

ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives (CHI): Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq¹

NEA-PSHSS-14-001

Weekly Report 73–74 — December 23, 2015 – January 5, 2016

Michael D. Danti, Amr Al-Azm, Allison Cuneo, Susan Penacho,
Bijan Rohani, Marina Gabriel, Kyra Kaercher, Jamie O’Connell

Executive Summary

SARG and Russian airstrikes continued to cause significant negative impact on heritage sites in Syria throughout this reporting period. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) documented four mosques damaged or destroyed in Idlib and Aleppo Governorates. Russian aerial bombardment hit places of worship in the town Kansafra near Jebel Zawiyah in Idlib Governorate as well as Zebdiya neighborhood of Aleppo City and Ma’aret el Artiq in Aleppo Governorate, whereas SARG bombardment hit a mosque in the city of Jisr Al Shoughour in Idlib Governorate. Additionally, further information was released on the SARG barrel bombing of the Ayyubid Citadel and Roman Theater of the UNESCO World Heritage site Ancient City of Bosra in Daraa Governorate, occurred on December 22, 2015. SARG and Russian aerial bombardment has exponentially escalated the collateral damage toll, resulting in high civilian casualties and severe damage to non-combatant property, including residential areas and medical facilities.

In Iraq, ISIL militants were involved in multiple episodes of intentional destruction. Reports emerged that ISIL is now forcing prisoners convicted of minor religious “crimes” to demolish gravestones in both Islamic and Christian cemeteries around Mosul. Furthermore, ISIL militants planted explosives in the village of Tel Kepe, destroying multiple Assyrian Christian homes and an unnamed monastery. These acts fit within ISIL’s established pattern of eroding civilian morale and resistance through acts of cultural destruction and targeted attacks against the heritage of vulnerable minority populations. The use of forced cultural destruction as a punishment, however, is unprecedented.

In-country Iraqi sources report that ISIL militants continue to engage in the mining of antiquities. Information obtained during this reporting period indicates that ISIL is occupying ancient tells near the ancient Assyrian capital city of Ashur (modern Qalaat Sharqat) and digging trenches. While these sources state that the sites were occupied to stop Iraqi forces from entering Qalaat Sharqat, they allege the ISIL trenches are not defensive, but rather are for looting antiquities.

Only one new satellite image was made available during the reporting period, covering southwestern Syria.

¹ This report is based on research conducted by the “Cultural Preservation Initiative: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq.” Weekly reports reflect reporting from a variety of sources and ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives

Key Points

- ISIL forced prisoners to destroy cemeteries in Mosul (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0101**).
- The Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities posted additional photographs of the damage to the citadel caused by recent SARG barrel bombings (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0166 UPDATE**).
- Russian airstrikes damaged or destroyed a mosque in Kansafra, Jebel Zawiya in Idlib Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0169**).
- Regime forces severely damaged the Al Turkman Mosque in Jisr Al Shoughour city in Idlib Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0170**). The Day After Heritage Protection Initiative has produced a report on the damage.
- Russian airstrikes caused severe damage to Batul Mosque in the Zebdiya neighborhood of Aleppo (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0171**).
- ISIL bombed ten Assyrian homes and a monastery in the village of Tel Keppe in northern Iraq (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0102**).
- ISIL destroyed and looted multiple sites to create military positions against Iraqi forces around the ancient site of Qalat Sharqat, also known as Ashur (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0103**).
- The Omar bin al-Khattab Mosque in Ma'arat el-Artiq in Aleppo Governorate was damaged by a Russian airstrike (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0001**).
- Three Sunni mosques in Iraq, including the Ammar bin Yasser Mosque and al-Fath al-Mubeen/Fateh Mosque in Babil Governorate, were bombed and partially destroyed (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 16-0001**)

Heritage Timeline

January 4, 2016

Reuters published an article entitled “**Iraqi Sunni mosques attacked in apparent retaliation for Saudi execution.**” Three Sunni mosques in Iraq were bombed and partially destroyed in suspected retaliation for the execution of Shi’ite cleric Nimr al-Nimr by Saudi Arabia. Two of the mosques identified are the **Ammar bin Yasser Mosque** and the **al-Fath al-Mubeen/Fateh Mosque**. **ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 16-0001**.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-violence-idUSKBN0UI0SE20160104>

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/01/sunni-mosques-bombed-town-south-baghdad-160104102900367.html>

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/01/04/At-least-two-Sunni-mosques-attacked-in-Iraq.html>

- The Art Newspaper* published an article entitled “**UK creates £30m fund to fight cultural destruction**” (by Martin Bailey). The British government has committed £30m to a new Cultural Protection Fund to help preserve antiquities and heritage in global conflict zones, £3m of which is slated for the Iraqi Emergency Heritage Management Project run by the British Museum.
<http://theartnewspaper.com/news/uk-creates-30m-fund-to-fight-cultural-destruction/>
 - Live Science* published an article entitled “**Archaeologists Return to Neanderthal Cave as Isis pushed from Iraq**” (by Owen Jarus). Archaeologists are returning to work in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, particularly the Neanderthal site of Shanidar Cave, after ISIL was pushed from nearby regions.
<http://www.livescience.com/53248-archaeologists-return-to-iraq.html>
- January 3, 2016
- Iranian Students' News Agency* published an article entitled “تعويض سائیداه زینب حرور زینب (س) به دست ایرانی‌ها + تصاویر” (Replacement of Tiles on Shrine of Sayyidah Zaynab by Iranians). Iranian specialists helped replace and restore tiles on the **Shrine of Sayyidah Zaynab** in Set Zaynab, Damascus, which had been damaged by mortars.
[http://www.isna.ir/fa/news/94100201053/سائیداه زینب حرور زینب \(س\) به دست ایرانی‌ها](http://www.isna.ir/fa/news/94100201053/سائیداه زینب حرور زینب (س) به دست ایرانی‌ها)
- January 2, 2016
- Syrian Network for Human Rights** published a post entitled “**Suspected Russian warplanes targeted Omar bin Al Khattab Mosque in Ma'aret Al Artiq town in Aleppo governorate in January 2.**” **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0001.**
<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/01/02/16126/>
- December 30, 2015
- T-Online* published an article entitled “**Wie kann das Weltkulturerbe gerettet werden?**” (How can world heritage be saved?) Mechtild Rössler, Director of the Division for Heritage and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, says that much can still be done to protect cultural heritage despite past destruction and current threats, highlighting art market regulation as an important solution.
http://www.t-online.de/unterhaltung/stars/id_76519782/jahreswechsel-wie-kann-das-weltkulturerbe-gerettet-werden.html

December 29, 2015

Newsweek published an article entitled “**London and New York To Unveil Monuments to ISIS-Hit Ancient Palmyra**” (by Damien Sharkov). In 2016 replicas of the remaining arch of the Temple Bel in Palmyra will be constructed in the two cities.

<http://www.newsweek.com/london-and-new-york-unveil-monuments-isis-hit-city-palmyra-409495>

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/28/palmyra-temple-bel-arch-survived-isis-syria-london-new-york>

- **Cultural Heritage Lawyer** published a blog post entitled “**Antiques from Syria: U.S. Cultural Property Import Stats Raise Suspicion**” (by Rick St. Hilaire). Despite the huge decline in U.S. imports from Syria since 2011, trade statistics from 2014 show that goods classified by importers as “Antiques of an Age Exceeding 100 Years” were the #1 import into the U.S. from Syria.
<http://culturalheritagelawyer.blogspot.in/2015/12/antiques-from-syria-us-cultural.html>

- *The Art Newspaper* published an article entitled “**France builds grand alliance to protect cultural heritage**” (by Vincent Noce).
<http://theartnewspaper.com/news/news/france-builds-grand-alliance-to-protect-cultural-heritage/>

December 28, 2015

Reuters published an article entitled “**Exclusive: Seized documents reveal Islamic State's Department of 'War Spoils'**” (by Jonathan Landay, et al.). ISIL has set up departments to handle “war spoils,” including slaves, stolen antiquities, and the exploitation of natural resources such as oil, creating the trappings of government that enable it to manage large swaths of Syria and Iraq.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-islamic-state-documents-group-exc-idUSKBN0UB0AW20151229>

<https://news.vice.com/article/stolen-antiquities-department-and-syria-ministry-government-islamic-state-style>

December 27, 2015

The Irish Times published an article entitled “**‘We have to save Syria’s culture for all,’ says director of antiquities**” (by Michael Jansen). Maamoun Abdulkarim discusses the state of artifacts and heritage sites in Syria, noting that he has had to secure not only artifacts from Damascus museums, but also 300,000 objects have been brought to the capital from provincial museums and sites.

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/middle-east/we-have-to-save-syria-s-culture-for-all-says-director-of-antiquities-1.2477871>

- TV 5 Monde* published an article and video entitled “**Pillage des sites antiques: ‘Il faut éradiquer le marché’**” (Looting of ancient sites: ‘We must eradicate the market’) (by Liliane Charrier). ICOM Program Director France Desmarais asserts that to stop the looting of archaeological sites, the market for stolen antiquities must be eradicated. He notes that all conflict areas are affected by looting, and that the problem of looting is a fixture of war in general, not only of a specific armed group like ISIS.

<http://information.tv5monde.com/info/comment-lutter-contre-le-traffic-des-oeuvres-d-art-77202>
 - The New York Times* published an article entitled “**Using Lasers to Preserve Antiquities Threatened by IS**” (by Stephen Farrell). Multiple organizations, including the World Monuments Fund, CyArk, and the Institute for Digital Archaeology, are trying to create 3-D records of at-risk heritage sites to preserve them for future generations. The Institute for Digital Archaeology will make a replica of the arch from the entrance of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra using the world’s largest 3D printer. The replica will be erected in Trafalgar Square in London in April 2016.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/28/arts/design/using-laser-scanners-to-preserve-antiquities-in-isiss-cross-hairs.html>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/visualarts/architecture/article4650820.ece>

<http://savingantiquities.org/digital-reconstructions/>
- December 26, 2015
- Al Arabiya* published an article entitled “**Pope slams destruction of cultural heritage.**” Pope Francis denounced the destruction of cultural heritage in his Christmas message.
- <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/world/2015/12/26/Pope-slams-destruction-of-cultural-heritage.html>
- The Creators Project** published a post entitled “**The Year in Art Crime.**” The post lists significant instances of crime in the art world, including numerous acts of destruction in Syria by groups like ISIL. To combat these catastrophes, artists and designers are seeking methods of preserving the memory of lost and destroyed sites and objects, like the founders of the New Palmyra project, who have created digital 3D-models of monuments in Palmyra.

<https://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/best-of-2015-the-year-in-art-crime>

- The *Assyrian International News Agency* published an article entitled **“ISIS Bomb Assyrian Homes, Monastery in Iraq, Cemeteries Vandalized.”** ISIL bombed ten Assyrian homes and a monastery in the Assyrian village of Tel Kepe in northern Iraq. The blasts injured several people. According to residents, ISIS threatened to bomb Assyrian homes in other villages in the area. **ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0102.**
<http://www.aina.org/news/20151226052124.htm>
- December 25, 2015

Anadolu Agency published a report entitled **“Russian jets target mosque during Friday prayer, kill five in Syria’s Aleppo.”** Airstrikes caused severe damage to Batul Mosque in the Zebdiya neighborhood of Aleppo. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0171.**
<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/russian-jets-target-mosque-kill-five-in-syria-s-aleppo/496477>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCOtcs_BJPs
<http://www.dailysabah.com/mideast/2015/12/25/russian-jets-target-mosque-during-friday-prayer-kill-five-in-syrias-aleppo>
- December 24, 2015

Heritage for Peace published their monthly report on damage to Syria’s heritage.
<http://www.heritageforpeace.org/syria-culture-and-heritage/damage-to-cultural-heritage/previous-damage-newsletters/damage-to-syrias-heritage-24-december-2015/>
- Washington City Paper* published an article entitled **“At the AAAS, A Look at Artistic Losses in Syria and Iraq—and Efforts to Prevent Them”** (by Louis Jacobson). An exhibit at the American Association for the Advancement of Science—“Ancient History/Modern Destruction: Using Science and Technology to Study Cultural Heritage Loss”—relates the largely untold story of scholars and technical experts who are trying, against the geopolitical odds, to save ancient structures and items of historical importance from the ravages of war and zealotry.
<http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/artsdesk/visual-arts/2015/12/24/at-the-aaas-a-look-at-artistic-losses-in-syria-and-iraq-and-efforts-to-prevent-them/>
- UNESCO** issued a press release entitled **“Director-General condemns destruction of vestiges in the Ancient City of Bosra, a Syrian World Heritage site.”** The Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, has condemned the destruction of Bosra.
<http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1416>

- *The Telegraph* published an article entitled “**Syrian regime ‘bombs Unesco world heritage site’**” (by Josie Ensor), discussing the damage to ancient Bosra as well as other incidents of cultural heritage damage in Syria.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/12068392/Syrian-regime-bombs-UNESCO-world-heritage-site.html>

December 23, 2015

The Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities posted several more photos on Facebook showing damage to the Ayyubid Citadel and Roman Theater in Bosra that took place on December 22, 2015.

ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0166 UPDATE.

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1707887589454400&id=1642112122698614

- *Orient News* posted an interview entitled “النظام بـقـصـف بـالـبـارـمـيـل الـمـتـفـجـرة قـلـعة بـصـرـى الشـام بـرـيـف دـعـا” (Regime bombed Bosra al-Sham Castle, Daraa, with barrel bombs) with the director of Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities, who describes the damage to the site and pleads for assistance.

<https://youtu.be/3melGaveV-s>

- *Niqash* published an article entitled “**More than broken bits of pottery: In Iraq, archeologists explore history's potential to unite a divided land**” (by Ahmad Thamer Jihad). Dr. Abdulmir al-Hamdani, an Iraqi archaeologist, argues that the best way to combat the damage done to Iraq's antiquities is to put more effort into exploring and maintaining the ancient sites that extremists cannot reach.

<http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/society/5185>

- *Naharnet* published an article entitled “**IS Smuggling Syrian Artifacts through Lebanon.**” An ISIL member recently arrested in Lebanon confessed to smuggling artifacts, gold, weapons, and narcotics in shipments of meat from Syria to a butcher in Tripoli, Lebanon.

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/197773-report-is-smuggling-syrian-artifacts-through-lebanon>

- The **Syrian Network for Human Rights** published a report entitled “**Regime forces targeted Al Turkman Mosque in Jisr Al Shoughour city in Idlib governorate on December 23.**” SNHR says regime warplanes fired missiles on the mosque, damaging it severely. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0170.**

<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2015/12/24/15871/>

December 22, 2015

The **Embassy of the United States in Baghdad, Iraq** released a statement entitled “**Department of State Supports the Conservation of the Iconic Ishtar Gate at Iraq’s Ancient City of Babylon,**” announcing \$530,000 of funding to the World Monuments Fund for the rehabilitation and preservation of the Ishtar Gate.

http://iraq.usembassy.gov/mobile//pr_122215.html

- **DGAM** published a post entitled “**Training on using new techniques in archaeological documentation.**” DGAM staff from several departments were trained to use new techniques in archaeological documentation and architectural elevation, including using computer tools that perform photogrammetric processing of digital images and generate life-size 3D spatial data.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1889>

December 20, 2015

Nieuwsuur published a video on Facebook entitled “**Dochter van onthoofde archeoloog Palmyra nog vol pijn**” (Daughter of decapitated Palmyra archaeologist still full of pain). Zenobia, the daughter of Khaled Asaad, is interviewed and reporters also visited the storage of the Syrian National Museum, where artifacts from across the country have been brought for safekeeping.

<https://www.facebook.com/Nieuwsuur/videos/1050614224983447/>

- *Orient Net* published an article entitled “**Russian jets destroy mosque in Idlib southern countryside,**” reporting that airstrikes appear to have damaged or destroyed a mosque in Kansafra in Jebel Zawiya, Idlib. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0169.**
http://orient-news.net/en/news_show/97513/0/Russian-jets-destroy-mosque-in-Idlib-southern-countryside

Military and Political Context

The main theaters of military operations during the reporting period in Syria were:

1. Aleppo Governorate:
 - During the reporting period, Russian airstrikes along the rebel held frontline with Kurdish forces in northwestern Aleppo allowed the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces to capture at least three villages near the rebel-held town of Azzaz, including the village of Tanab from Al-Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham.²
 - On December 25, Russian airstrikes struck several areas in the old city of Homs, including the Batul Mosque in the opposition held area of Zebdiya. Other districts hit during the airstrikes included Bustan al-Qasr, Karm Turab, and Bab Kansirin. Airstrikes also targeted hospitals in the town of Azzaz, killing as many as 14 people.³
 - On December 27, a coalition of moderate Free Syrian Army groups and Kurdish YPG fighters, backed by US-led coalition airstrikes, captured the Tishrin Dam from ISIL militants. The capturing of the Tishrin Dam helps to isolate ISIL strongholds in northern Aleppo from the group's territories east of the Euphrates River, including the city of Raqqa. The coalition also captured a large area south of Kobani.⁴
 - On December 30, ISIL militants carried out a car bombing in the city of Azzaz.⁵
 - On January 3, the Syrian 'insurgent' group Failaq al-Sham announced that it was pulling out of the coalition known as the Army of Conquest in order to redeploy around Aleppo, where pro-government forces have recently intensified assaults.⁶
 - On January 3, the French military announced that its airstrikes had destroyed an ISIL site used for producing missiles and storing weapons in an area east of Aleppo.⁷
2. Homs Governorate:
 - During the reporting period, ongoing airstrikes and shelling were reported in the city of Palmyra striking several civilian areas including the National Hospital.⁸
 - On December 28, two bombings in the city of Homs killed at least 19 people and wounded at least 90 more. The bombings, which struck the district of Zahraa, are the second major attack in the city since a ceasefire was declared earlier in December. No group has yet taken responsibility for the attack.⁹
 - On December 29, Syrian regime forces retook several towns and positions around in the town of Maheen, southeast of the city of Homs. Protests also occurred in the city

² <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/01/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-december-22.html> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-aleppo-idUSKBN0UF1VU20160101>

³ <http://www.dailysabah.com/mideast/2015/12/25/russian-jets-target-mosque-during-friday-prayer-kill-five-in-syrias-aleppo> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/12/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-december-18.html>

⁴ <http://www.conflict-news.com/isis-losses-continue-in-iraq-and-syria/> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-alliance-idUSKBN0U90DE20151226>

⁵ http://www.orient-news.net/en/news_show/98434/0/ISIS-attacks-Azaz-with-car-bomb-in-Aleppo

⁶ <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN0UH08Q20160103>

⁷ http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_FRANCE_SYRIA

⁸ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2015/12/28/16002/> ; <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2015/12/27/15967/> ; <https://twitter.com/snhr/status/681261292452200452> ; <https://twitter.com/snhr/status/681908449324707841> ; <http://aranews.net/2016/01/palmyra-dozens-of-civilian-casualties-reported-in-fresh-syrian-airstrikes/>

⁹ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2015/12/28/15997/> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35188344> ; <http://www.wsj.com/articles/double-bombing-kills-at-least-19-in-homs-1451316449>

of Homs against the governor and the head of the security committee following the bombings that struck the district of Zahraa.¹⁰

- On January 5, Abu Rateb al-Homsy, the provincial leader of the Islamist opposition group Ahrar al-Sham, was assassinated by unidentified gunmen in the village of Al-Farhaniyah, near the town of Talbiseh.¹¹

3. Damascus Governorate:

- During the reporting period, reports began to surface of an ongoing siege in the town of Madaya.¹²
- On December 24, an airstrike targeting a meeting of the Syrian rebel-group Jaysh al-Islam killed the group's founder, Zahroun Alloush, in the Eastern Ghouta countryside. The deputy leader of the group was also killed in the strike.¹³
- On December 26, the evacuation of thousands of rebel fighters and their families from in and around Yarmouk refugee camp was put "on hold." According to the BBC, militants along with their families were "due to be bussed to areas under the control of their respective groups." The delay is being blamed on safety issues and the recent death of the leader of Jaysh al-Islam in an airstrike. Al Arabiya reported that ISIL militants were included in the number of those set to evacuate the area.¹⁴

4. Daraa Governorate:

- On December 29, Syrian regime forces, backed by pro-government militias, Hezbollah, and government airstrikes, retook the "key southern military base" of Brigade 82 in the town of Sheikh al-Maskeen from opposition forces, including Al-Nusra Front.¹⁵
- On December 30, Syrian regime forces entered the rebel-held town of Sheikh al-Maskeen and were present in the town's main square as well as the eastern and northern neighborhoods. The recapturing of the town is a strategic victory for the Syrian regime as Sheikh al-Maskeen lies on a major supply route between the Syrian capital of Damascus and the city of Daraa. Rebel forces on the ground reported the "heaviest" level of Russian airstrikes thus far in Daraa.¹⁶

5. Raqqa Governorate:

- During the reporting period, the Syrian activist group Raqqa is Being Silently Slaughtered confirmed the first known execution of a female journalist by ISIL.¹⁷
- On December 25, British airstrikes targeted their first ISIL militant target, striking a checkpoint outside of the group's stronghold of Raqqa.¹⁸
- On December 30, Russia announced that it had bombed a meeting of senior ISIL leaders near Raqqa after they received a tip from rebel groups. The date of the airstrike was not announced.¹⁹

¹⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/12/29/world/middleeast/ap-ml-syria.html> ; <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=41624>

¹¹ <http://dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Jan-06/330519-gunmen-assassinate-commander-of-syrian-rebel-group.ashx>

¹² <http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/despite-ceasefire-syrians-starve-besieged-town>

¹³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35178684>

¹⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35182306> ; <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/12/26/Deal-to-evacuate-Syrian-ISIL-militants-is-halted-Hezbollah-TV.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/12/29/world/middleeast/ap-ml-syria.html>

¹⁶ <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN0UD0Z120151230> ; <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=41732>

¹⁷ <http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2016/01/05/first-known-execution-of-a-female-citizen-journalist-by-isis-takes-the-life-of-ruqia-hassan/>

¹⁸ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/british-air-strikes-kill-first-isis-militants-in-syria-as-checkpoint-near-raqqa-blown-up-on-a6789526.html>

- On January 3, Arab and Kurdish forces killed at least 16 ISIL militants during clashes near the town of Ayn Issa, north of the ISIL stronghold of Raqqa.²⁰
- On January 4, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces captured six villages and farms close to the town of Ayn Issa, approximately 30 miles north of the ISIL stronghold of Raqqa.²¹
- 6. Rif Dimashq Governorate:
 - On December 28, 120 Sunni rebels and civilians were evacuated from the district of Zabadani and transported to Lebanon under a UN-brokered truce. Some news outlets reported that a number of those evacuated included residents of the besieged town of Madaya.²²
- 7. Idlib Governorate:
 - On December 28, more than 300 wounded militants and their families were evacuated from the majority-Shia besieged towns of Fouaa and Kfraya under a UN-brokered truce. Those evacuated were transported to Turkey.²³
- 8. Hasakah Governorate:
 - On December 30, three suicide bombings targeted restaurants in the city of Qamishli, killing at least 16 people and wounding 30 more. The city of Qamishli, near the border with Turkey, is under shared control by Syrian regime forces and Kurdish authorities. ISIL later claimed responsibility for the attack.²⁴
- 9. Quneitra Governorate:
 - During the reporting period, ongoing clashes between Syrian regime and rebel forces occurred with Syrian rebels retaking and holding much of the governorate of Quneitra, including parts of the Golan Heights. Syrian regime forces continue to control the towns of al-Baath and Khan Arnabah.²⁵

Other Key Points:

- During the reporting period, the US-led coalition conducted airstrikes in the areas of Aleppo, Al-Hawl, Ayn Isa, Deir Ez Zor, Hasakah, Manbij, Mar'a, Raqqa, and Washiyah.²⁶
- Russian airstrikes targeted rebel held positions in Aleppo, Damascus, Daraa, Hama, Homs, and Idlib governorates. A limited number of airstrikes targeted ISIL positions in Homs, Aleppo, and Deir ez-Zor. Additional Russian airstrikes also supported Kurdish ground forces in operations against Syrian opposition forces in Aleppo governorate.²⁷

¹⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/12/30/world/europe/ap-eu-russia-syria.html>

²⁰ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/01/03/Arab-Kurd-fighters-kill-16-is-jihadists-near-Syria-capital-.html>

²¹ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-syria-raqqa-idUKKBN0UI1RL20160104>

²² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35188344> ; <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52911>

²³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/29/world/middleeast/evacuations-aim-to-ease-path-to-talks-in-syria-war.html>

²⁴ <http://news.yahoo.com/nine-killed-least-25-injured-three-blasts-northeast-222027457.html>

²⁵ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/01/assad-forces-build-troops-syrian-golan-160103031544139.html> ; <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-syria-golan-idUKKBN0UE10520151231>

²⁶ See: "US DOD News Release Military Strikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq." *Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve*. News Release No: [637840](#), [637964](#), [638012](#), [638024](#), [638029](#), [638071](#), [639432](#), [639538](#), [639700](#), [639766](#), [639772](#), [639809](#), [639897](#)

²⁷ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/12/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-december-18.html> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/01/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-december-22.html>

- On December 23, Amnesty International published a report accusing Russia of killing hundreds of civilians and causing massive destruction on civilian sites, including residential areas and medical facilities, across Syria as a result of ongoing indiscriminate airstrikes.²⁸
- On December 30, Syrian authorities arrested two prominent Syrian opposition leaders from the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change as they attempted to travel to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for another meeting of opposition groups.²⁹
- On January 4, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons announced that it had completed the disposal of chemical weapons turned over by the Syrian government. However, reports continue to surface of Syrian regime forces using chemical weapons, including the presence of Sarin gas, in the ongoing conflict.³⁰

The main theaters of military operations during the reporting period in Iraq were:

1. Anbar Governorate:

- On December 26, Iraqi forces retook a ‘former government compound’ in the city of Ramadi from ISIL militants. According to an Iraqi spokesman, the capturing of the government compound “heralded the defeat of [ISIL] in the city”, however pockets of ISIL resistance groups remain. Several major ISIL commanders were reported killed in the fighting. The status of major sites in the city, including the Justice Palace and the Grand Mosque, remains unknown.³¹
- On December 29, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi visited the city of Ramadi despite continuing reports of clashes and ISIL suicide attacks against Iraqi forces in some areas. On the same day, 500 Sunni tribal fighters, alongside the Iraqi army, took over “security duties” from Iraqi elite counter-terrorism forces.³²
- On January 1, ISIL militants carried out a suicide bombing attack on an Iraqi military base near the city of Ramadi, killing three Iraqi soldiers and wounding 17. The Iraqi military was able to counter the attack with the help of US-led Coalition airstrikes.³³
- From January 3-5, ISIL militants staged repeated attacks against Iraqi troops and allied tribal fighters outside the town of Haditha, killing at least 45 troops and wounding 50 more.³⁴

²⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/12/syria-russias-shameful-failure-to-acknowledge-civilian-killings/>

²⁹ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/2/0/177775/World/0/Syria-arrests-opposition-figures-on-way-to-Riyadh-.aspx>

³⁰ <https://www.opcw.org/news/article/destruction-of-syrian-chemical-weapons-completed/>; <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/30/u-s-diplomat-syria-has-continued-to-use-chemical-weapons-on-its-own-people/>; <http://news.yahoo.com/un-watchdog-finds-traces-syria-sarin-gas-exposure-233353245.html>; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35231663>

³¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35186105>; <http://www.newsweek.com/iraq-declares-victory-over-islamic-state-ramadi-409190>; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/12/iraqi-security-forces-clear-ramadis.html>; <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/12/29/Top-ISIS-commanders-killed-in-Ramadi-who-were-they-.html>

³² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35192619>; <http://news.yahoo.com/sunni-tribal-fighters-deployed-reconquered-ramadi-areas-141209437.html>

³³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35210440>; <http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/02/middleeast/iraq-ramadi-isis-suicide-attack-on-army-base/index.html>

³⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/following-islamic-state-collapse-in-ramadi-militants-intensify-siege-of-haditha/2016/01/05/7abf4840-b316-11e5-8abc-d09392edc612_story.html; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/01/iraq-situation-report-december-22-2015.html>

- On January 5, ISIL militants took responsibility for a double suicide bombing attack that killed eight Iraqi soldiers at a military post in the town of Al-Nakhib near the border with Saudi Arabia.³⁵
- 2. Baghdad Governorate:
 - On December 23, several explosions struck commercial areas across the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, killing at least 15 civilians. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.³⁶
 - On January 3, rocket fire struck the Saudi Arabian embassy in Baghdad following the mass execution of 46 prisoners in Saudi Arabia including prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr. The embassy had just re-opened on January 1, after being closed in 1990 following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.³⁷
- 3. Diyala Governorate:
 - On December 23, two explosions struck the Shia-majority town of Khalis, killing seven people and wounding 18 more. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.³⁸
- 4. Babil Governorate:
 - On January 3, at least two Sunni mosques were attacked, including one in the city of Hilla and another in the village of Sinjar, killing at least two people. A Sunni cleric was also assassinated in the city of Iskandariya (Alexandria). No group has yet taken responsibility for the attack.³⁹
- 5. Ninawa Governorate:
 - On December 28, the activist group Mosul Eye released a report regarding increasing financial stress on ISIL in their stronghold of Mosul. According to the group, ISIL has taken measures such as cutting fighters salaries by 50% and adding additional fines to civilians in order to increase their funding.⁴⁰
 - On December 30, Iraq once again called for Turkey to remove its remaining troops at Bashiqa military camp or face military action. Turkey has removed some troops from the camp and relocated them to elsewhere in northern Iraq, however an unknown number of Turkish troops remain.⁴¹

³⁵ <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2480869&Language=en>

³⁶ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Dec-23/328740-iraq-car-bombings-kill-at-least-7-north-of-baghdad.ashx>

³⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXI8Z9BwGdw> ; <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/01/01/Saudi-Arabia-reopens-Baghdad-embassy.html>

³⁸ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Dec-23/328740-iraq-car-bombings-kill-at-least-7-north-of-baghdad.ashx>

³⁹ <http://in.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-iraq-violence-idINKBN0UI0U320160104> ; <http://news.yahoo.com/two-sunni-mosques-bombed-muezzin-killed-iraq-police-072829078.html> ; <http://uk.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-iraq-violence-idUKKBN0UI0U320160105> ; <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/01/sunni-mosques-bombed-town-south-baghdad-160104102900367.html> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/01/iraq-situation-report-december-22-2015.html>

⁴⁰ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=837459759708861&id=552514844870022&substory_index=0

⁴¹ <http://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2015/12/30/iraq-threatens-turkey-with-military-action-until-all-troops-are-withdrawn> ; <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/12/31/Abadi-says-Turkey-not-respecting-agreement-to-withdraw-troops.html>

6. Salah ad Din Governorate:

- On January 3, ISIL militants attempted to carry out an attack on the military base of Camp Speicher near eastern Tikrit, killing 20 police officers and wounding ten others. Iraqi police forces were eventually able to repel the attack.⁴²

Other Key Points:

- During the reporting period, the US-led coalition conducted airstrikes in the areas of Albu Hayat, Baghdadi, Fallujah, Kisik, Haditha, Huwayjah, Habbaniyah, Hit, Makhmur, Mosul, Qayyarah, Ramadi, Sinjar, Sultan Abdallah, and Tal Afar.⁴³
- On January 4, Shia demonstrators protested against the January 2 execution of Saudi Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr in Baghdad and other southern cities across Iraq.⁴⁴

Other Key Points:

- On December 26, an audio message purported to be of ISIL-leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi surfaced. The message encouraged ISIL militants to continue their fight.⁴⁵
- On December 27, Syrian filmmaker and activist Naji al-Jerf was assassinated in Gaziantep, Turkey. Naji al-Jerf was reportedly a member of the Syrian activist group Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, and produced documentaries hostile to ISIL and the Assad regime. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the killing of al-Jerf.⁴⁶
- On December 29, it was reported that US-led coalition airstrikes killed 10 ISIL commanders in Iraq and Syria in December, including individuals involved in the November terrorist attacks in Paris.⁴⁷
- On January 3, ISIL militants released a video showing the executions of five men accused of being British spies.⁴⁸
- On January 4, ISIL militants in Libya seized the coastal town of Bin Jawad. In addition, ISIL militants attacked an oil export terminal in As Sidr, killing two guards and setting fire to an oil storage tank. The attack on As Sidr continued on January 5.⁴⁹

⁴² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35217319> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/01/iraq-situation-report-december-22-2015.html>

⁴³ See: "US DOD News Release Military Strikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq". *Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve*. News Release No: [637840](#), [637964](#), [638012](#), [638024](#), [638029](#), [638071](#), [639432](#), [639538](#), [639700](#), [639762](#), [639766](#), [639772](#), [639809](#), [639700](#), [639762](#), [639766](#), [639772](#), [639809](#), [639897](#)

⁴⁴ <http://in.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-iraq-violence-idINKBN0UI0U320160104>

⁴⁵ <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/26/middleeast/isis-syria-iraq/>

⁴⁶ <http://news.yahoo.com/syria-anti-documentary-maker-assassinated-turkey-183829324.html> ; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/naji-jerf-dead_56817dbce4b0b958f65a03ff

⁴⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35195219>

⁴⁸ <http://www.ibtimes.com/new-isis-video-shows-execution-five-alleged-british-spies-2247127>

⁴⁹ <http://www.france24.com/en/20160104-libya-islamic-state-group-oil-ben-jawad> ; <http://af.reuters.com/article/libyaNews/idAFL8N14O28820160104> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35220281> ; <http://af.reuters.com/article/libyaNews/idAFL8N14P1FP20160105>

Satellite Imagery and Geospatial Analysis

During this reporting period only one new DigitalGlobe satellite image was released, taken December 24, 2015 over the southwestern portion of Syria. There are only four locations within the CHI inventory within the area covered. Each of these villages display military activity in the form of defensive embankments and trenches. These defensive encampments are not new, however, and predate the conflict.

As outlined in ASOR CHI Weekly Report 69–70 there were reported increases in Russian and Syrian airstrikes within Aleppo Governorate. This activity is only minimally visible in the satellite imagery taken December 11, 2015 that covered the countryside west of Aleppo. This bombardment took place between November 22, 2015 and December 11, 2015. There were only three villages that showed clear damage due to aerial bombardment, Khirbet Kadim, Barqum, and Abu Sheilam, all locations located 10-20 km southwest of the city of Aleppo. These sites all showed very minor damage to the villages, with a few buildings destroyed in each location.

Incident Reports: Syria

SHI 15-0166 - UPDATE

Report Date: December 23, 2015

Site Name: Bosra Ayyubid Citadel (الأيوبية القلعة), Bosra Roman Theater (الروماني المسرح)

Date of Incident: December 22, 2015

Location: Bosra, Daraa Governorate, Syria

Site Description: According to Burns, this site consists of a second century CE Roman theater with an Ayyubid-era (13th century) citadel/castle built around it. Perhaps built during the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan, who made Bosra capital of the Roman province of Arabia in 106 CE, the theater is one of the most well-preserved structures of its kind anywhere in the Mediterranean world. The seating, for example, is almost entirely intact, in some sections up to the last row before the crowning colonnade. It seats 6000, with standing room for another 2000 to 3000 spectators.

The theater was first fortified during the Umayyad era, with further additions in the Fatimid and Seljuq periods, but most of what remains of the citadel today is Ayyubid construction dating from 1202 to 1251. The Ayyubid fortifications were built as an outer strongpoint to defend Damascus against the Crusader threat from the Jerusalem. They enclose the original Roman theater completely, and include huge towers at the northeast and northwest corners, with five smaller towers between them. The Mamluk sultan Baibars I made further improvements to the structure in 1261.

An initial program of clearance work and research took place from 1946 to 1970. Today, the structure also houses the Folklore Museum.⁵⁰

Site Date: 2nd century CE through 13th century CE

Incident Summary: Barrel bombs dropped from helicopters caused massive damage to the western sections of the Ayyubid Citadel and Roman Theater.

Incident Source and Description: The Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities reported barrel bombs dropped from helicopters caused massive damage to the western section of the Ayyubid Citadel and Roman Theater in central Bosra. Damage includes the collapse of the Ayyubid Citadel's West Tower and collapse of some of the columns in the courtyard overlooking the Roman Theater on the western side. There is also a deep hole in the courtyard. Some of the corridors encircling the theater have partially collapsed or been filled with rubble. The Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities has not been able to gain access to the site because many of the passages have been blocked or are at risk of further collapse.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Burns, Ross (2009) *Monuments of Syria: A Guide*. London: I.B. Tauris. p. 81.

⁵¹ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1707262846183541&id=1642112122698614

APSA reports that the damage was caused by two barrel bombs dropped by SARG helicopters.⁵² The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights confirm the bombs were dropped by SARG.⁵³

Previous incidents of destruction and damage have occurred at this site, including damage to the northern wall of the Citadel caused by barrel bombs in September 2015 (see ASOR CHI Incident Reports **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 14-0037**, **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0057**, **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0133**).

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI remains concerned as to the condition of the Ayyubid Citadel and Roman Theater in Bosra, and will continue to monitor reports for additional updates on any damage to the site.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Bosra Al Sham Department of Antiquities:

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1707262846183541&id=1642112122698614

APSA:

<https://www.facebook.com/apsa2011/timeline/story?ut=43&wstart=0&wend=1451635199&hash=-8751039026776856994&pagefilter=3>

<http://apsa2011.com/apsanew/bosra-the-roman-theater-in-bosra-is-severely-damaged-by-two-barrels-of-tnt-dropped-by-the-syrian-air-forces-on-22-12-2015/>

Syrian Observatory for Human Rights:

<http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=40981>

DGAM:

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1891>

Orient News:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=3melGaveV-s

The Telegraph:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/12068392/Syrian-regime-bombs-UNESCO-world-heritage-site.html>

UNESCO:

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1416>

⁵² <https://www.facebook.com/apsa2011/timeline/story?ut=43&wstart=0&wend=1451635199&hash=-8751039026776856994&pagefilter=3>

⁵³ <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=40981>

Scholarly:

Burns, Ross (2009) *Monuments of Syria: A Guide*. London: I.B. Tauris.



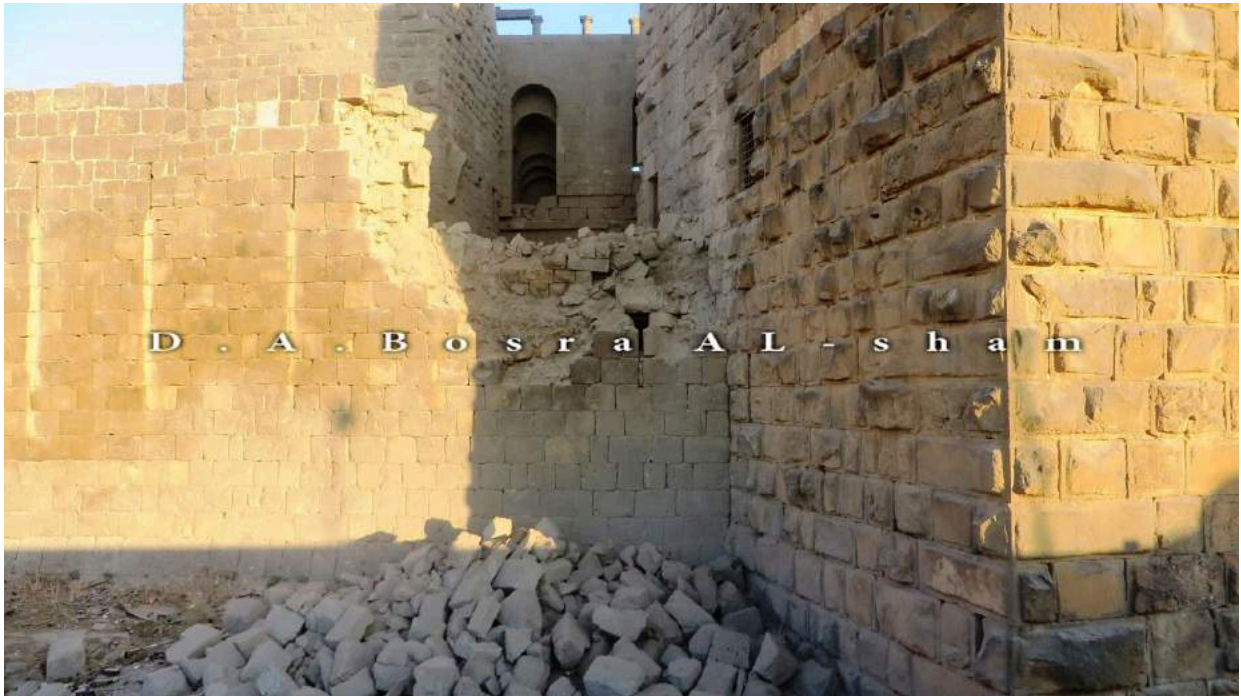
Deep hole in Ayyubid Citadel courtyard (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



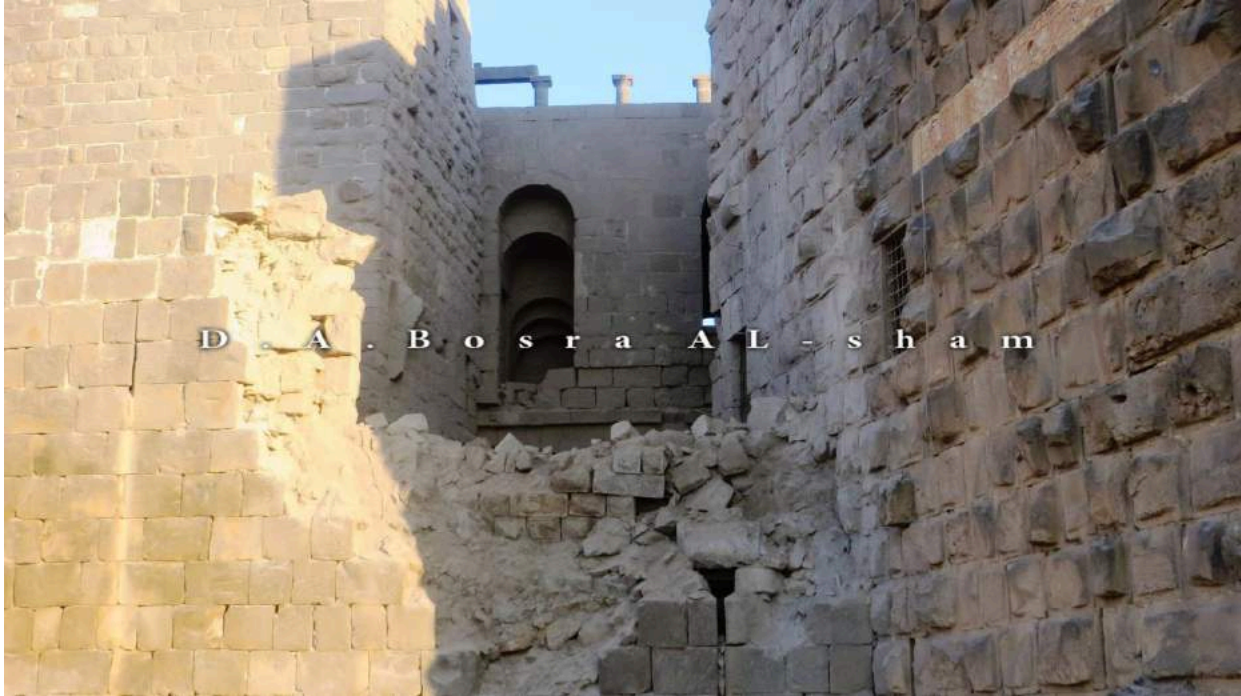
Damage to Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



Collapse of columns in western section of Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



Collapse of western section of Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



Collapse of western section of Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



Damage to corridors in Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



Damage to Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



Damage to Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



Damage to Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



Damage to Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



Damage to Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



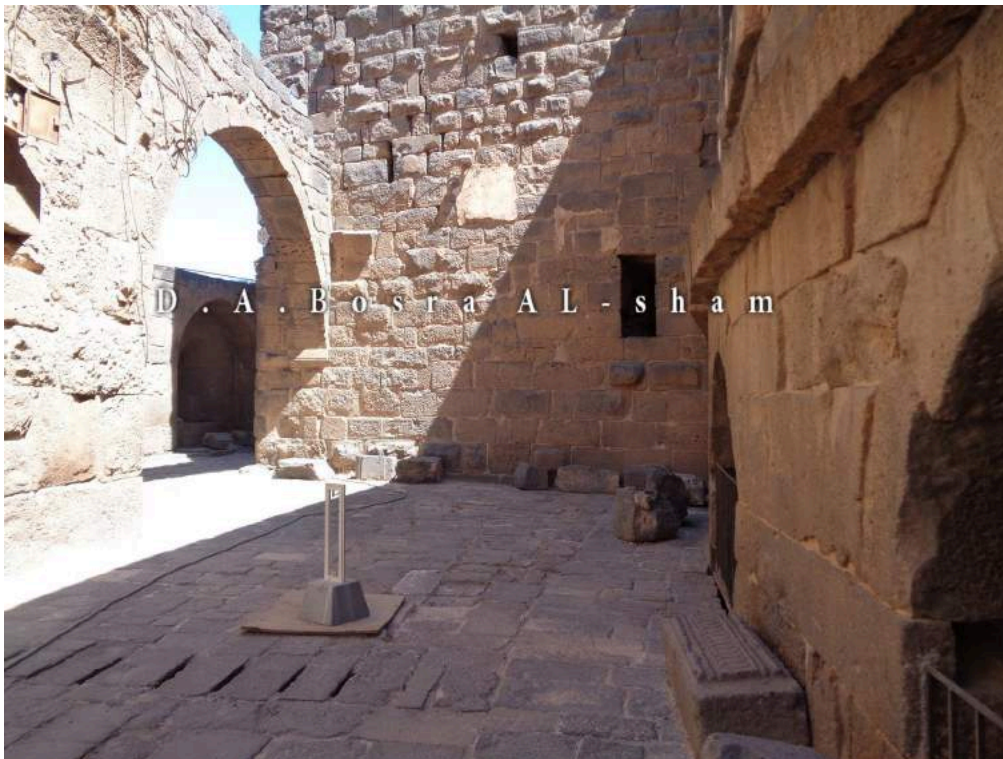
Damage to Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



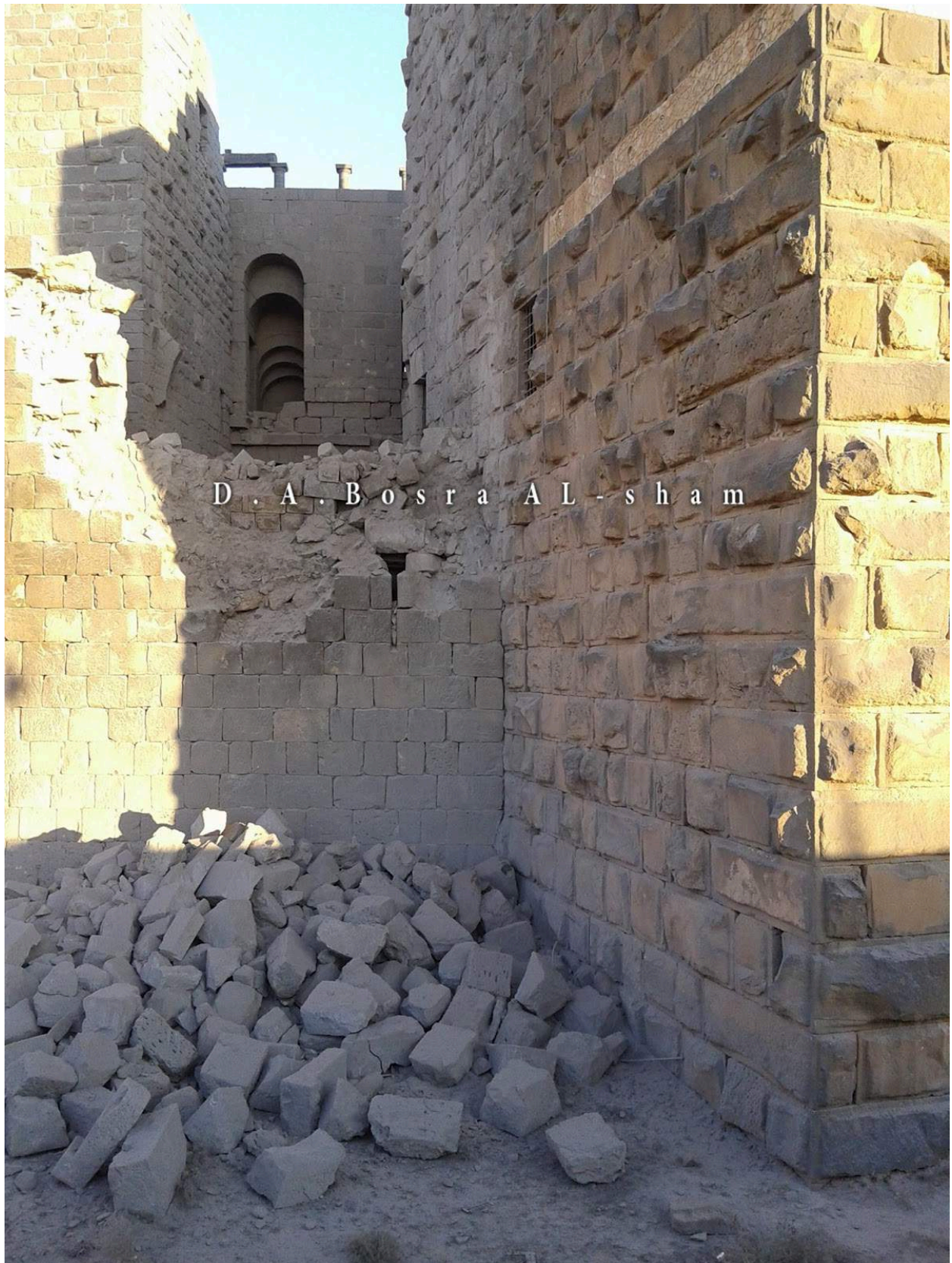
Damage to Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 22, 2015)



Damage to Ayyubid Citadel, Arch in front of Folklore Museum (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 23, 2015)



Ayyubid Citadel, Arch in front of Folklore Museum before bombing (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 23, 2015)



Damage to Ayyubid Citadel (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 23, 2015)



Ayyubid Citadel before the bombing (Bosra al-Sham Department of Antiquities; December 23, 2015)

SHI 15-0169

Report Date: December 23, 2015

Site Name: Mosque of Kinsafra Village (كنصفرة بلدة مسجد)

Date of Incident: December 20, 2015

Location: Kinsafra Village, Ariha Region, Idlib Governorate

Site Description: Mosque

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Russian airstrike destroys mosque.

Incident Source and Description: On December 20, Orient News reported that Russian airstrikes destroyed the mosque of Kinsafra village.⁵⁴ No photographs or other supporting evidence was available at the time of publication. It is difficult to determine the extent of the damage at this time.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI has seen a rise in attacks on civilian sites including mosques by both Russian and SARG forces. ASOR CHI will continue to monitor any reported damage to the mosque in Kinsafra village as well as other mosques in Aleppo governorate in light of the increase in airstrikes on civilian sites since the escalation of the Russian aerial bombardment in support of SARG forces.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Orient News:

http://orient-news.net/en/news_show/97513/0/Russian-jets-destroy-mosque-in-Idlib-southern-countryside

⁵⁴ http://orient-news.net/en/news_show/97513/0/Russian-jets-destroy-mosque-in-Idlib-southern-countryside

SHI 15-0170

Report Date: December 26, 2015

Site Name: Al Turkman Mosque (ركم انالت مسجد)

Date of Incident: December 23, 2015

Location: Jisr Al Shoghour, Idlib Governorate

Site Description: Mosque

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Missiles cause severe damage to mosque.

Incident Source and Description: On December 23, 2015, The Syrian Network for Human Rights reported that Syrian warplanes fired missiles on Al Turkman Mosque in Jisr Al Shoughour city in Idlib governorate, causing severe structural damage.⁵⁵ The Day After Heritage Protection Initiative has produced a brief, illustrated report of the damage on the Al Turkman Mosque below.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI has seen a rise of attacks on civilian sites, including mosques, by SARG forces and Russian allies. As such, ASOR CHI will continue to monitor any reported damage to the Al Turkman Mosque and other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Syrian Network for Human Rights: <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2015/12/24/15871/>

⁵⁵ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2015/12/24/15871/>



The Day After “Heritage Protection Initiative” Site Monitors Project: The Turkmen Mosque in Jisr Al-Shughour January 2016

Jisr Al-Shughour is a city in the northwest part of the province of Idlib. It lies on the Orontes River (*Al-A’assi*) and has a population of 44,322 according to the 2010 census. The city’s strategic location on the highway between Aleppo and Latakia makes it a hub that connects the industrial capital of the country and the coastal cities.

History

Historical records indicate that the city was established in the early 17th century. Some travelers noted the city’s relatively young age as evidenced by the presence of an inn, a mosque, and a bathhouse to serve caravans travelling between Aleppo and the coastal regions. Families then moved to the city to enjoy the public amenities provided by the Ottoman Sultanate.

The city’s historic sites include the Grand Mosque (*Al-Jame’ Al-Kabeer*), the inn (*Al-Khan*), the bathhouse (*Al-Hammam*), and the historic Castle District (*Al-Qala’a*) where it is illegal to demolish or alter any structures due to their historical value. Houses in *Al-Qala’a* district, which date back to the mid to late 19th century, have the distinctive courtyard layout. The district earned its name from sitting on the highest elevation in the old city.

The area of Jisr Al-Shughour boasts many historic sites and bridges across the Orontes River (*Al-A’assi*) dating back to the Roman era. On the way north towards Sheikh I’ssa bathhouse, there is a water fountain from the early 20th century inscribed with the Quranic verse: “*and their Lord will give to them to drink of a Wine Pure and Holy.*”

Turkmen Mosque

The Turkmen Mosque is located in the Turkmen district in the northern part of Jisr Al-Shugoor, and dates back to the Ottoman era. Many areas of the mosque have been updated such as the restrooms and the ablution (*Wudu’*) spaces.

The mosque was targeted by Russian airstrikes on December 23rd, 2015 causing severe damage to the structure and to the surrounding area as shown in these photos:







Reported by:
Eng. Abdul Rahman Alyehia (Syrian Heritage Centre)
Site Monitors Project Manager - Dr. Amr Al-Azm

SHI 15-0171

Report Date: December 27, 2015

Site Name: Al Batul Mosque (البتول جامع)

Date of Incident: December 25, 2015

Location: Zebdiya District, Aleppo, Aleppo Governorate

Site Description: Mosque

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Airstrikes strike mosque and cause severe damage.

Incident Source and Description: On December 25, 2015, Daily Sabah reported that Russian airstrikes struck Al Batul Mosque in Zebdiya District during Friday prayers, causing severe damage.⁵⁶ Video released online showed volunteer rescue workers and civilians digging through rubble.⁵⁷ On the same day multiple Russian airstrikes were reported throughout the city of Aleppo.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI has seen a rise of attacks on civilian sites, including mosques, by SARG forces and Russian allies. As such, ASOR CHI will continue to monitor any reported damage to the Al Batul Mosque and other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Daily Sabah:

<http://www.dailysabah.com/mideast/2015/12/25/russian-jets-target-mosque-during-friday-prayer-kill-five-in-syrias-aleppo>

⁵⁶ <http://www.dailysabah.com/mideast/2015/12/25/russian-jets-target-mosque-during-friday-prayer-kill-five-in-syrias-aleppo>

⁵⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCOtcs_BJPs



Possible photograph of damage to Al Batul Mosque (Anatolia Arabic; December 25, 2015)

SHI 15-0172

Report Date: December 31, 2015

Site Name: Qara Qozak (قوزك قره); Tell Ahmar (أحمر تل) (Til-Barsib, Til Barsip, Masuwari, Bersiba); Shiukh (شيوخ) (Tell Sheik Tahtani, Tell Shioukh Tahtani); Sahel Qamlaq (قملق) (Tell Qamlaq); Tell Al Aber (إيبار تل) (Tell al-Abr); Al Qubah

Date of Incident: December 30, 2015

Location: Tishreen, Aleppo Governorate, Syria

Site Description:

- Qara Qozak – Unknown
- Tell Ahmar Boraz – The site was inhabited as early as the Neolithic period, but it is the remains of the Iron Age city that are the best-known elements at Tell Ahmar. The town was known in Hittite as Masuwari. The city remained largely Neo-Hittite up to its conquest by the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the 856 BC and the Luwian language was used even after that. Tell Barsip was in the area of the Aramaean-speaking Syro-Hittite state of Bît Adini. After being captured by the Assyrians the city was then renamed as Kar-Šulmānu-ašarēdu, after the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, though its original name continued in use. It became a prominent center for the Assyrian administration of the region due to its strategic location at a crossing of the Euphrates River. The tell was first examined by David George Hogarth, who proposed the identification as Til Barsip. The site was visited in 1909 by Gertrude Lowthian Bell who also took squeezes from some of the inscriptions there. The site of Tell Ahmar was excavated by the French archaeologist François Thureau-Dangin from 1929 to 1931. He uncovered the Iron Age city and an Early Bronze Age hypogeum burial with a large amount of pottery. Three important steles were also discovered at the site. These record how the 8th century BC Aramaean king Bar Ga'yah, who may be identical with the Assyrian governor Shamshi-ilu, made a treaty with the city of Arpad. Recent excavations at Tell Ahmar were conducted by Guy Bunnens from the University of Melbourne in the late 1980s and through to the present. Many ivory carvings of outstanding quality were discovered and these were published in 1997. Current excavations are under the auspices of the University of Liège, Belgium.⁵⁸
- Shiyukh Tahtani – The earliest evidence of occupation at Shiyukh Tahtani dates to the beginning of the Early Bronze Age (the third millennium BCE). The site was sporadically occupied through the Byzantine era. Later remains include a Roman bath complex.
- Sahel Qamlaq – Early Bronze Age settlement or cemetery and remains of several later periods.⁵⁹ TDA sources state that the archaeological remains were below the surface of the lake, but receding water levels exposed the site in recent years and it had become vulnerable to looting; the recent flooding submerged the site once again.

⁵⁸ Roobaert, A (1998) "The Middle Bronze Age Funerary Evidence from Tell Ahmar (Syria)." *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 35, pp. 97–105; Bunnens, G. (1997) "Carved ivories from Til Barsib." *American Journal of Archaeology* 101(3), pp. 435–450.

⁵⁹ Cooper, L. (2006) *Early Urbanism on the Syrian Euphrates*. New York & London: Routledge.

- Tell Al Abr – Important site of Ubaid-era pottery production. Later remains have also been found.⁶⁰
- Al Qubah – Unknown

Site Date: Sites range from Ubaid and Byzantine periods

Incident Summary: Multiple sites are being flooded near the Tishrin Dam.

Incident Source and Description: On December 26, 2015 the Tishrin Dam was taken from ISIL militants by an alliance of Syrian Kurds and Arab rebel groups called the Democratic Forces of Syria (DSF) with support from U.S. coalition aircraft. The intent of this operation was to isolate ISIL strongholds in northern Aleppo from other controlled territories east of the Euphrates River.⁶¹ The Tishrin Dam is located north of Raqqa and the Tabqa Dam on the Euphrates and had been under ISIL control since 2014.⁶²

On December 30, ISIL militants warned residents in eastern (left) bank communities that the dam was in danger of immediate collapse and they should evacuate their homes. One news report states that an ISIL cell remained hidden in the dam and planted explosives within its structure, but this same report states that experts believed that if explosives were detonated it would be unlikely that the dam would be completely destroyed.⁶³ Media reports citing DSF sources in northern Aleppo stated that the Euphrates River, specifically between the border city of Jarablus in the north and the Tishrin Dam in the south, had risen suddenly since Monday, leading to flooding along the eastern shores of the northern impound lake that forced many to evacuate their homes.⁶⁴ It is alleged that the pumping of water out of the dam had ceased because many employees working in the dam had fled their posts after DSF forces took control.⁶⁵

On Thursday December 31, in-country sources via The Day After Heritage Initiative (DAHI) reported that multiple heritage sites located north of the Tishrin Dam were being flooded, including Tell Al Aber, Qara Qozak, Tell Ahmar “Boraz,” Shiukh, Sahel Qamlaq, and Al Qubah.

According to these sources, the lake was rising because eight sluice gates were closed. The sources feared that the rising water level was putting stress on the dam structure, and there was concern that when the sluice gates are reopened to relieve pressure the resulting flow would flood downstream settlements. DAHI sources reported that on January 2 that some of the dam sluices were functioning again and that Turkey appeared to have reduced water flow upstream, stabilizing the water level.

⁶⁰ Hammade, H. & Y. Yamazaki (2006) *Tell al-'Abr (Syria): Uruk and Ubaid Periods*. Louvain: Peeters.

⁶¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-alliance-idUSKBN0U90DE20151226>

⁶² <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/fears-syrias-tishrin-dam-may-collapse-amid-rising-water-levels-705752950#sthash.nGIvgS1e.dpuf>

⁶³ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/fears-syrias-tishrin-dam-may-collapse-amid-rising-water-levels-705752950#sthash.nGIvgS1e.dpuf>

⁶⁴ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/fears-syrias-tishrin-dam-may-collapse-amid-rising-water-levels-705752950#sthash.nGIvgS1e.dpuf>

⁶⁵ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/fears-syrias-tishrin-dam-may-collapse-amid-rising-water-levels-705752950#sthash.nGIvgS1e.dpuf>

Pattern: Development disturbances; Natural impacts.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the condition of the Tishrin Dam and the vulnerable cultural landscape of the surrounding area.

Sources:

Scholarly:

Bunnens, G. (1997) "Carved ivories from Til Barsib." *American Journal of Archaeology* 101(3), pp. 435–450.

Cooper, L. (2006) *Early Urbanism on the Syrian Euphrates*. New York & London: Routledge.

Hammade, H. & Y. Yamazaki (2006) *Tell al-'Abr (Syria): Uruk and Ubaid Periods*. Louvain: Peeters.

Roobaert, A (1998) "The Middle Bronze Age Funerary Evidence from Tell Ahmar (Syria)." *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 35, pp. 97–105.



Flooding Tell Ahmar “Boraz” area caused by the neglect of the Tishrin Dam (Anonymous source; reported December 31, 2015)

SHI 15-0173

Report Date: December 31, 2015

Site Name: Jebel Zawiya Park (الزواوية جبل) - Dead Cities (المدن الميتة)

Date of Incident: Ongoing, reported December 30, 2015

Location: Idlib Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Roman-era tombs and caves in the Jebel Zawiya park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The exact location of the site referenced is unknown.

Site Date: Roman Era

Incident Summary: Occupation of Roman-era caves and tombs by civilians.

Incident Source and Description: On December 30, 2015, Eye on the Homeland published a video documenting the ongoing occupation of Roman-era caves and tombs in Jebel Zawiya Park. Video footage shows the occupation of families fleeing airstrikes and utilizing the underground tombs as shelters.⁶⁶ The exact locations of the occupied tombs were not disclosed in the news report.

In 2014 the Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights Project of the American Association for the Advancement of Science published a report that included images of Jebel Zawiya park as well as details on the ongoing occupation of IDPs in the area, including the site of Al Bara (**See ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 14-0008, See ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 14-0081**).⁶⁷ Previously in 2013, CBS News published a photo series of Jebel Zawiya Park that detailed the occupation of the area by civilians fleeing SARG bombing campaigns.⁶⁸ Other news sources have also published images as well as details of the reuse of these sites by IDPs.⁶⁹

Pattern: Reuse of ancient/historic building materials (non-combatants).

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI remains concerned about the destruction of standing architecture in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria. Destruction in this area is highly correlated with the current IDP/refugee crisis, which is in turn linked to SARG (and now Russian) aerial bombardment of residential areas, especially barrel bombing.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

⁶⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaolGcwuvaU>

⁶⁷ <http://www.aaas.org/page/ancient-history-modern-destruction-assessing-current-status-syria-s-world-heritage-sites-using#AncientVillages>

⁶⁸ <http://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/syrians-flee-to-roman-ruins-to-dodge-bombs/>

⁶⁹ <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/syrian-family-takes-refuge-in-an-ancient-roman-tomb>

American Association for the Advancement of Science: <http://www.aaas.org/page/ancient-history-modern-destruction-assessing-current-status-syria-s-world-heritage-sites-using#AncientVillages>

CBS News: <http://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/syrians-flee-to-roman-ruins-to-dodge-bombs/>

Eye On The Homeland: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ya0lgCwuvaU>

The National: <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/syrian-family-takes-refuge-in-an-ancient-roman-tomb>



Jebel Zawayah Park, video still from news report on refugee occupation (Eye On the Homeland; December 30, 2015)



Jebel Zawayah Park, video still from news report on refugee occupation (Eye On the Homeland; December 30, 2015)

SHI 16-0001

Report Date: January 5, 2016

Site Name: Omar bin Al Khattab Mosque (مسجد عمر بن الخطاب)

Date of Incident: January 2, 2016

Location: Ma'aret Al Artiq, Aleppo Governorate

Site Description: Mosque

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Russian airstrikes cause damage to mosque.

Incident Source and Description: On January 2, 2016, the Syrian Network for Human Rights reported that Russian warplanes targeted Omar bin Al Kattab Mosque, causing damage to the mosque.⁷⁰ The photographs available at the time of publication show damage to the exterior fence, but the extent of the damage to the structure and interior is difficult to determine.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI has seen a rise of attacks on civilian sites, including mosques, by SARG forces and Russian allies. As such, ASOR CHI will continue to monitor any reported damage to the Omar bin Al Khattab Mosque and other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Syrian Network for Human Rights: <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/01/02/16126/>

⁷⁰ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/01/02/16126/>



Damage shown outside of Omar bin Al Kattab Mosque (Syrian Network for Human Rights; January 2, 2016)

Incident Reports: Iraq

IHI 15-0101

Report Date: December 22, 2015

Site Name: Cemeteries in Mosul. Al Karama (Karamah; (مقبرة التالفيون)), Wadi 'Ikab ('ekab; 'ukab; (مقبرة وادي عكاب), Zanjeli, Mosul al-Jadiada (مقبرة موصل الجديدة), and three Christian Cemeteries

Date of Incident: December 18, 2015; Ongoing since 2014

Location: Mosul, Ninawa Governorate, Iraq

Site Description: There are 17 cemeteries in Mosul belonging to the Sunni, Shiite, and Christian communities. The names are as follows: Dab al-Maidan, Al Mushahda, Sheikh Hanash, Bab al Tab, Al-Kawazin, Nabi Sheet, Imam Abdul-Rahman, Sheikh Fathi, Al-Karama, Wadi 'ikab, Zanjeli, Mosul al Jadiada, three Christian cemeteries, and two unnamed ones. Each cemetery is usually smaller than 250 square meters and is surrounded by a low fence, and plots are distributed to families in advance.⁷¹

Site Date: 1200 CE to Present

Incident Summary: ISIL is using prisoners to destroy cemeteries in Mosul.

Incident Source and Description: On December 18, 2015, reports emerged that Mosul cemeteries were being destroyed by prisoners of ISIL.⁷² This most recent destruction is occurring in the four large Muslim cemeteries in Mosul, Al Karama, Wadi 'ikab, Zanjeli, and Mosul al-Jadiada, as well as the three Christian cemeteries.

Niqash and Mosulyoon's report on the most recent destruction state the same ideological motivation for the destruction, but in this instance ISIL was supervising prisoners convicted of smaller crimes to commit the damage. Minor crimes include smoking, selling cigarettes, insufficient beard length, or failure to pray. The number of graves the prisoner was required to destroy was based on the crime committed, usually 50-100 graves.⁷³

Cemetery destructions have been occurring since 2014 and represent a continuation of the destruction of religious heritage in Mosul.⁷⁴ In April 2015 reports surfaced of destruction to

⁷¹ <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/security/5180/Extremists-in-Mosul-Force-Their-Prisoners-To-Vandalise-Graves.htm>

⁷² <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/security/5180/Extremists-in-Mosul-Force-Their-Prisoners-To-Vandalise-Graves.htm>

⁷³ <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/security/5180/Extremists-in-Mosul-Force-Their-Prisoners-To-Vandalise-Graves.htm> ; <https://www.facebook.com/mosulyoon/photos/a.778075902288143.1073741828.775247292571004/908905835871815/?type=3&theater> ; <https://lists.uchicago.edu/web/arc/iraqcrisis/2015-12/msg00008.html>

⁷⁴ www.iraqnews.com/features/isis-destroys-ancient-christian-cemeteries-converts-church-military-office-nineveh/ ; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3043255/ISIS-destroy-Christian-graves-headstones-sledgehammers-Islamist-terror-group-continues-purge-against-religions.html>

Christian cemeteries around Mosul, including the cemetery adjacent to Mar Georgis Monastery (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0050**) and the cemetery of Tel Keif (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0074**).

Pattern: Military activity: intentional destruction.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will attempt to gather further information on these reports via in-country sources as well as DigitalGlobe satellite imagery as it becomes available and will continue to monitor the condition of heritage sites in Mosul.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Niqash: <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/security/5180/Extremists-in-Mosul-Force-Their-Prisoners-To-Vandalise-Graves.htm>

Eye over Mosul:

<https://www.facebook.com/mosulyoon/photos/a.778075902288143.1073741828.775247292571004/908905835871815/?type=3&theater>

Iraqi News: <http://www.iraqinews.com/features/isis-destroys-ancient-christian-cemeteries-converts-church-military-office-nineveh/>



Destruction of graves by ISIL in Mosul Christian cemetery (Iraqi News; April, 19, 2015)



Christian Cemetery in Mosul, Destruction of graves by ISIL (Iraqi News; April, 19, 2015)



Destruction of graves by ISIL in Mosul Christian cemetery (Iraqi News; April, 19, 2015)



Destruction of graves by ISIL in Mosul Christian cemetery (Iraqi News; April, 19, 2015)



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Destruction of graves by ISIL in Mosul Christian cemetery (Iraqi News; April, 19, 2015)



Destruction of graves by ISIL in Mosul Christian cemetery (Iraqi News; April, 19, 2015)

IHI 15-0102**Report Date:** December 26, 2015**Site Name:** Tel Keppe Monastery (تل كفيف دير)**Date of Incident:** December 24, 2015**Location:** Tel Keppe, Ninawa Governorate, Iraq**Site Description:** Assyrian Christian monastery or convent.**Site Date:** Unknown**Incident Summary:** Bombing of Assyrian monastery or convent and 10 homes by ISIL.**Incident Source and Description:** On December 26, 2015, Assyrian International News Agency reported that ISIL bombed 10 Assyrian homes and a monastery in Tel Keppe that “belonged to Assyrian nuns” on December 24. According to Tel Keppe residents, ISIL also threatened to bomb other villages in the area. AINA does not specify which monastery/convent was attacked.

ISIL militants have vandalized, damaged, or repurposed multiple Christian places of worship in the Mosul region throughout its occupation of northern Iraq.⁷⁵ Incidents of intentional attacks on Christian places of worship reported in detail by ASOR CHI include the repurposing of Mar Gorgis Monastery as a prison and the damaging of its church and cemetery (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0050**) and the destruction of the Mother of Aid Church (Kanizat Umm al-Maunah) with explosives (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0088**).

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** ASOR will attempt to determine which Tel Keppe monastery was damaged in this attack. ASOR will continue to monitor attacks on Christian places of worship in Iraq.**Sources:**Online Reporting:AINA: <http://www.aina.org/news/20151226052124.htm>

⁷⁵ <http://myocn.net/45-christian-institutions-mosul-destroyed-occupied-isis/>

IHI 15-0103

Report Date: December 30, 2016

Site Name: Kharbat Masehli (Qaryat Maslilah, Tel Alchristla (خربة مسيحي حلي), Tell Beena (تل بينة))

Date of Incident: December 27, 2015

Location: Masehli, Near Ashur (Qalaat Sharqat), Salah al-Din Governorate, Iraq

Site Description:

- Kharbat Masehli – Tell located in the village of Duk Duk in the Ajmeela clan villages south of Ashur. The site is 1 km from the junction of Sharqat Street and Baghdad Street and 17 km south of the center of al-Sharqat. The archaeological site has an area of 4 acres and the tell covers 1 acre. The first exploration was in 1999 under the direction of Abdul Jerro from Mission Assyria. A test trench reached 3 meters deep and revealed mud brick walls, pottery, tablets, and floors. The second exploration in 2001 led by Hafiz Hussain Hayani, along with Abdul Jerro and Abdul Farhan Ahmad Al-Azzawi lasted one month. The excavators placed a small test trench along the top of the mound but did not discover anything of archaeological significance at the time. The site is not to be confused with Kharbat Masehli South, which is located opposite the village of Duk Duk. The sites are separated by a public street, and Kharbat Masehli South was explored by Dr. Mohammed Ajaj Zarzis Jumaili in 2000. The site consists of a brick built tomb. All of the graves were built with a small wall on the eastern side.
- Tell Beena – Tell Beena is located in the western valley near the village of Al Beenah. It is located in an agricultural area belonging to a farmer. The Tell is located in the center of the property on a flat plain. The height of the tell exceeds 12m and was surveyed in 1999 and 2005. The first survey was performed by Younis Salem, Mohammed Abdul Agag and Abdul Jerro under the antiquities department. The site has both Assyrian and Parthian artifact surface scatters.

Site Date: Kharbat Masehli – Assyrian, Parthian
Tell Beena – Assyrian, Parthian

Incident Summary: ISIL damaged multiple sites to create military positions against Iraqi forces and looted these sites.

Incident Source and Description: On December 27, 2015, in country sources reported that ISIL was damaging, looting, and destroying the sites of Kharbat Masehli and Tell Beena located 5km south of Qalaat Sharqat (Ashur) in Iraq. These sources state that people were digging defensive trenches for ISIL in order to prevent the entry of Iraqi forces into Qalaat Sharqat. The source states that when he asked the perpetrators why they were digging, he was told to go back to Qalaat Sharqat and not return to Masehli. He further states that the trenches did not look military in nature, they look archaeological. This source also reports that the ISIL members spoke the Syrian Arabic dialect of the Khabur region. Sources allege ISIL was also removing artifacts from the sites.

Pattern: Military activity: occupation/militarization; Military activity: construction; Illegal excavation.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will attempt to gather further information on these reports via in country sources as well as DigitalGlobe satellite imagery as it becomes available, and is continuing to monitor the condition of Kharbat Masehli and Tell Beena.

IHI 16-0001

Report Date: January 4, 2016

Site Name: Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (جامع عمار بن ياسر); Al Fateh Mosque (جامع الفاتح aka Al Fath al Mubeen Mosque)

Date of Incident: January 3, 2016

Location: Al Bakarly Neighborhood, Hilla Town, Babil Governorate, Iraq; Sinjar Village, Babil Governorate

Site Description: Sunni Mosques

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Explosives severely damage mosques.

Incident Source and Description: On January 3, 2016 various news sources reported the overnight bombings of two Sunni mosques in Babil Governorate: Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque in the town of Hilla and Al Fateh Mosque in Sinjar Village. According to eyewitness reports, men in military uniforms planted IEDs inside each mosque, then detonated them causing extensive damage. No group has yet taken responsibility for the attack; however, reports speculate that this attack could be in retaliation for the January 2 execution by Saudi Arabia of the Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi accused ISIL militants, or groups similar to them, of planning the attack in order to sow sectarian tensions in the country.⁷⁶

According to Reuters, the bombing destroyed the dome and several walls of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque.⁷⁷

The extent of the damage to Al Fateh Mosque remains unclear although an image released shows significant damage to the exterior of the mosque.

There were reports of a third explosion in a mosque in either Baghdad or Hilla; however, ASOR CHI was unable to corroborate this report or determine the name and location of the mosque, in addition to any reported damage.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the extent of the damage to Ammar Bin Yasser and Al Fateh Mosques, as well as further details regarding the attacks and the perpetrators. ASOR CHI will continue to monitor any reports of a third bombing occurring at an unidentified mosque in Baghdad.

⁷⁶ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/01/04/At-least-two-Sunni-mosques-attacked-in-Iraq-.html>

⁷⁷ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-violence-idUSKBN0UI0SE20160104>

Sources:

Online Reporting:

AFP:

<http://www.afp.com/en/news/two-sunni-mosques-bombed-muezzin-killed-iraq-police>

Al Jazeera: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/01/sunni-mosques-bombed-town-south-baghdad-160104102900367.html>

International Business Times India:

<http://www.ibtimes.co.in/iraq-two-sunni-mosques-bombed-religious-leader-shot-dead-661846>

Reuters: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-violence-idUSKBN0UI0SE20160104>

Reuters Canada:

<http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCAKBN0UI0SE20160104>

Reuters UK:

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-iraq-violence-idUKKBN0UI0U320160105>

Press TV: <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2016/01/04/444444/Iraq-Babil-Hilla-sinjar-iskandariya-ammam-bin-yasser/>

Yahoo News: <http://news.yahoo.com/two-sunni-mosques-bombed-muezzin-killed-iraq-police-072829078.html>



Damage to the interior of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (Al Mada Press; January 4, 2016)



Damage to the interior of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (Reuters; January 4, 2016)



Damage to the interior of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (AFP; January 4, 2016)



Damage to the interior of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (Getty Images/AFP; January 4, 2016)



Damage to the exterior of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (Getty Images/AFP; January 4, 2016)



Damage to the exterior of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (Iraq News Facebook Page; January 6, 2015)⁷⁸

⁷⁸ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1641495002739481&id=1488031254752524



Damage to the interior of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (Iraq News Facebook Page; January 6, 2015)



Damage to the interior of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (Iraq News Facebook Page; January 6, 2015)



Damage to the interior of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (Iraq News Facebook Page; January 6, 2015)



Damage to the exterior of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (Twitter; January 4, 2016)⁷⁹

⁷⁹ <https://twitter.com/IraqiSecurity/status/683948013543387136>



Damage to the interior of Ammar Bin Yasser Mosque (Twitter; January 4, 2016)



Debris at Al Fateh Mosque (AFP; January 4, 2016)