

The Great Book Robbery: How Israel intentionally destroyed the Palestinian cultural heritage

By [Palestinian and Jewish Unity](#)

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Between December 1947 and September 1948, up to 760,000 Palestinians were forced to flee or were violently expelled from Palestine. Their towns and cities were taken over; up to 500 villages were either destroyed or occupied by the Zionists. In recent years, following the declassification of most official political documents of the State of Israel from that time, a new critical consciousness – much of it written in Israel – has emerged about the war’s catastrophic and criminal impact on the Palestinian People.

The works of historians and sociologists such as Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé, and Baruch Kimmerling have confronted and explored what really happened in 1948. We now have official confirmation of the violent expulsion of the refugees and of the way that Israel prevented them from returning home.

We also know much more about the Israeli theft of refugee assets, property, land and factories. All these were looted, expropriated and sold, initially to the Israeli army and later to the highest bidder. However, little research has yet been done on the tragic implications of the war for Palestinian culture.

A striking example of Israeli’s intentional destruction of the Palestinian culture is the Israeli National Library’s handling of 70,000 valuable books that were looted from Palestinian homes after the occupants had been driven out. This priceless Palestinian heritage was collected at the Library and declared the ‘property’ of the library, then put away in the National Library’s storerooms. In the 1960s the cataloguing system intentionally erased all the names of the rightful Palestinian owners of these books, replacing them with a new signature, “AP” (“Abandoned Property”). In this way, the books were permanently severed from their rightful owners, effectively erasing a critical part of the Palestinian cultural heritage.

This is only one example of how Israel has proceeded since 1948: seizing the land of Palestine by force, emptying the country of its rightful citizens, stealing the cultural, physical and financial wealth, and attempting the criminal erasure of all traces of the crimes, the victims and of their culture.

Adapted from the film: “The Great Book Robbery”, directed by Benny Brunner and released in May 2012.

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