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## *activists work together to protect and preserve Syria's rich cultural heritage.*

By **Stefanie Dekker**

Comment



A group of scholars, historians and activists have been working to protect and preserve the rich cultural heritage of wartorn Syria.

The members of the initiative, a joint effort by people on the ground and an organisation called The Day After - Heritage Protection Initiative (HPI) have been carrying out the dangerous work in places such as

the Maarat Mosaic Museum, in Idlib province's Maarat al Numan.

They use sandbags in an effort to shield Roman and Byzantine era mosaics, some of which are 600 years old, from bombs and shrapnel.

"We were worried that the museum would get targeted, so we managed to raise some money in early 2015 and we were able to sandbag the museum," Amr Al Azm, the founder and board member of The Day After project - HPI, told Al Jazeera.



**News** ▾ **Programmes** ▾ **Opinion** **Investigations** |  
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protection for these kinds of buildings."

Indeed, a few months after the sandbagging was complete, the Syrian government dropped a barrel bomb on the museum's courtyard.

Yet, the valuable mosaics were left intact, as the sandbags absorbed the impact of the blast.

However, Syria's cultural monuments are threatened not only by bombs.

"Looting is happening in all areas," Al Azam said.

"It's happening in areas of regime control; and in [areas of] opposition control. But, most seriously, it is happening in areas under ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] control."

But throughout this war, nothing has been stolen from the courtyard at the mosaic museum.

And this is happening not only at the mosaic museum - in many places across Syria, people are risking their lives to protect the country's heritage.