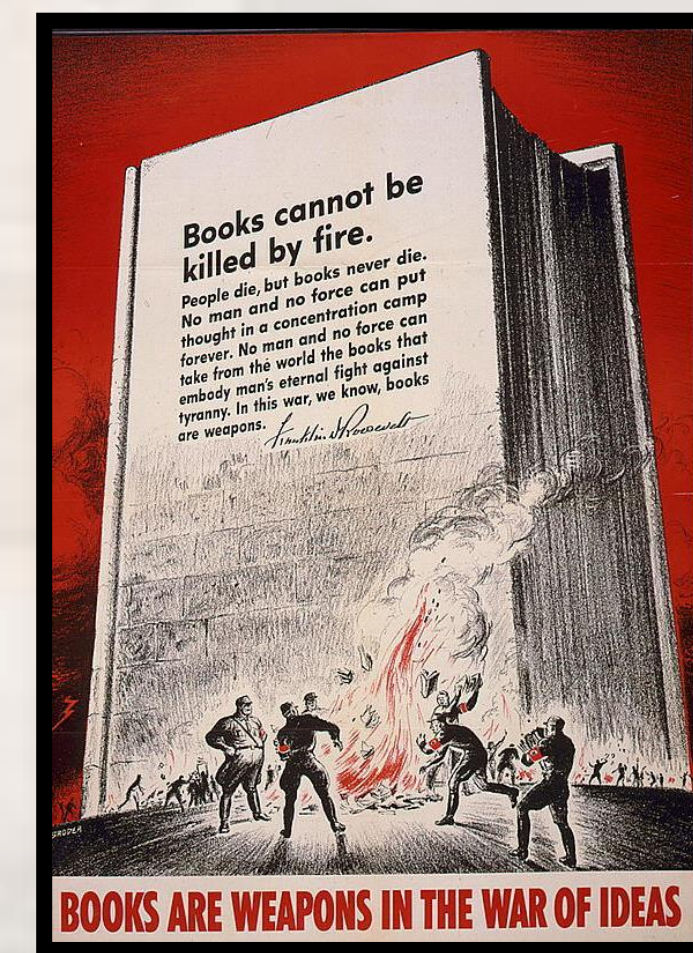


#### **Cultural & Ethnic Cleansing**

To eradicate any existing records or cultural materials of a community based on factors such as race, ethnicity, and/or religious belief.

#### **Political or Ideological Purging**

To keep the populace away from certain ideas, knowledge, or information that the aggressor deems dangerous or harmful.



#### **Crushing Cultural Symbols**

To destroy a symbol of knowledge, culture, and history that communities often highly-regard in order to obliterate morale and threaten identity.



### Five Responses to Library Destruction



Preserve the Physical Materials



Preserve the Content of the Materials



Recover or Rebuild the Lost or Damaged Collection



Pass and Enforce Laws that Punish Cultural Heritage Destruction



Create, Collect, and Preserve Memories of Cultural Heritage Loss

### Preliminary Findings: The Traditional Approach

Historically, responses to library destruction were more reactionary. Priority was placed on saving the physical material or the physical material's content. If this was not possible, finding replacement copies of lost or damaged materials tended to be the next pursued approach.

#### **Example: Bosnian Manuscript Ingathering Project**

Collaboration between Bosnian and American scholars to find as many materials from the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina's original collection as possible.

#### **Example: British Libraries during WWII**

During Hitler's Blitzkrieg on the United Kingdom in WWII, some British libraries microfilmed their more important documents and sent them to Canada and the United States for safekeeping in case damage or destruction of the originals were to occur.

### Preliminary Findings: The Digital Approach

While digital responses to library and cultural heritage loss still include the prevention and preservation of original content, they also embrace, and even prioritize, the collection of new content that memorializes personal experiences and narratives of the conflict.

#### **Example: Project Syria**

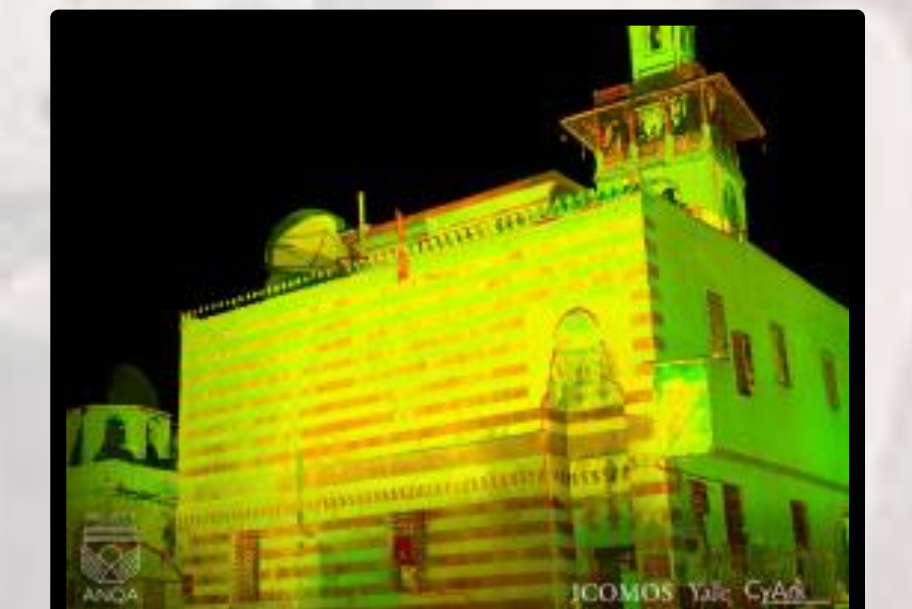
Project Syria is a virtual reality program that places the user in a market in Syria right before a bombing occurs. The project's purpose is to memorialize experiences of those living through conflict and to foster empathy.



Screenshot from Project Syria

#### **Example: Project Anqa**

Project Anqa is a digital project that maps Middle Eastern cultural heritage sites in danger of destruction in 3D, while also providing background information and stories told by locals for cultural context.



Laser scan from Al-Jakmalya Madrasa in Damascus

### Future Research Goals

- 1). Continue to research and find digital humanities projects that focus on cultural heritage destruction and recovery to monitor how the field evolves.
- 2). Analyze how digital humanities projects are changing how we preserve and interpret record keeping materials outside of print, such as quipus of Incan origin, or ancient runes in the Middle East and Europe.

### References

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Figure 1: Project Syria Screenshot [Online Image]. (2016). Retrieved on April 12, 2019 from <https://emblematicgroup.com/experiences/project-syria/>. Copyright 2016 by Emblematic.  
Figure 2: Laser-Scan of Al-Jakmalya Madrasa [Online Image]. (2016). Retrieved on April 12, 2019 from <https://www.cyark.org/about/project-anqa-progresses-in-2016>. Copyright 2018 by CyArk and partners.

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