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Attacks on Civilian Cultural Architecture During Russia's War on Ukraine February 2022 to November 2023

Introduction

PEN America is sharing information regarding attacks on cultural sites in Ukraine in response to the Commission of Inquiry's request for information concerning the negative impacts of attacks on civilian architecture since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

PEN America has found that Russian forces have carried out both deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on Ukraine's cultural infrastructure, including through their use of explosive weapons and cluster munitions in densely populated areas. Russian military attacks have damaged or destroyed hundreds of cultural buildings and objects, including museums, theaters, monuments, statues, places of worship, cemeteries, historical buildings, libraries, archives, as well as schools and universities. Russian attacks have also damaged or destroyed community cultural centers ("houses of culture"), concert venues and stadiums, and other locations where people access culture in their communities. In addition, Russian forces looted several museums in some cities.

While this report focuses on attacks on civilian architecture, it is important to note that they take place within the context of Russian officials' repeated, disingenuous, and aggressive claims denying that Ukraine exists as a nation or that Ukrainians have an identity and culture distinct from that of Russia and Russians. These claims have been used to justify the war and occupation and negate Ukraine's claim to sovereign nationhood. Russian leaders have also resorted to the demonization of Ukrainian culture by evoking Nazism, with Ukrainian culture promoting the "systemic glorification of Nazism" through rituals, literature, history, culture, and media.¹

Much of the information included here was published in PEN America's December 2022 report, "[Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine](#)," based on interviews with artists, writers, and other cultural workers in Ukraine and desk research conducted in 2022.² Additional cases of Russian attacks on cultural architecture in 2022 and 2023 are also included in this submission, based on desk research in 2023. This list is not exhaustive.

Summary

Several organizations are recording attacks on cultural heritage in Ukraine. As of November 29, 2023, UNESCO had verified damage to 331 sites, including 125 religious sites, 144 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 29 museums, 19 monuments, 13 libraries, and one archive.³ The Conflict Observatory, a multi-organization research initiative based in the United States documenting

¹ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine," December 2, 2022, <https://pen.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Ukraine-Culture-Under-Attack-12-20-22.pdf>

² PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

³ "Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO," UNESCO, November 18, 2023, unesco.org/en/articles/damaged-cultural-sites-ukraine-verified-unesco. It describes its methodology as: "UNESCO is conducting a preliminary damage assessment for cultural properties [as defined by the 1954 Hague Convention] by cross-checking the reported incidents with multiple credible sources."

potential damage to cultural heritage sites in Ukraine, reported potential damage to 1,689 cultural heritage sites from February 2022 through April 2023.⁴

The Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and Information Policy has recorded damage to 1,702 objects of cultural infrastructure in 262 locations across Ukraine, including creative hubs, libraries, theaters, museums, and other buildings, as of September 29, 2023.⁵ It also estimates that from February 24, 2022, to September 25, 2023, 835 cultural heritage sites, including architectural and archeological heritage sites, historical sites, and monumental art, have been destroyed or damaged.⁶

The State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience found a total of 205 religious sites, including churches, mosques, synagogues, and Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses, destroyed between February 24 and August 23, 2022.⁷ As of November 2023, most of the Luhansk region and significant parts of the territories of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and Donetsk regions remain under Russian occupation, impeding an accurate account of damage to cultural sites.

Attacks on Cultural Sites by City or Region

Kyiv

The Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Complex in Kyiv

Russian forces struck the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial complex in Kyiv on March 1, 2022, damaging a building that would have been the first Holocaust Memorial Center in Eastern Europe. The 140-acre site suffered extensive destruction and fire damage. The site is adjacent to Kyiv's main television and radio tower, which appeared to be the main target.

October 2022 Attack on Kyiv

On October 10, 2022, multiple Russian missiles hit Kyiv, including Taras Shevchenko Park, damaging a children's playground and numerous buildings surrounding the park.⁸ A number of historic and cultural buildings suffered damage, with windows broken in the Khanenko Art Museum, the Museum of the History of the City of Kyiv, the Taras Shevchenko Museum, the Kyiv Art Gallery, the National Research and Restoration Center, the Memorial Museum-apartment of Mykola Bazhan and Pavel Tychyna, the National Natural Science Museum of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Maksymovych Scientific Library, Institute of Literature at the National Academy of Sciences, and the Institute of Archeography at the National Academy of Sciences. Nineteenth-century historical residential buildings were also damaged.⁹ The building known as the Kyiv Teacher's House houses the Museum of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-1921 and the Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine. During the

⁴ "Potential Damage to Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Sites, 24 February 2022 to 30 April 2023," Virginia Museum of Natural History, Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab; University of Maryland, Center for International Development and Conflict Management; and Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/home/documents/2f61abda792f4d29bed8eef26106dfb9/explore> It describes its methodology as: "Potential damage to cultural heritage sites is identified using multi-spectral satellite data and credible social media sources."

⁵ Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, "Due to russian aggression in Ukraine, 1702 objects of cultural infrastructure have suffered," October 10, 2023, <https://mcip.gov.ua/en/news/due-to-russian-aggression-in-ukraine-1702-objects-of-cultural-infrastructure-have-suffered/>

⁶ Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, "Due to russian aggression in Ukraine, 835 cultural heritage sites have been affected," October 12, 2023, <https://mcip.gov.ua/en/news/due-to-russian-aggression-in-ukraine-835-cultural-heritage-sites-have-been-affected/>

⁷ The State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience, "List of religious sites ruined in Ukraine as a result of Russia's full-scale attack," August 23, 2022, <https://dcss.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Perelik-na-2022-08-23.ENG.pdf>. The state services' methodology for verification is unclear.

⁸ Beaumont et al, "Putin warns of further retaliation as Ukraine hit by massive wave of strikes", The Guardian, October 10, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/10/explosions-kyiv-ukraine-war-russia-crimea-putin-bridge>

⁹ Sophia Kishkovsky, "Kyiv cultural sites reportedly damaged in Russian bombardment," The Art Newspaper, October 11, 2022, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/10/11/kyiv-cultural-sites-reportedly-damaged-in-russian-bombardment> and "Kyiv's Cultural Sites Damaged by Missiles," Kyiv Post, October 12, 2022, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/735>

October 10 attack, the building's glass dome was shattered, as well as windows and doors, leaving the building and its contents exposed to the elements.²⁰

National Palace for the Arts

A Russian missile attack on central Kyiv on December 31, 2022, directly hit the Ukraine Palace of Arts, the city's largest art and concert space.¹⁰

Kyiv Region

Ivankiv Local History Museum

In a June 2022 report, a consortium of United States-based research institutes examining cultural heritage destruction in Ukraine using remote sensing, high-resolution satellite imagery, and other evidence identified ten sites in Ukraine, including four local museums, that sustained damage that cannot be explained by their proximity to potential military targets, suggesting that the sites may have been specifically targeted.¹¹

The damage to and destruction of these small, local museums represents a particular cultural loss to local residents, which may be irreplaceable if their holdings are not fully cataloged. One of the museums identified in the report is the Ivankiv Historical and Local History Museum, established in 1981 and located about 50 miles north of Kyiv. Their holdings include art and artifacts relevant to the history and culture of the village of Ivankiv. On February 26, Russian troops shelled the museum and no other targets in Ivankiv. At the time of its destruction, the museum served as a repository for a collection of paintings by Maria Prymachenko, a Ukrainian painter and former resident of the Ivankiv district.¹²

Vyacheslav Chornovil's Archives

In Bucha, near Kyiv, Russian forces destroyed the archives of the Ukrainian politician and Soviet-era dissident politician and publicist Vyacheslav Chornovil. The National Union of Journalists reported that significant parts of Chornovil's archive were lost, as well as books from the Chornovil Foundation and 60 copies of the complete works of Chornovil. Nearly all the archives of Mykola Plahotniuk, a fellow dissident, located in the same house, were also destroyed.¹³

Chernihiv

Gothic Revival Youth Library

Russian attacks on the city of Chernihiv in early April 2022 decimated the striking Gothic Revival Youth Library, also known as the Tarnovsky Building, causing extensive damage to its roof and walls. The building formerly housed the Museum of Ukrainian Antiquities, founded in 1902, and is one of Ukraine's first and most well-known museums. The collection had previously been transferred to the city historical museum, and the building subsequently functioned as a library for children and youth, including at the time of the attack.¹⁴

¹⁰ "Moment missile hits Kyiv on New Year's Eve caught on newly released CCTV footage - video," The Guardian, January 4, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2023/jan/04/moment-missile-hits-kyiv-on-new-years-eve-caught-on-newly-released-cctv-footage-video>

¹¹ "[D]amaged cultural heritage sites distant (>3km) from ongoing conflict activity, Ukrainian bases or stationary military assets, and dual-use transportation infrastructure (e.g., train stations, railways, airfields, and airports) are unlikely to be damaged as a consequence of military activity. Multiple authors, "Analysis of Damage to Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Sites: A Case Study as of 08 June 2022," Virginia Museum of Natural History, Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab; University of Maryland, Center of International Development and Conflict Management; and Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Cultural Rescue, Initiative.

¹² PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

¹³ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine" and "Analysis of Damage to Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Sites: A Case Study as of 08 June 2022."

¹⁴ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

Security Service Archives

In the Chernihiv region, Ukraine's Ministry of Justice, citing the head of the State Archival Service of Ukraine, reported in March 2022 that Russian attacks destroyed the Security Service archives, which included former Soviet secret police (NKVD) documents related to Soviet repression against Ukrainians. Approximately 13,000 files were destroyed, representing a devastating loss to historians and to the victims whose stories the documents held.¹⁵

Taras Shevchenko Chernihiv Regional Music and Drama Theater

A Russian missile attack on a historic central square in Chernihiv on August 19, 2023, resulted in significant damage to the Taras Shevchenko Chernihiv Regional Music and Drama Theater, with the roof blown off and many windows damaged.¹⁶ Established in 1926, the theater is among Ukraine's oldest and most prominent regional theatres. Nearby buildings in the Chernihiv historical center were also damaged by the strike.¹⁷

Kharkiv and the Kharkiv Region

The Izyum Local Lore Museum

The Izyum Local Lore Museum in the Kharkiv region was struck in late February or early March 2022. The museum was established in 1920 to "preserve the historical and cultural heritage and spread knowledge" through a collection of books, paintings, and works of art relevant to the region's history. The June 2022 report by the research consortium noted above also identified this museum as one that sustained damage that cannot be explained by their proximity to potential military targets.¹⁸

Drobitsky Yar Holocaust Memorial

In March 2022, Russian shelling damaged the Drobitsky Yar Holocaust Memorial outside of Kharkiv, which commemorates the site where Nazis killed an estimated 15,000 Jews during World War II. The complex's most prominent feature, a giant black menorah, was severely damaged.¹⁹

Hryhoriy Skovoroda National Literary Memorial Museum

A Russian missile strike on May 6, 2022, hit the Hryhoriy Skovoroda National Literary Memorial Museum in the Kharkiv region and caused a fire. This museum sustained damage that could not be explained by military targets in the vicinity.²⁰

Korolenko Kharkiv State Scientific Library

The 19th-century Korolenko Kharkiv State Scientific Library, the most extensive library in Ukraine in size and the second largest in terms of holdings suffered significant damage on March 13, 2022. Ukraine's Ministry of Culture and Information Policy and the Korolenko Kharkiv State Scientific Library described the library as housing seven million copies of documents in different languages and serving as a digital education hub in Kharkiv. Russian attacks on the facility caused damage to two on-site book depositories, the main library building, stained glass windows, and a grand piano once played by Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff. The book collections in the library were not damaged by the attacks but were exposed to the elements when the windows were blown out.²¹

Community Cultural Center in Derhachi

Human Rights Watch documented two Russian strikes on the Derhachi cultural center in May 2022. The first, on May 12, pierced the building's roof and injured two volunteers who were preparing food

¹⁵ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

¹⁶ Brendan Cole, "Ukraine Theater Hit by Missile With Deaths, Dozens of Injured Reported," Newsweek, August 19, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/chernihiv-ukraine-theater-missile-strike-update-1821072>

¹⁷ "Russia hit Taras Shevchenko Theatre in the attack on Chernihiv city center," Government of Ukraine Website: Russia Invaded Ukraine, August 19, 2023, <https://war.ukraine.ua/crimes/chernihiv-theater-attack-on-august-19/>.

¹⁸ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

¹⁹ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

²⁰ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

²¹ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

and other assistance for local residents. The second, in the early morning hours of May 13, struck while 21 people were sheltering there overnight.²²

Community Cultural Center in Lozova

On May 20, 2022, the community cultural center in Lozova, near Kharkiv, called the Palace of Culture, received a direct hit. According to the government, at least seven people, including an 11-year-old child, were injured. The center, the only major cultural institution in the area, housed an auditorium, a lecture hall, three dance halls, a gym, a large library, and multiple rooms for classes and club meetings.²³

Sunnah Mosque

The Sunnah Mosque in the Kharkiv region was damaged during shelling on July 20, 2022. Russian missiles struck a public transport stop that was near the mosque, and the debris and shockwaves from the blast damaged the façade.²⁴

Chuhuiv House of Culture

The Chuhuiv House of Culture in the Kharkiv region was reduced to rubble after a Russian missile struck the building in July 2022. According to one media report, the building was occupied at the time of the attack, and rescuers saved three of the seven that were trapped in the rubble.²⁵

Kupiansk Local Lore Museum

During heavy fighting in the Kharkiv region, on April 25, 2023, a Russian S-300 type missile struck the Kupiansk Local Lore Museum, causing extensive damage, killing the director and one other employee, and injuring ten other people.²⁶ The museum, located in the city center, preserved objects of everyday 18th and 19th century life in the area, including tools, handicrafts, items of decorative and applied art, and clothing.²⁷

Mariupol

Academic Regional Drama Theater

On March 16, Russian aircraft dropped two 500kg bombs on the Academic Regional Drama Theater in Mariupol, where hundreds of residents were sheltering. The bombs caused the roof and large parts of the walls to collapse. The Russian word for “children” appeared written twice in a large Cyrillic script in front of and behind the theater, clearly visible to aircraft, indicating that children were sheltering in the building. According to the Mariupol City Council, approximately 300 people died in the attack.²⁸

²² “Ukraine: Unlawful Russian Attacks in Kharkiv,” Human Rights Watch, August 16, 2022, [hrw.org/news/2022/08/16/ukraine-unlawful-russian-attacks-kharkiv](https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/16/ukraine-unlawful-russian-attacks-kharkiv)

²³ PEN America, “Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia’s War Against Ukraine.”

²⁴ The State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience, “List of religious sites ruined in Ukraine as a result of Russia’s full-scale attack,” and “Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO.”

²⁵ “Civilian Harm in Ukraine,” Bellingcat, regularly updated, last accessed November 26, 2023, ukraine.bellingcat.com; “The House of Culture lies in ruins after a Russian missile attack, Chuhuiv, Kharkiv Region, northeastern Ukraine,” Alamy, July 25, 2022, <https://www.alamy.com/chuhuiv-ukraine-july-25-2022-the-house-of-culture-lies-in-ruins-after-a-russian-missile-attack-chuhuiv-kharkiv-region-northeastern-ukraine-as-reported-the-rescuers-saved-three-persons-out-of-seven-people-trapped-under-the-rubble-of-the-cultural-institution-the-response-effort-is-ongoing-this-photo-cannot-be-distributed-in-the-russian-federation-image476045376.html> and “Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO.”

²⁶ “Deadly Russian Strike Hits Museum In Kupiansk As Battle For Bakhmut Picks Up,” RFE/RL Ukrainian service, April 25, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-invasion-bakhmut-assaults-russia/32378224.html>; “Iryna Osadcha, director of Kupiansk history museum, killed in Russian missile strike,” Art Review, <https://artreview.com/iryna-osadcha-director-of-kupiansk-history-museum-killed-in-russian-missile-strike/>; and “Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO.”

²⁷ “Kupianskyi Museum of Local Lore,” undated, <https://www.tourcenter.kh.ua/en/infrastruktura/kupianskyi-museum-local-lore>

²⁸ PEN America, “Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia’s War Against Ukraine.”

Kuindzhi Art Museum

During the Russian siege of Mariupol on March 20, 2022, an airstrike damaged the Kuindzhi Art Museum, a landmark Art Nouveau building, destroying some artworks. The museum commemorates the work and life of Arkhip Kuindzhi, a prominent landscape painter of Greek descent born locally. The museum contained works by other 20th-century Ukrainian painters as well as a library and historical archive.²⁹

Donetsk Region

Sviatohirsk Lavra

The Sviatohirsk Lavra, a historic Orthodox Christian cave monastery complex built between the 17th and 19th centuries in the Donetsk region, came under repeated attacks between March and June. According to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, at the time of an air attack on March 12, 520 people were sheltering at the monastery, and some were injured. The historic wooden All Saints' church in the complex was burned completely, apparently having been struck by artillery. Ukraine's Minister of Culture Oleksandr Tkachenko said that there were monks and nuns, as well as about 300 others, seeking shelter in the complex at the time of the strike.³⁰

On June 4, 2022, the historic wooden chapel in the Sviatohirsk Lavra monastery complex, which was consecrated in 1912, burned down. Although Russian and Ukrainian military officers each blamed the opposing party for the destruction, locals reported that the church burned after it was hit by a shell. The church had been hit several times before; two monks and a nun were killed during those attacks.³¹

Community Cultural Centers in the Donetsk region

Bellingcat recorded damage to community cultural centers ["houses of culture"] in Mariupol on March 16, 2022, and in Irpin on March 24, 2022.³² On February 14, 2023, Russian strikes hit the cultural center in Kostyantynivka, which was being used as a center for humanitarian aid at the time.³³

Community Cultural Center in Chasiv Yar

On the morning of July 23, 2023, Russian forces attacked the community cultural center in Chasiv Yar, which dated to 1929. The attack caused a devastating fire with severe damage to the roof, windows, and facade. Photographs showing splatter patterns characteristic of cluster munitions suggest that they may have been used in the attack. According to the center's director, the building included a museum, a gymnasium, a 750-seat auditorium with a stage, two smaller halls, an art gallery, and seven classrooms. Most of the exhibits had been relocated prior to the attack, although books, photographs, a unique stucco, and a grand piano were lost. At the time of the attack, the building was being used as a center for humanitarian aid.³⁴

Luhansk Region

The City Museum in Rubizhne

The June 2022 joint research report on targeted attacks also found that Russian forces' March 2022 attack on the City Museum in Rubizhne was a targeted attack and could not be explained by military

²⁹ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

³⁰ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

³¹ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

³² PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

³³ "The Russians launched two missile strikes - on Kostyantynivka and Kramatorsk," Ukrinform, February 14, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3669948-rosiani-zavdali-dva-raketnih-udari-po-kostantivci-i-kramatorsku.html>

³⁴ Natalia Zhukova and Tetyana Kharkevich, "The symbol of the city: the Russians destroyed the Palace of Culture, which is more than 90 years old, in Chasiv Yar (PHOTOS, VIDEO)," Free Radio, July 23, 2023, <https://freeradio.com.ua/symvol-mista-u-chasiv-iari-rosiiany-znyshchyly-palats-kultury-iakomu-ponad-90-rokiv-foto-video/>; "The Russian army destroyed the humanitarian headquarters in Chasovoy Yar - Kyrylenko," Radio Svoboda, July 23, 2023, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-humanitarnyy-shtab-chasiv-yar/32515393.html>

targets in the vicinity. The museum housed a collection of art and artifacts relevant to local history and culture.³⁵

Community Cultural Center in Lysychansk

On June 17, 2022, a Russian bombing destroyed the Stalin-era Cultural Center in Lysychansk, including by igniting an intense fire. Photographs show the building's roof wholly destroyed. At least four people were killed. The building contained a library, a post office, and a stage for cultural events. At the time of the attack, it was used as a bomb shelter by locals and a makeshift refuge for those who lost their homes.³⁶

Luhansk Regional Academic Ukrainian Music and Drama

Russian forces struck the Luhansk Regional Academic Ukrainian Music and Drama on June 22, 2022. The building was severely damaged while people were sheltering in the basement. According to the Ukrainian Institute, it is unknown whether those people survived the strike.³⁷

Zaporizhzhya Region

Attack on Komyshuvakha

On April 16, 2023, on the eve of Orthodox Easter, a Russian S-300 missile struck the Church of the Archangel Michael in the village of Komyshuvakha. Photos show that the attack destroyed the church, built in 1906. The village's central library and the building of another religious organization were also damaged. The church is a meeting point for the Kushuhumska community in the Zaporizhzhia region.³⁸

Attack on Novozlatopol

On November 14, 2023, the President of the Association of National Minorities of the Zaporizhzhia region reported that a 19th-century building that served as a synagogue and a Jewish school built in the 1920s, were destroyed by Russian shelling and only the outer walls, which are also damaged, had remained in place.³⁹

Kherson

St. Catherine's Cathedral

St. Catherine's Cathedral, a 1781 historical and architectural monument in Kherson and one of the city's most prominent buildings was damaged by Russian shelling on August 3, 2023. The local emergency service reported that while fighting the fire, four of its workers were injured by more shelling. The cathedral was once the burial location for Prince Grigory Potemkin, an 18th-century Russian military commander under Catherine the Great.⁴⁰

House Museum of Polina Raiko

On June 6, 2023, Russian forces destroyed the Nova Kakhovka Dam on the Dnipro River, causing extensive flooding and damage to the surrounding villages and landscape.⁴¹ The Polina Raiko House

³⁵ Multiple authors, "Analysis of Damage to Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Sites: A Case Study as of 08 June 2022."

³⁶ "Deadly air strike hits Ukraine frontline city as it readies for street battle," France24, June 17, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220617-deadly-air-strike-hits-ukraine-frontline-city-as-it-readies-for-street-battle>

³⁷ "Luhansk Regional Academic Ukrainian Music and Drama," Ukrainian Institute, undated, <https://ui.org.ua/en/postcard/luhansk-regional-academic-ukrainian-music-and-drama-theatre/>

³⁸ "In Zaporozhye, Russian rockets destroyed the church where the Easter service was to be held," Ukrinform, April 16, 2023, <https://war.ukraine.ua/crimes/the-church-of-st-michael-the-archangel-near-zaporizhzhia-was-destroyed-by-the-russian-missile-attack/>

³⁹ "Russians destroy historic buildings of Jewish school, synagogue in Zaporizhzhia region," <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ato/3786962-russians-destroy-historic-buildings-of-jewish-school-synagogue-in-zaporizhzhia-region.html>

⁴⁰ Hanna Arhirova, "Russian shelling hits a landmark church in the Ukrainian city of Kherson," AP, August 3, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-kherson-cathedral-damaged-88e389198e8d5d087693cecc1971f66f>

⁴¹ James Glantz et al, "Why the Evidence Suggests Russia Blew Up the Kakhovka Dam," New York Times, June 16, 2023

Museum, located in the affected town of Oleshky, near Kherson, was submerged and damaged.⁴² The self-taught Ukrainian artist Polina Raiko (1928–2004), an icon of Ukrainian folk art, had covered the walls of her home with vibrant murals primarily depicting animal, floral, and religious motifs. After her death, it was preserved as a museum.⁴³

Mykolaiv Region

Palace of Culture of Ochakiv

On June 27, 2022, Russian forces attacked the Black Sea town of Ochakiv, striking its local cultural center directly, causing significant damage, visible in photographs published on a regional media site.⁴⁴ Built in 2020, the center was home to a movie theatre and a large auditorium that hosted dance performances, plays, and pop concerts.⁴⁵

Mykolaiv Regional Center of Folk Art and Cultural and Educational Work

On July 21, 2023, Russian attacks on Mykolaiv destroyed the Regional Center of Folk Art and Cultural and Educational Work, which was housed in a historic 19th-century building. According to local media, missiles struck a nearby residential building, and the blast wave blew out the windows, doors, and roof and caused extensive interior damage. The center director said that an architect informed her that the center would have to be rebuilt from the foundation up. The center coordinated the activities of hundreds of cultural clubs, managed a collection of cultural artifacts, and hosted art classes and art and culture exhibits.⁴⁶

Odesa

Russian attacks in July 2023

In July 2023, Russian forces launched repeated air strikes on Odesa, striking multiple buildings protected as the UNESCO World Heritage site ‘The Historic Centre of Odesa.’⁴⁷ A UNESCO assessment following a July 20 attack reported damage to several museums within the World Heritage site, including the Odesa Archaeological Museum, the Odesa Maritime Museum, and the Odesa Literature Museum.⁴⁸ Further Russian strikes on July 23 damaged twenty-nine 19th and 20th-century historical buildings, many of them home to famous Ukrainian and Russian writers and artists and designated as “monuments of cultural heritage” in Ukraine, according to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy.⁴⁹ Some were also within the UNESCO World Heritage site.⁵⁰ On the same

⁴² Multiple authors, “Rapid Report: Flooding at the Polina Raiko House Museum Due to the Nova Kakhovka Dam Destruction on 6 June 2023,” Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative; Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab; University of Maryland, Center for International Development and Conflict Management; and Virginia Museum of Natural History, Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab

⁴³ Emma Graham-Harrison, “‘Masterpiece’ house is latest victim of Putin’s war on Ukrainian heritage,” *The Guardian*, June 12, 2023,

⁴⁴ “As a result of the shelling of the city on 06/27/2022, the “City Palace of Culture” cultural center was damaged in Ochakiv,” *Novii region*, 8 July 2022, <https://n-region.org/ochakovskiy-rayon/8909-v-nasldok-obstrlu-msta-27062022-roku-v-ochakov-bulo-poshkodzhenoz-kz-mskij-palac-kulturi.html>

⁴⁵ “As a result of the shelling of the city on 06/27/2022, the “City Palace of Culture” cultural center was damaged in Ochakiv,” *Novii region*, 8 July 2022, <https://n-region.org/ochakovskiy-rayon/8909-v-nasldok-obstrlu-msta-27062022-roku-v-ochakov-bulo-poshkodzhenoz-kz-mskij-palac-kulturi.html>

⁴⁶ “Mykolaiv regional center of folk creativity and cultural and educational work. Lost monument,” *Pragmatika*, September 8, 2023, <https://pragmatika.media/news/mykolaivskiy-oblasnyi-tsentr-narodnoi-tvorchosti-ta-kulturno-osvitnoi-roboty-vtrachena-pam-iatka/>; and “Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO.”

⁴⁷ “Historic Centre of Odesa,” UNESCO, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1703/>; and UNESCO, “Odesa: UNESCO strongly condemns attack on World Heritage property,” July 21, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/odesa-unesco-strongly-condemns-attack-world-heritage-property>; and UNESCO, “Odesa: UNESCO strongly condemns repeated attacks against cultural heritage, including World Heritage,” July 23, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/odesa-unesco-strongly-condemns-repeated-attacks-against-cultural-heritage-including-world-heritage>.

⁴⁸ UNESCO, “Odesa: UNESCO strongly condemns attack on World Heritage property.”

⁴⁹ “Corrected Data: ICIP reports on 29 monuments damaged by the Russian attack in Odesa,” *Ukrinform*, July 23, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-culture/3739523-utocneni-dani-mkip-povidomlae-pro-29-poskodzenih-rosijskou-atakou-pamatok-v-odesi.html>

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

night of attacks, the Transfiguration Cathedral, Odesa's largest church, suffered extensive damage, with photos showing a hole in the roof and heavy debris in the interior.⁵¹

Russian attacks on September 25

Further Russian attacks on Odesa on the night of September 25, 2023, caused additional damage to some of the buildings within the UNESCO World Heritage that had been struck in July, as well as additional buildings. For example, the Odesa National Art Museum experienced damage to the windows and sections of the ceiling, and new cracks appeared in the walls.⁵² Ukraine's Ministry of Culture and Information Policy reported damage to nine "objects of cultural heritage," mainly on the seafront boulevard.⁵³

Russian attacks on November 6

On November 6, 2023, Russian aerial strikes on Odesa damaged the 124-year-old Fine Arts Museum, also part of the World Heritage site. In 2022, museum staff evacuated over 12,000 pieces of art, but the remaining art was damaged and exposed to the elements.⁵⁴ The strikes left a crater just in front of the building, shattered windows, and left exhibition halls damaged and covered in dust. Seven exhibitions, most featuring the work of contemporary Ukrainian artists, were damaged.⁵⁵

Lviv

On July 6, a Russian aerial attack on the city included a strike on a historic building located in the buffer zone of the World Heritage Site of "Lviv - the Ensemble of the Historic Centre."⁵⁶ Buffer zones are areas that add an additional layer of protection to World Heritage sites.⁵⁷

Looting of Museums

Melitopol Museum of Local History

In the southern city of Melitopol in April, Russian soldiers oversaw the removal of at least 198 rare gold artifacts, silver coins, and other precious objects from the Melitopol Museum of Local History—the gold objects date back to the fourth century B.C. and the Scythian empire. Soldiers also kidnapped museum workers. The Russian-appointed de facto museum head made it clear the authorities do not regard the treasures as part of Ukrainian cultural legacy, but that they are of great cultural value for the entire former Soviet Union.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Iryna Nazarchuk, "Russian attack on Odesa kills one, damages cathedral," Reuters, July 23, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-attack-odesa-kills-one-injures-18-ukraine-officials-2023-07-23/>; Heidi Levine et al., "Ukraine live briefing: At least 1 killed, 21 injured after missiles rain down on Odessa," Washington Post, July 23, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/07/23/russia-ukraine-war-news/>; and Heather Chen et al., "Historic Ukrainian cathedral badly damaged in Russian strikes," CNN, July 23, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/23/world/odesa-attacks-saturday-russia-ukraine-intl-hnk/index.html>.

⁵² "Historic buildings and museums in Odesa damaged in missile attack," Ukrainska Pravda, September 26, 2023, <https://news.yahoo.com/missile-attack-odesa-damages-historical-130629491.html>

⁵³ Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, "As a result of enemy shelling in Odesa, 9 objects of cultural heritage were damaged," September 25, 2023, <https://mcip.gov.ua/news/vnaslidok-vorozhogo-obstrilu-v-odesi-postrazhdaly-9-ob%ca%bcyektiv-kulturnoyi-spadshhyny/>

⁵⁴ Matthew Mpoke Bigg, "Five Wounded as Russian Missiles Strike Odesa, Damaging an Art Museum," New York Times, November 6, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/06/world/europe/ukraine-russia-odesa-museum.html>

⁵⁵ "Odesa's National Art Museum Damaged in Russian Attack," Art Review, November 8, 2023, <https://artreview.com/odesas-national-art-museum-damaged-in-russian-attack/> and Matthew Mpoke Bigg, "Five Wounded as Russian Missiles Strike Odesa, Damaging an Art Museum."

⁵⁶ "Lviv: UNESCO condemns the attack in the buffer zone of the World Heritage site," UNESCO, July 6, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/lviv-unesco-condemns-attack-buffer-zone-world-heritage-site>

⁵⁷ Radina Gigova, "Russia's Lviv attack violated the World Heritage Convention by hitting protected building, UNESCO says," CNN, July 6, 2023, https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-07-06-23/h_35e5b09766dd413f6d4d6de43439cd13

⁵⁸ PEN America, "Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia's War Against Ukraine."

Oleksiy Shovkunenko Kherson Art Museum

Between October 31 and November 3, 2022, the Oleksiy Shovkunenko Kherson Art Museum was looted by armed men dressed in civilian clothing, according to museum administrators. Russian occupying forces and Russian collaborators carried out “everything they saw, everything they could reach.” The museum’s collection includes more than 10,000 pieces of art.⁵⁹

The Albin Havdzytskyi Picture Gallery

The Albin Havdzytskyi Picture Gallery, located in the occupied city of Nova Kakhovka in the Kherson region, was robbed by occupying Russian forces after the “evacuation of the population” was announced due to a possible counter-offensive by the Ukrainian army. The city’s mayor, Volodymyr Kovalenko, reported: “They are taking all the exhibits they can. A truck approached the gallery, and Russians started loading them. Locals saw this, but the occupiers did not let them come close. Over 1,000 artworks were exhibited in the gallery; of these, 297 paintings were gifted to Nova Kakhovka by Albin Havdzytskyi, Honored Artist of Ukraine.”⁶⁰

Oleksiy Shovkunenko Kherson Art Museum, Kherson Regional Museum, and other cultural sites

In November 2022, Russian forces were forced to retreat from Kherson. Media reports confirmed by the Ukrainian military’s National Resistance Center indicated that Russian soldiers had looted 15,000 objects from the Oleksiy Shovkunenko Kherson Art Museum, Kherson Regional Museum, and other cultural venues. Media reports suggest that the Kherson Art Museum’s collection was taken to the Simferopol Museum of Local Lore in occupied Crimea.⁶¹

Kherson Regional Universal Scientific Library

The Kherson City Council reported on Telegram that on November 15, 2022, Russian forces looted pre-revolutionary publications detailing local history.⁶²

State Archive of Kherson Region

Russian troops occupied the city of Kherson for eight months, but before they retreated, they looted thousands of artifacts, including from the State Archive of Kherson. The archives contained 18th and 19th-century artifacts, urban plans, regional maps, and pre-revolution newspapers. The Russians took almost everything relating to the pre-revolutionary period. According to an investigation by Human Rights Watch, most of the looting took place in the last three weeks of the occupation, which ended on November 11, 2022.⁶³

Relevant International Law

The 1954 Hague Convention for Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict requires states to protect movable or immovable property, specifically “of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people.” The convention defines cultural property as monuments of architecture, art, or history; archaeological sites; works of art; manuscripts, books, and other objects; and buildings that preserve or exhibit cultural property. The Hague Convention and its Additional Protocols require that states engaged in an armed conflict do everything feasible to protect cultural property. They are not allowed to direct hostilities against cultural property, must verify that objects to be attacked are not cultural property, and avoid incidental damage to cultural property, including through the means of warfare and types of weapons. Theft, pillage, misappropriation of, or vandalism directed against cultural property are also prohibited. Military regulations should follow these

⁵⁹ PEN America, “Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia’s War Against Ukraine.”

⁶⁰ PEN America, “Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia’s War Against Ukraine.”

⁶¹ PEN America, “Ukrainian Culture Under Attack: Erasure of Ukrainian Culture in Russia’s War Against Ukraine.”

⁶² “The occupiers took away valuable pre-revolutionary books from the Kherson library”, Chytomo, November 15, 2022, <https://chytomo.com/en/the-occupiers-took-away-valuable-pre-revolutionary-books-from-the-kherson-library/>

⁶³ Human Rights Watch, “Ukraine: Russians Pillage Kherson Cultural Institutions,” December 20, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/20/ukraine-russians-pillage-kherson-cultural-institutions>

principles, and states should foster respect for the culture and cultural property of all peoples among their armed forces.

Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states that civilians “are entitled, in all circumstances, to respect for their persons, their honor, their family rights, their religious convictions and practices, and their manners and customs.” Article 53 of Additional Protocol One prohibits any attacks of hostility directed against “the historic monuments, works of art, or places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples.” States should also not use such objects for military purposes.

The Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention prohibit the targeting of civilian objects and require states to make every effort to minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects. Other locations of culture, which do not fall under the narrower definition of the 1954 Hague Convention of cultural property, such as local history and culture museums, most libraries, local community and cultural centers, concert venues, sports arenas, and the like, are protected as civilian objects.

In 2017, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2347, which makes the protection of cultural heritage a security imperative and affirmed that directing unlawful attacks against sites and buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, or historic monuments may constitute, under certain circumstances and pursuant to international law a war crime and that perpetrators of such attacks must be brought to justice (para. 4). The Security Council emphasized that the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, and the looting and smuggling of cultural property in the event of armed conflicts, and the attempt to deny historical roots and cultural diversity in this context can fuel and exacerbate conflict and hamper post-conflict national reconciliation, thereby undermining the security, stability, governance, social, economic and cultural development of affected States (Preamble, para. 5).⁶⁴

In a statement on February 22, 2023, three UN special rapporteurs called for the attacks on cultural sites to cease, expressing concern that “this destruction is preventing and will further hinder the exercise of the human right to enjoy and have access to cultural heritage, including places of worship, by the people of Ukraine, thereby restricting their freedom of religion or belief, as well as their right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and to express their cultural identity.”⁶⁵

In December 2022, three special rapporteurs sent a letter to the Russian ambassador in Geneva expressing concern about “the destruction of and damage to many sites, institutions, and objects of cultural, historical and religious importance in Ukraine.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/s/res/2347-%282017%29#:~:text=Condemns%20the%20unlawful%20destruction%20of,sites%2C%20notably%20by%20terrorist%20groups>.

⁶⁵ “Targeted destruction of Ukraine’s culture must stop: UN experts,” OHCHR, February 22, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/02/targeted-destruction-ukraines-culture-must-stop-un-experts#:~:text=Cultural%20resources%20%E2%80%93%20such%20as%20repositories,for%20ideological%20repression%20and%20strict>

⁶⁶ <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=27760>