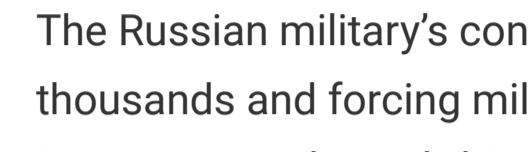
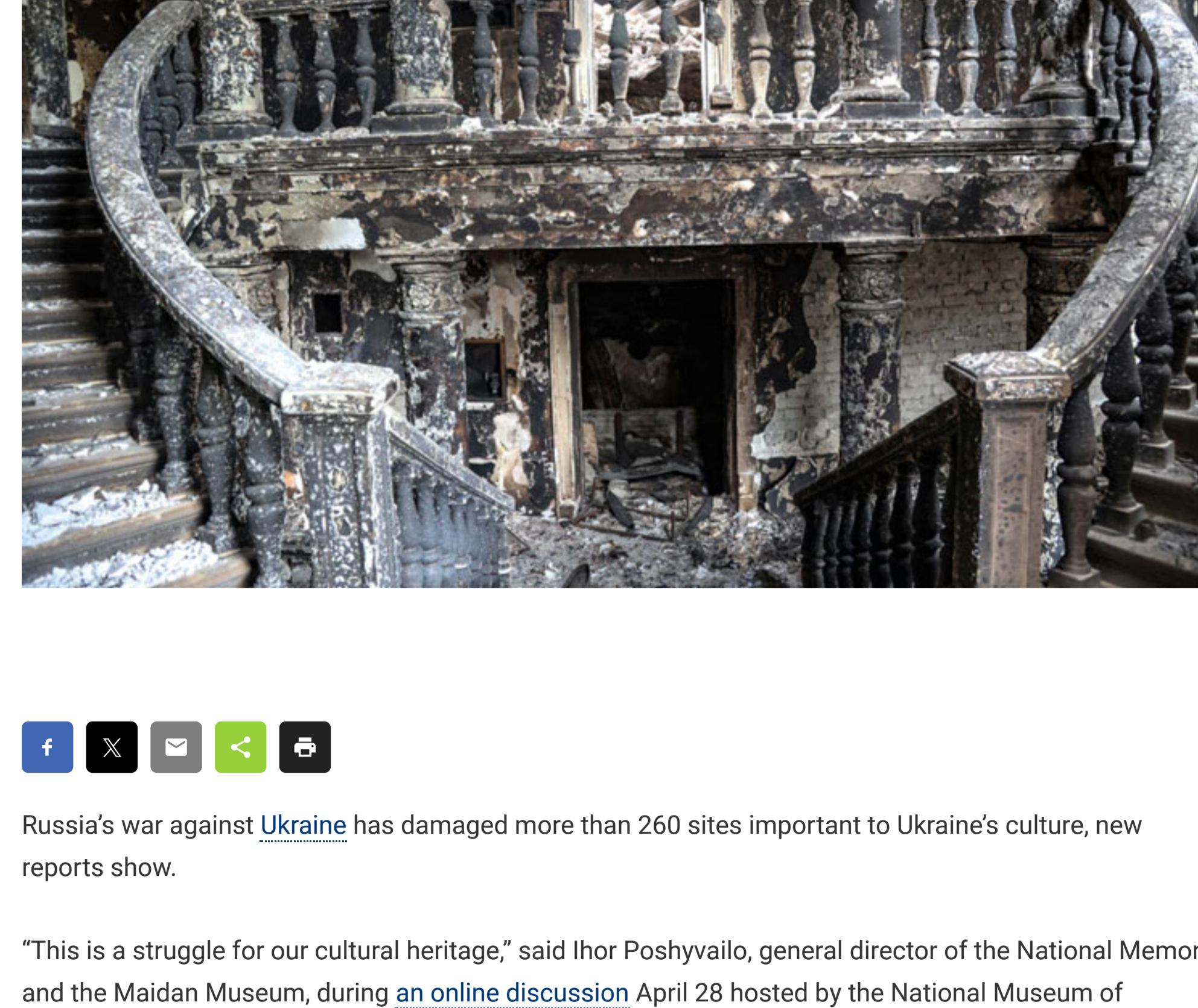




War in Ukraine damages major cultural sites

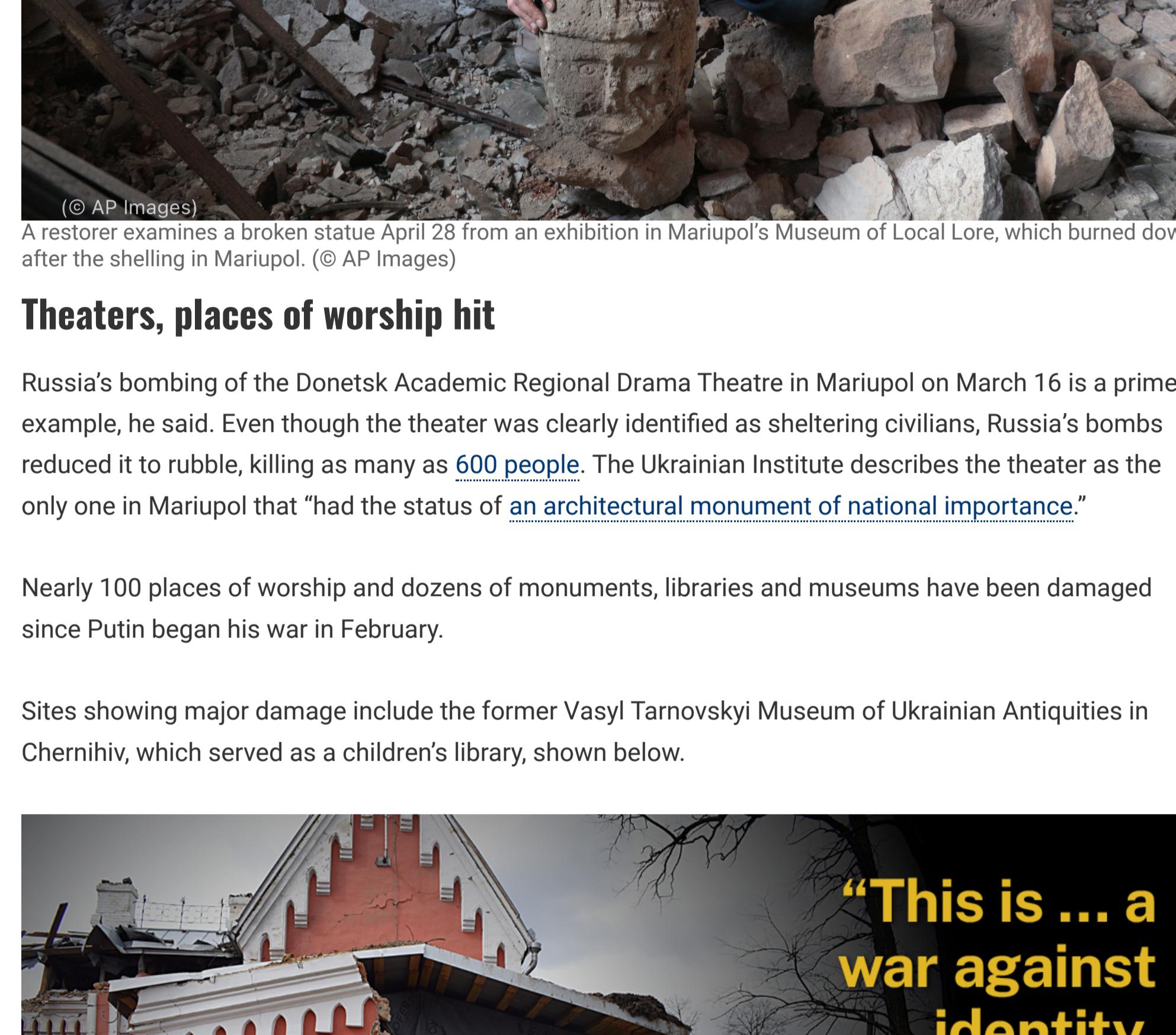
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Russia's war against [Ukraine](#) has damaged more than 260 sites important to Ukraine's culture, new reports show.

"This is a struggle for our cultural heritage," said Ihor Posyvalo, general director of the National Memorial and the Maidan Museum, during an [online discussion](#) April 28 hosted by the National Museum of American Diplomacy.

The Russian military's constant bombing of Ukraine has caused horrific human suffering, killing thousands and forcing millions to flee their homes. Russia's bombs are hitting civilians and sites important to Ukraine's history and cultural identity.

"We should not separate the humanitarian and culture spheres. Culture cannot wait. It needs to be preserved, especially when it is deliberately targeted by an aggressor," Posyvalo said.



(© AP Images)
A restorer examines a broken statue April 28 from an exhibition in Mariupol's Museum of Local Lore, which burned down after the shelling in Mariupol. (© AP Images)

Theaters, places of worship hit

Russia's bombing of the Donetsk Academic Regional Drama Theatre in Mariupol on March 16 is a prime example, he said. Even though the theater was clearly identified as sheltering civilians, Russia's bombs reduced it to rubble, killing as many as [600 people](#). The Ukrainian Institute describes the theater as the only one in Mariupol that "had the status of [an architectural monument of national importance](#)."

Nearly 100 places of worship and dozens of monuments, libraries and museums have been damaged since Putin began his war in February.

Sites showing major damage include the former Vasyly Tarnovskiy Museum of Ukrainian Antiquities in Chernihiv, which served as a children's library, shown below.



(State Dept./M. Gregory)

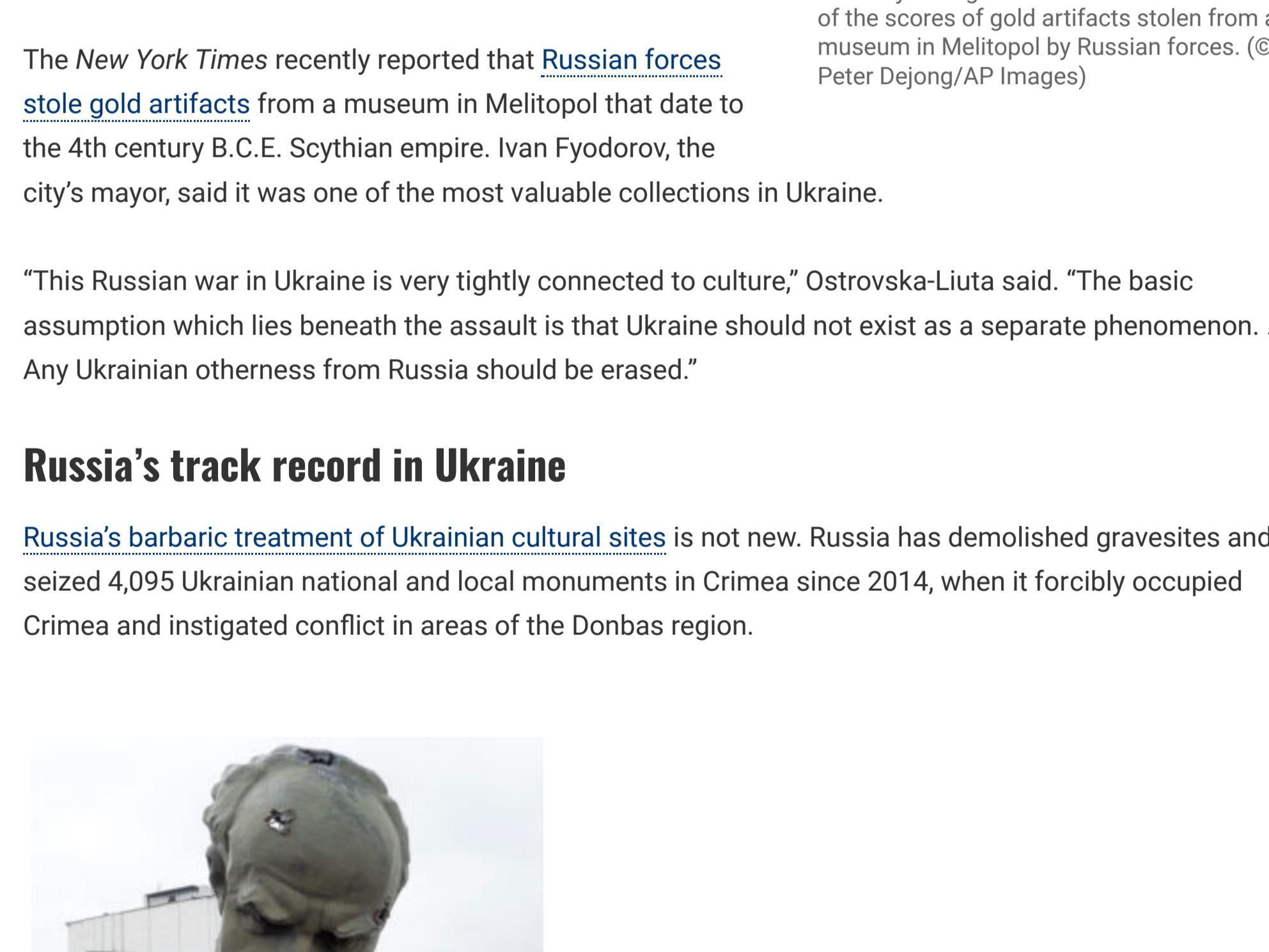
Also damaged were the:

- Museum of Local History in Okhtyrka.
- Ivankiv Museum in Kyiv oblast.
- Monument in Borodyanka to [Taras Shevchenko](#), a revered Ukrainian poet.

"This is not a war for territory or wide political goals," Posyvalo said. "It is a war against identity, memory, culture and our future."

Posyvalo co-founded the Heritage Emergency Response Initiative to assess damage and plan for renovation after the conflict ends.

Meanwhile, art and culture professionals from Ukraine, the United States and around the world are doing what they can to protect Ukraine's cultural heritage from Putin's war.



(© Celestino Arce/NurPhoto/Getty Images)

A priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church looks at damage inside his church in Yasnohorodka, Ukraine, on March 26. (© Celestino Arce/NurPhoto/Getty Images)

Three-pronged attack

Olesia Ostrovska-Liuta, director general of the Mystetskyi Arsenal, a cultural agency, said during the discussion that the attack on Ukraine's culture is composed of three elements:

- Destruction of artifacts.
- Claiming Ukrainian artifacts are Russian instead of Ukrainian, a practice known as "reattribution."
- Illegal seizure of Ukrainian objects by the Russian military.

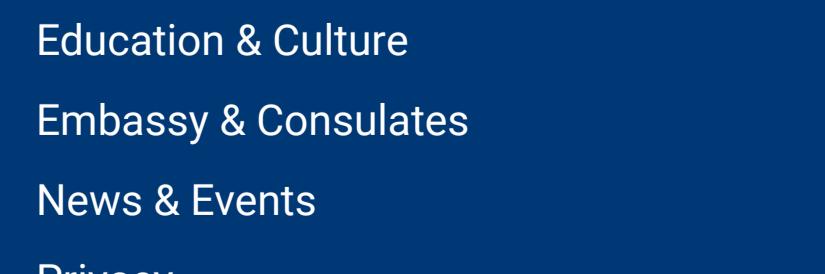
She said Russian soldiers have looted sites in Mariupol and Melitopol.

The *New York Times* recently reported that [Russian forces stole gold artifacts](#) from a museum in Melitopol that date to the 4th century B.C.E. Scythian empire. Ivan Fyodorov, the city's mayor, said it was one of the most valuable collections in Ukraine.

"This Russian war in Ukraine is very tightly connected to culture," Ostrovska-Liuta said. "The basic assumption which lies beneath the assault is that Ukraine should not exist as a separate phenomenon. ... Any Ukrainian otherness from Russia should be erased."

Russia's track record in Ukraine

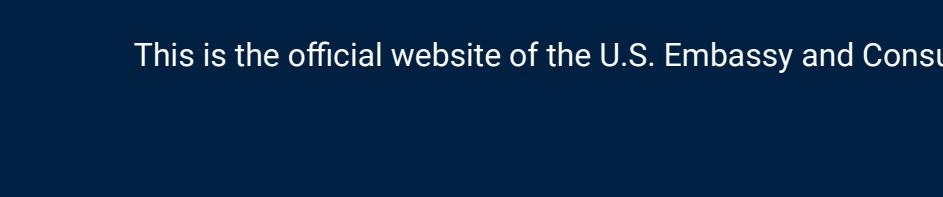
Russia's [barbaric treatment of Ukrainian cultural sites](#) is not new. Russia has demolished gravesites and seized 4,095 Ukrainian national and local monuments in Crimea since 2014, when it forcibly occupied Crimea and instigated conflict in areas of the Donbas region.



A monument to Ukrainian poet and national symbol Taras Shevchenko in the central square of Borodyanka, Ukraine, shown April 6, was damaged by bullets. (© Efrem Lukatsky/AP Images)

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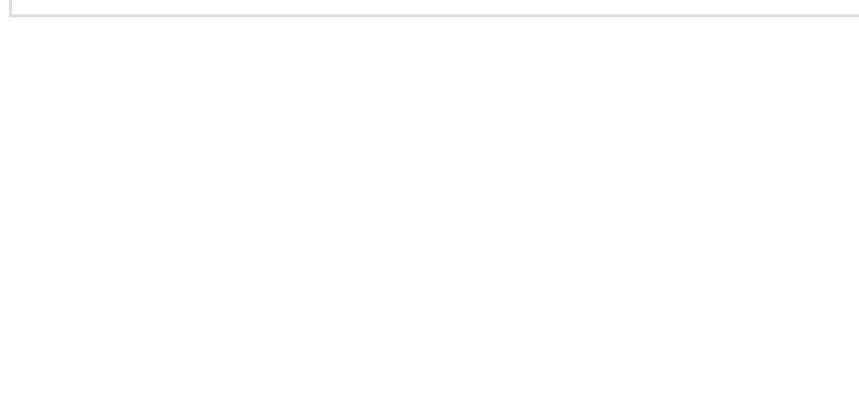


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