

# Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Gaza

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## Editor's Note

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## Abstract

Since the start of the 2023–24 war on Gaza, Palestinian cultural heritage has undergone widespread destruction from Israeli targeting of ancient sites, historic and religious buildings, museums, cultural and academic buildings, public buildings, and infrastructure. More than 100 archeological sites, 256 historical buildings, many museums, hospitals, libraries, cemeteries, and over 100,000 archaeological objects, were destroyed. This essay presents a brief summary of cultural heritage policies in Palestine, protections of cultural heritage guaranteed by international humanitarian law and the protective role of UNESCO and other similar organizations. It then gives a preliminary assessment of the war's destruction to cultural sites in Gaza up to early 2024, recommends future action for a comprehensive assessment of the damage, and proposes mechanisms for legal follow-up and a framework for plans and programs for recovery and rebuilding.

## Keywords:

Gaza historical sites; Palestinian cultural heritage; cultural genocide; archaeological sites; destruction of cultural heritage; destruction of urban landmarks; war crimes.

The name “Gaza Strip” is a new politico-geographical term for the much larger ancient area of Gaza. The term was first used after the Nakba of 1948 to describe a narrow Mediterranean coastal strip in southern Palestine (figure 1), forty kilometers long and six to eight

kilometers wide. Today, it is home to 2.3 million Palestinians, 70 percent of whom are refugees and their descendants, driven out of their homes and lands in western and southern Palestine by Israel during the 1948–49 war and its aftermath. Since 1967, the population has lived under the harsh conditions of Israeli occupation, most in overpopulated refugee camps; in 2007, a suffocating siege was imposed that severely limits entry and exit of people and goods.<sup>1</sup> Despite its small size, Gaza is rich in archeological and historic sites. Archeological surveys carried out over the last century indicate the existence of some one hundred and thirty sites (figure 2), in addition to remains of ancient cities and towns within Gaza, located in Gaza City, Khan Yunis, Dayr al-Balah, Rafah, and Bayt Hanun, and in tens of villages and eight refugee camps.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1. Aerial photograph of the Gaza Strip before 7 October 2023.



Figure 2. Map showing the distribution and density of archeological sites in the Gaza Strip.

# The International Law Framework

According to international law, the occupied Palestinian territories – the West Bank including Jerusalem, and Gaza – are occupied land and Israel, as an occupying power, must comply with the laws that stipulate member states’ obligation to protect cultural and natural heritage under their control. The following conventions specifically apply: the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948; the Fourth Geneva Convention and its annexes, 1949; the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural

Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 1954; and the UNESCO Recommendation on International Principles Applicable to Archaeological Excavations, 1956.

Further, article 27, paragraph 4 of the fourth annex of the Hague regulations of 1907 specifies the duty of armed forces in siege situations is to take all measures necessary not to damage places of worship and other buildings that house artistic, scientific, or charitable institutions or historical artefacts. Article 56 of the 1954 Hague Convention forbids any damage done to places of worship, charitable institutions, and historical sites, while article 5 of the Hague Convention obligates all parties which occupy any region or subdistrict thereof to offer support to the party whose land was occupied in order to take all necessary measures to protect cultural property. The protocols attached to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1977, namely articles 53 of the first protocol and 16 of the second protocol, forbid the commission of any destructive acts directed against any historical sites, works of art, or places of worship that embody the spiritual heritage of a people. A number of other international agreements also apply to occupied territories: UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1970; World Heritage Convention, formally the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972; UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, 2001; UNESCO Declaration Concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage, 2003; UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003, and tens of resolutions issued by UNESCO.<sup>3</sup>

The current assault on Gaza constitutes a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, most seriously, the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Nevertheless, international political will has been much quieter concerning the current assault on Gaza in contrast to its vocal activism elsewhere. Previously, UNESCO played an effective role in following up on destruction to cultural heritage in the recent wars in Iraq and Syria. It also raised a case with the International Criminal Court in the aftermath of the attack by armed gangs on shrines in Mali, called “war crimes” by the ICC, and advocated not to leave these attacks unpunished. Subsequently, a multipurpose international delegation was entrusted with protecting cultural and historic sites in Mali, in coordination with UNESCO. Irina Bukova, UNESCO Director General at the time, considered that the consensus achieved regarding Security Council Resolution 2347 (2017) on the protection of cultural property being important to security indicated that “a new cultural landscape” was being built, and “a new global awareness” was emerging “to protect culture for peace and security.”<sup>4</sup> History shall record that UNESCO, which had played a principal role in this major achievement has, under its current leadership, failed in its responsibility to preserve Palestinian cultural heritage in Gaza. The only measure it adopted was to register the site of Tell Umm ‘Amr on UNESCO’s list of sites requiring additional protection, on 14 December 2023, during a special meeting to discuss the Convention of Protecting Cultural Property in cases of armed conflict.

International reactions to what could arguably be considered war crimes committed against Gaza's cultural heritage have been muted; the absence of any effective role by UNESCO has been stark regarding the destruction of that heritage. Other European cultural institutions remained similarly on the sideline, an attitude demonstrated by the lukewarm statements issued by the World Heritage Council, ICOMOS, which came close to supporting the assault.<sup>5</sup>

## The Systematic Destruction of Palestine's Cultural Heritage

The acts of heritage destruction during this current war are a sequel to similar acts committed by Israel over the past seventy-five years, beginning with the obliteration of more than four hundred Palestinian towns and villages and the expulsion or genocidal cleansing of a million Palestinians from their homes and properties.<sup>6</sup> Despite the blatant horror of these well-documented crimes, the Palestinians have been unable to inscribe them into the collective memory of mankind.



Figure 3. A main street in Gaza City in late 2023.

Since the start of the most recent war on Gaza in October 2023, Israeli shelling and air bombardment has brought catastrophic destruction to all areas of life (figure 3) resulting in the deaths, until this writing, of more than thirty-four thousand people and the wounding of more than seventy-six thousand Palestinian civilians, overwhelmingly children, women, and the elderly. Israel further destroyed basic infrastructure and vital institutions, targeted hospitals and health care personnel,

totally demolished entire city quarters, wiped out entire families by bringing homes and residential towers crashing down upon their inhabitants, dislocated the population and forced them to seek refuge in southern Gaza and other regions lacking water, food or shelter – without the bare minimum to sustain life – and bringing about a massive humanitarian catastrophe.

## **Preliminary Estimates of the Damage**

Several local Gaza organizations began to make initial assessments of the damage based on testimonies and reports from the field and information from satellite imagery. Information from an internal memo of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities that recorded the destruction of a large number of archaeological sites and historic buildings is also included below. Heritage for Peace (November 2023) and ICOMOS-Palestine (January 2024) managed to assess damage to twenty-three out of one hundred sites.<sup>7</sup> The security situation did not permit a more thorough and comprehensive assessment of damage done to sites of cultural heritage; information was obtained with great difficulty due to danger from air strikes, tank shelling, and drone and sniper targeting. Nevertheless, available documentation provides evidence of damage done to archaeological sites, historic towns, mosques, churches and religious shrines, museums and libraries, manuscript centers, cultural and artistic centers, universities and academic institutions. Photos obtained of these archaeological sites, historic buildings and cultural centers in Gaza portray systematic destruction of five thousand years of cultural heritage, ancient sites in many cases reduced to piles of rubble.<sup>8</sup>

## **Archaeological Sites**

The targeting by Israel of a large number of archaeological sites began at the start of the war. Most prominent of these sites is Tell al-Sakan to the south of Gaza, which archaeologists dated to the early Bronze Age (3200–2300 BCE). Preliminary reports indicate that Tell al-‘Ajul was also targeted, a site that represents Gaza’s history during the Middle and Late Bronze Age (2300–500 BCE), while the sites of Tell al-Mintar and the shrines of Shaykh ‘Ali al-Mintar and Shaykh Radwan suffered extensive damage.

Targeted also was the al-Balakhiya site (figure 4) which represents the ancient port of Gaza, the Anthedon, constructed during the Greco-Roman period and active until the twelfth century. Shelling caused severe damage to a Byzantine-era church in Jabaliya, with the probable loss of its very rich mosaics of figures of humans, animals, plants, and scenes from mythology (figure 5). The historic cemetery in Jabaliya was also destroyed where hundreds of tombs dating to the Roman and Byzantine periods had been excavated. The mosaics in ‘Abasan al-Kabira dating to the same period were previously destroyed in the 2014 war.





Figure 4. Al-Balakhhiyya, the site of the ancient port of Gaza, before and after destruction.

The Saint Hilarion Monastery at the archaeological site of Tell Umm ‘Amr (figure 6), near Nusayrat camp, was shelled and indications are that the historic Dayr al-Balah cemetery on the coast of the town suffered widespread damage. This is a cemetery where excavations from 1972 to 1982 revealed anthropoid coffins dating to the twelfth century BCE, making it a site of exceptional importance.

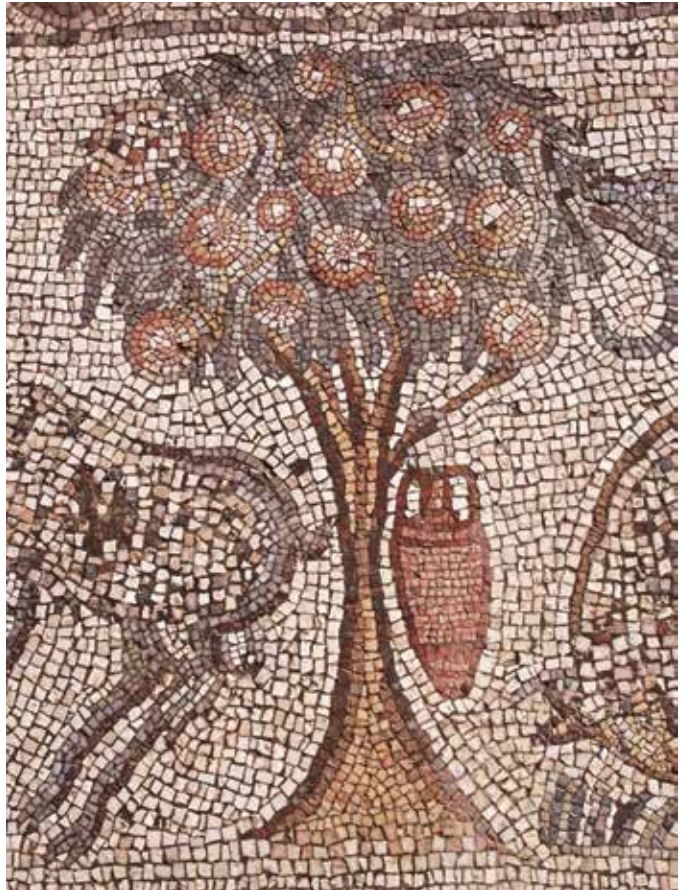


Figure 5. Jabaliya Byzantine church mosaics, likely destroyed by shelling.





Figure 6. Mosaics of Saint Hilarion Monastery, likely destroyed by shelling. Bottom photo online at [www.travelpalestine.ps/en/Tag/8/Gaza](http://www.travelpalestine.ps/en/Tag/8/Gaza) (accessed 2 August 2024).



## Historic and Religious Buildings

Historic and religious sites were systematically targeted by aerial strikes and shelling in 2023 and early 2024, causing massive damage to the cultural heritage of Gaza City, Bayt Hanun, Dayr al-Balah, Khan Yunis, and Rafah, a heritage that included historical buildings, mosques, schools, mansions, shrines, and public fountains. Among the most significant and celebrated historic and religious buildings targeted in Gaza was the Great ‘Umari Mosque (figure 7), in the central Daraj quarter of Gaza City, which was totally destroyed. The oldest and the largest mosque in Gaza with an area of 4,100 square meters, it is believed that the mosque was built on the site of the Roman period temple of the god Marna and the Byzantine church of Eudoxia and dates to the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. It is especially noted for its Mamluk and Ottoman inscriptions.



Figure 7. ‘Umari Mosque before and after destruction.

The Church of Saint Porphyrius (figure 8) in the Zaytun quarter in Gaza City was also almost totally destroyed. The ancient church includes the tomb of the saint, who was bishop of Gaza in 425 CE; the church was rebuilt in the twelfth century CE. On 19 October 2023, the church was bombed, which destroyed its walls and floors and led to the collapse of the building that housed church caretakers and caused the death of many people from the area who had sought refuge there, with entire families wiped out.





Figure 8. The Orthodox Church of Saint Porphyrius in Gaza City, after the 19 October 2023 bombardment.

All of Gaza's seven-century-old historic mosques suffered partial or total destruction. The most notable of these is the Katib Wilaya Mosque in the Zaytun quarter in the Old City of Gaza, the oldest part of which dates to 1334 CE, in the Mamluk period. The western portions of the mosque were built during the Ottoman period by Ahmad Bey, the *katib wilaya* (chief secretary of the province), in 1586 CE and its minaret stands next to the bell tower of the Church of Saint Porphyrius. Also destroyed is the Mosque of al-Sayyid Hashim (figure 9), one of the most beautiful historic mosques in the Daraj quarter in Gaza. Built in the Ottoman style with a surface area of around 2,400 square meters, it has an open courtyard (*sahn*) surrounded by porticos. Beneath the western portico is a tomb believed to be that of al-Sayyid Hashim ibn 'Abd Manaf, grandfather of the Prophet Muhammad. The historic Qashqar Mosque as well as the 'Umari Mosque in Jabaliya built in the Mamluk period were also destroyed, as was the 600 square-meter Mamluk-era Zafardamri Mosque in the Shuja'iyya quarter, built by Shihab al-Din Ahmad Azfir ibn al-Zafadamri in 1360 CE. The Mamluk-era Mahkama Mosque also in al-Shuja'iyya had been destroyed in the 2014 assault.



Figure 9. Photo of the Mosque of al-Sayyid Hashim before its destruction, from the official website of the Gaza Municipality.

A large number of religious shrines were also destroyed including, for example, some in Tell al-Mintar and al-Shaykh ‘Ajlin, and the *maqam* (shrine) to the legendary figure al-Khidr in Rafah, which encompasses the tomb of Saint Hilarion. The Ottoman-era shrine of the prophet Yusuf east of Jabaliya was destroyed in the 2014 assault on Gaza.

Historic buildings include public buildings such as schools, mansions, private residences, and public baths. This current war is unlike its predecessors in that it has been systematically targeting the historic centers of Gaza City, Bayt Hanun and Khan Yunis (figure 10). Notable in this regard is Qasr al-Basha (figure 11) in the Daraj quarter in Gaza, which was a large palace with two floors and dates to the Mamluk era. Its decorations include the *rank*, or heraldic emblem, of Sultan al-Zahir Baybars. It had been used as the residence of the governors of Gaza in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. The palace was named after the Radwan family who owned it at the beginning of the Ottoman era. Napoleon Bonaparte spent three nights at the palace during his campaign against Syria in 1799, and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities had recently restored the palace and refurbished it as a museum.





Figure 10. Khan Yunis castle, or Qalat Barquq, a Mamluk fortress built in 1387 CE, here before and after its destruction. Top photo online at [virtualmuseum.tourism.ps/en/article/80/Khan-Yunis](https://virtualmuseum.tourism.ps/en/article/80/Khan-Yunis) (access 2 August 2024).





Figure 11. Qasr al-Basha, after its restoration and below, after its destruction.

Also completely destroyed was al-Kamiliya Madrasa in the Zaytun quarter of Gaza city, named after the Ayyubid Sultan al-Kamil who built it in 1237 CE. It has

two floors and a surface area of 537 square meters with a central courtyard. This madrasa was used for teaching and to house poor students and travelers, and was used continuously over the centuries until 1930. It was the last madrasa standing in the city.

The destruction includes the almost total demolition of Dar al-Saqqa in the Shuja'iyya quarter (figure 12) which had been built in 1661 CE by Ahmad al-Saqqa, a prominent Gaza merchant. The mansion has two floors and a total surface area of about 700 square meters. The al-Saqqa family had recently restored it and refurbished it as a cultural center. Targeted too was the Tarazi House, a distinguished Ottoman era structure, and extensive damage was done to the 'Alami House and the adjoining arcade in the Daraj quarter, one of the city's ancient gates, and situated near the 'Umari Mosque and Qasr al-Basha. The Ottoman-era Hammam al-Samra (figure 13), recently restored, was also destroyed along with the Ottoman-era Rifa'iyya public fountain, constructed by Bahram ibn Mustafa Pasha in 1568 CE.



Figure 12. Dar al-Saqqa, after restoration and after destruction.



Figure 13. Hammam al-Samra, after restoration and after destruction.



The al-Ahli Arab Hospital (called al-Ma‘madani) in the Zaytun quarter, built in 1882 CE – operated by the Anglican Diocese in Jerusalem and the only Christian hospital in Gaza – was comprised of thirteen buildings. It suffered extensive shelling on the evening of Tuesday, 17 October 2023, resulting in the massacre of some 471 civilians who were sheltering there, including patients who were with their families.

## **World Heritage Sites**

There are three archaeological sites registered on the preliminary list of cultural sites in Palestine that are in the Gaza Strip.<sup>9</sup> These are al-Balakhiyya or Anthedon, the Tell Umm ‘Amir or Monastery of Saint Hilarion and Wadi Gaza (coastal wetlands) as a natural heritage site.

### **Al-Balakhiyya (Anthedon)**

This site lies on the coast northwest of Gaza city and was the ancient port of Gaza during the Greco-Roman period. Islamic sources call it *Tida*. The site is one kilometer from the ancient port city, Maiuma. Joint Palestinian and French excavations have revealed traces of neo-Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and early Islamic remains. The site also revealed the city walls and quarters housing craft workers and the city’s population, some of which were decorated with frescoes. The site reveals floor mosaics, storage areas, and fortified structures, and was listed on the Palestinian preliminary list of world heritage prior to its inclusion on the list of world heritage. This site was shelled extensively in 2023 and 2024.

### **Tell Umm ‘Amir (Monastery of Saint Hilarion)**

The Monastery of Saint Hilarion was revealed to occupy the site of Tell Umm ‘Amir, near the Nusayrat camp, and is known as historic Tabatha, a site which appears on the Madaba map. The site was excavated by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities in conjunction with a French archaeological mission and excavations revealed the remains of a large monastery dating to the Byzantine and early Islamic periods. The monastery consists of two churches, a baptismal and reception area, in addition to other facilities like wells, a hammam and housing for pilgrims. On the floor mosaics, Greek inscriptions were found that mention St Hilarion who was born in Gaza in 291 CE and died in Cyprus in 371 CE. Saint Hilarion was the founder of Palestinian monasticism and his biography was written by Saint Jerome. His fame spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean; his saint’s day is celebrated in Cyprus on 21 October. The site was included on a preliminary list of World Heritage in 2005 as a cultural site and was inscribed formally on the UNESCO World Heritage list during the 46th World Heritage session in New Delhi, India, July 2024.



## Wadi Gaza (Gaza Creek)

The Gaza Creek originates from the hills of the Naqab desert and the heights south of al-Khalil (Hebron), and runs from the 1949 armistice line east of Gaza to the coast where it flows into the sea. After it enters Gaza, it is seven kilometers long. This creek is considered one of the most important coastal wetland regions on the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea and is rich in geographical and biological diversity, including being a station for migrating birds. Due to its importance as a nature habitat, it was included in the Palestinian list of cultural and natural sites of world value, and listed as a nature reserve site that includes threatened or rare species. Since the start of Israel's latest assault on Gaza, this site has been a major locus of Israeli military operations despite its high environmental value as a stopover for migrating birds and its biological diversity.

## Museums and Archaeological Storage Centers

At least twelve local museums and numerous antiquities collections were systematically destroyed in the aerial and land bombardments. Notable is the Qasr al-Basha, a Mamluk period building, which was restored and refurbished as



Figure 14. Qarrara Museum.

an archaeological museum. On exhibit were artifacts from most of the important excavations carried out in the Gaza Strip over the past two decades. Tens of thousands of archeological objects are now buried under the rubble. The Dayr al-Balah Museum was also destroyed and with it its collection of archeological and heritage items, and the Qarrara Museum (figure 14), which housed a varied collection of ancient objects dating to various historical eras. Private collections such as the Jawdat al-Khudari collection in Gaza (figure 15) and the ‘Aqqad collection were also destroyed, and many other family-held or private collections of antique objects have been lost due to the extensive heavy bombardment of Gaza.

Storehouses belonging to the Gaza Department of Antiquities and housing tens of thousands of archeological objects were broken into, and reportedly ransacked. These stores include Palestinian and international archeological excavations still under study and are estimated to hold tens of thousands of figurines, earthenware, glass and metal utensils and coins. Forcible entry into museums and stores is a clear violation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property during Armed Conflicts.



Figure 15. Jawdat al-Khudari's extensive collection of artifacts, housed in the hotel-museum al-Mathaf, north of Gaza city, was used as an Israeli barracks in late 2023 and then destroyed by fire and bulldozers.



Figure 16. A Gaza storeroom full of antiquities from Palestinian and international excavation sites was broken into by Israeli soldiers and photos and video later posted on Instagram by the director of the Israeli Antiquity Authorities, along with a photo of stolen items exhibited in the Israeli Knesset.<sup>10</sup>

## Destruction of Mosques and Cemeteries

In addition to the historic mosques mentioned above, a systematic campaign of destruction targeted mosques in Gaza in a manner unprecedented in modern history. A report from the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf (religious endowments), dated 22 January 2024, cites the total or partial destruction of at least 1,000 of a total of 1,200 mosques. Cemeteries were also targeted, for example, the Christian Baptist cemetery in Gaza City and the World War II Commonwealth soldiers' cemetery in the Tuffah quarter of Gaza were extensively damaged, while the cemetery in Bayt Hanun was destroyed (figure 17) and large sections were excavated.





Figure 17. Bayt Hanun cemetery, after destruction.

## Targeting the City's Landmarks

A report by the Gaza Municipality concluded that the occupation forces were targeting the city's main cultural landmarks that represent its collective identity. In addition to historic buildings, mosques, and churches, destroyed landmarks included the Municipal Garden, the Monument of the Unknown Soldier, the Rashad al-Shawwa Cultural Center (figure 18), the al-Katiba Garden, the Public Library building (figure 19), the Is'ad al-Tufula (Happy Childhood) building, the Municipal Promenade, the Central Archives building, the Manuscript Restoration Center (figure 20), and the city's universities (figure 21), as well as private hotels, tourist resorts, service and commercial centers, and municipal infrastructure such as roads, water treatment stations, and wells.





Figure 18. The Rashad al-Shawwa Cultural Center, before and after destruction.



Figure 19. Gaza Municipal Library, before and after destruction.



Figure 20. Gaza Municipal Manuscript Center, after destruction.



Figure 21. Gaza's Faculty of Law, before and after destruction.

## The International Genocide Convention

The 1948 Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide was signed in the wake of the horrors of World War II, due in no small part to Polish-Jewish jurist and refugee Rafael Lemkin, who argued for the term “genocide” for the physical and cultural destruction of a national, religious, or racial group, and then worked to see it codified within international law.<sup>11</sup> Although this definition was adopted unanimously in a UN General Assembly resolution in 1946, the element of cultural genocide was dropped from the final text of the treaty convention (Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, or Genocide Convention) following objections by states with an imperialist history of decimating native populations – namely,



Australia, the United States,<sup>12</sup> the United Kingdom, France, and Canada. Therefore, actions committed with the intention of destroying the language, religion and culture of a human group are not specifically proscribed under the genocide convention. Many scholars today, however, view that the intended end result of cultural genocide is indeed genocide. As Canadian sociologist Andrew Woolford argues, the destruction of the collective identity of native populations and theft of their lands to enable settlers to dominate them should be considered genocide, as it deprives the group of their means to exist.<sup>13</sup>

Raz Segal, a Jewish American expert on the Holocaust at Stockton University in the United States, described the current war in Gaza, on the sixth day of the war, as typical of genocidal wars intentionally aimed at the destruction of a human group. That intention was clearly expressed in numerous statements made by Israeli political and military leaders and is directly connected with military operations such as shelling, destruction of infrastructure, a very tight siege, forcible eviction, and the use of famine, then “justifying violence by a shameful exploitation of the anniversary of the Holocaust.”<sup>14</sup> Their purpose is to disengage the conflict from its political context as a struggle against occupation, to compare Palestinian victims to the Nazis and the terrorist ISIS, and to revive the dehumanizing notion of fighting barbarism. This last, according to Franz Fanon, was a favorite imperialist discourse and always preceded waging a criminal war.<sup>15</sup> The targeting of historic centers, archaeological sites, cultural institutions, and museums is yet another indicator of a deliberate scheme to destroy the collective identity of a human group, as defined in the Genocide Convention. John Hocking, a member of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, described the destruction of cultural heritage as tantamount to cultural genocide and stated that wherever there is cultural destruction genocide must be suspected.

## **The Case Raised Before the International Court of Justice**

With the efforts exerted thus far to end the war on Gaza having failed, and despite the UN General Assembly resolution and the U.S. veto of any UN Security Council resolution to stop the war, the Republic of South Africa submitted a case of eighty-four pages to the International Court of Justice against Israel, holding that it had and is committing genocide in Gaza.<sup>16</sup> The ICJ is considered the highest judicial authority of the UN. The South African case, supported by a large number of other states, is based on the 1948 Genocide Convention, which outlaws the most heinous crime in international law. On 11 and 23 January 2024, South Africa presented its case and urgently demanded that a decision be issued to stop acts of genocide, based upon objective evidence, whether with respect to intention or to the five actions classified as constituting genocide. Many international law experts hold that the crimes committed by Israel in Palestine are a normal consequence of the immunity granted to Israel by the West over the past seventy-five years of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Clearly, efforts must be intensified to stop the war and bring in adequate

humanitarian aid. Whatever the verdict of the ICJ may be, it will not restore the lives of the victims nor the heritage that has been lost. But enforcing justice and punishing the criminals will stop the continued commission of these crimes against humanity and prevent their future recurrence. This call is addressed to all institutions concerned with cultural heritage, both local and international, and urges them to act forcefully to estimate the damage done and the rebuilding process. The Palestinian heritage does not belong solely to Palestine but is inseparable from world heritage, and its destruction is a loss to the whole of humanity.

*Hamdan Taha is an independent researcher and a former deputy minister of the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and director general of the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (1995–2014). He is coeditor with Ingrid Hjelm, Ilan Pappé, and Thomas L. Thompson of A New Critical Approach to the History of Palestine: Palestine History and Heritage Project 1 (Routledge, 2019).*

## Endnotes

- 1 Unless noted otherwise, the source for all images is the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.
- 2 *Al-Adhrrar al-najima 'an al-qasf al-Isra'ili alladhi asaba al-mawaqi' al-athariyya fi qita' Ghazza* [Damages deriving from the Israeli bombardment of archaeological sites in the Gaza Strip] (Palestinian Authority Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2014); *Taqrir hawla al-adhrrar allati lahiqat bi-mawaqi' al-turath al-thaqafi fi qita' Ghazza natijata al-'adwan al-Isra'ili* [Report on the damages that befell cultural heritage sites in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israeli aggression] (Palestinian Authority Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2023).
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- 7 See: Ahmed al-Barsh, "Report on the Impact of the Recent War in 2023 on the Cultural Heritage in Gaza Strip – Palestine" (Heritage for Peace and ANSCH, November 2023), online at [www.heritageforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Report-of-the-effects-of-the-last-war-of-2023-on-the-cultural-heritage-in-Gaza-Strip-Palestine-english.pdf](http://www.heritageforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Report-of-the-effects-of-the-last-war-of-2023-on-the-cultural-heritage-in-Gaza-Strip-Palestine-english.pdf) (accessed 1 April 2024); and ICOMOS-Palestine, "Report #3: New Evidence Indicated the Devastation in Palestine: Genocide, Urbicide, and Ecocide (Documentation and Evidence Gathered: December 16th 2023–January 31st 2024)" (ICOMOS-Palestine, 2024), online at [drive.google.com/file/d/18U8czolQ45afKXFZB1Fq7uxZ8n4ouG9/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/18U8czolQ45afKXFZB1Fq7uxZ8n4ouG9/view) (accessed 1 April 2024).
- 8 "Destruction of the Palestinian Cultural Heritage of Gaza – In Pictures," *Guardian*,

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