

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

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Weekly Report 53–54 — August 18, 2015

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Executive Summary

In Year 2, ASOR CHI will shift to producing reports every two weeks.

During the most recent reporting period, reported cultural heritage damage in Syria and Iraq showed signs of an increase with the release of new information on ISIL deliberate destructions of heritage places. Tragically, two prominent heritage professionals lost their lives in Syria. On August 18, Khaled al-Asa’ad (83), former Director of Palmyra Antiquities, was publically executed in Tadmor by ISIL militants. Al-Asa’ad was famous for his life-long study of Palmyra (Tadmor) and service to the DGAM. On August 12, Qassim Abdullah Yehya (37), a DGAM Deputy Director, was killed in a rocket attack on the Damascus Citadel reportedly launched from the suburb of Douma — the attack also allegedly targeted the National Museum. Other DGAM employees were reportedly injured in the attack. Yehya was especially known for his important work in the conservation of mosaics. On August 7, a regime airstrike caused serious damage to the Khan Assad Pasha in Maarat al-Nu’man and damage was reported to the Daraa National Museum.

In Iraq, tumultuous political conditions and rapid government restructuring have the potential of adversely impacting an already stressed State Board of Antiquities and Heritage and exacerbating the existing unstable situation for cultural heritage assets and infrastructure. On August 9, ISIL released images of deliberate destructions of Sufi shrines and graves in the area of Fallujah on the internet.

Key Points

- On August 18, 2015, ISIL executed Syrian archaeologist Khalid al-Assad, former Director of Palmyra Antiquities.
- On August 12, 2015, Syrian DGAM Deputy Director Qassem Abdullah Yahya was killed in a rocket attack on the Damascus Citadel. Rockets also struck the National Museum (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0115**).

¹ This report is based on research conducted by the “Cultural Heritage Initiative: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq.” Weekly reports reflect reporting from a variety of sources and may contain unverified material. As such, they should be treated as preliminary and subject to change.

- On August 7, 2015, an airstrike caused substantial damage to the Khan Assad Pasha in Maarat al-Nu'man, which dates to the Ottoman period. ASOR CHI is preparing a detailed incident report and a special report in conjunction with The Day After organization (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0120**).
- The Daraa National Museum in southern Syria continues to suffer combat damage (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0106 UPDATE**).
- On August 18, 2015 airstrike damage to the Tadmor Museum was reported (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0116**).
- In the week leading up to August 10, 2015 ISIL's "Bureau of Propaganda for the District of Fallujah" posted 19 photos to Justpaste.it by showing the destruction of multiple Sufi shrines and graves in the Fallujah, Iraq area (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0091**).

Heritage Timeline

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| August 18, 2015 | <p>DGAM published an article titled “DGAM announce the passing of the archaeology researcher Khalid al-Asaad- former Director of Palmyra Antiquities”</p> <p>http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1773</p> <p>http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=177&id=1772</p> |
| August 17, 2015 | <p>DGAM published an article titled “The Eastern Countryside in Daraa: Damage at the Jmarein Village”</p> <p>http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1770</p> |
| August 14, 2015 | <p><i>Heritage for Peace</i> published their newsletter titled “Damage to Syria’s Heritage 14 August 2015”</p> <p>http://www.heritageforpeace.org/syria-culture-and-heritage/damage-to-cultural-heritage/previous-damage-newsletters/</p> |
| August 13, 2015 | <p><i>CNN</i> published an article titled “Inside Syria: The wasteland of Yarmouk that sums up four years of civil war” (by Frederik Pleitgen). This video and article show the destruction to the district of Yarmouk inside of Damascus.</p> <p>http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/13/middleeast/syria-yarmouk-front-line/index.html</p> |
| August 12, 2015 | <p><i>Al-Arabia</i> published an article titled “ISIS wages cultural warfare on Syria’s heritage” (by Halla Diyab).</p> <p>http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2015/08/12/ISIS-wages-cultural-warfare-on-Syria-s-heritage.html</p> |

- Yahoo News* published an article titled “**Syria regime air raids, rebel fire on Damascus kill 50**” (by AP). This article records alleged damage to the Damascus Citadel and Damascus National Museum.
<http://news.yahoo.com/deadly-rocket-fire-hits-syrian-capital-state-news-072329501.html>
 - DGAM** published an article titled “**The DGAM announce the passing of our colleague Qassem Abdullah Yehya.**” This article also mentions that rockets fell near the **Damascus Citadel** and **Damascus National Museum**. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0115**.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1764>
 - Stuff.co.nz* published an article titled “**A Virtual Tour Through Ruined Syrian City Aleppo**” (by Derrick Lang). This article contains a video with 360 degree views of different areas of Aleppo.
<http://www.stuff.co.nz/technology/digital-living/71058989/a-virtual-tour-through-ruined-syrian-city-aleppo>
- August 10, 2015
- DGAM** published an article titled “**Maraat al Numan: Damage at the Khan Assad Pasha**” **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0106 UPDATE**.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1762>
- August 8, 2015
- APSA** published a photograph album titled “**Rif Dimashq al-Zabadani: Destruction of the minaret of the Al-Jisr mosque**”
<http://apsa2011.com/apsanew/rif-dimashq-al-zabadani-destruction-of-the-minaret-of-the-al-jisr-mosque-08-08-2015/>
- APSA** published a video titled “**Aleppo – Destruction in the old city**”
<http://apsa2011.com/apsanew/aleppo-destruction-in-the-old-city-08-08-2015/>
- August 7, 2015
- Smithsonian* published an article titled “**These Academics Are Outracing (and Outwitting) ISIS**” (by Danny Lewis).
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/academics-outracing-outwitting-isis-180956193/?no-ist>
- August 6, 2015
- Al-Monitor* published an article titled “**Saving Middle East Relics Needs Less Talk, More Action**” (by Vitaly Naumkin).
<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/russia-efforts-save-monuments-middle-east.html>
- Syrian Radio and TV* published an article titled “**International Conference in Germany to protect Syrian culture and heritage**”
<http://www.syriaonline.sy/?f=Details&pageid=17782&catid=27>

August 5, 2015

Tehran Times published an article titled “**Iraq Rejects Iran’s Proposal for Safekeeping of Artifacts**”

http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=248473

- *Universidade da Coruna* published an article titled “**El Conflicto Armado en Siria Y Su Repercusión Sobre El Patrimonio Cultural: L: Deir ez-Zor**” (by Anas Al Khabour).
http://www.arqueologiaoriental.com/publicaciones/ANAS_VOL_I.pdf
- Wellesley College is hosting a conference titled “**Erasing the Past: Da’esh and the Crisis of Antiquities Destruction**” on September 24, 2015. Speakers include Morag Kesrel, Clemens Reichel, Jytte Klausen, Patty Gerstenblith, Salam Al-Kuntar, Jeremy Hutton, Stephenne Mulder, Charles Jones, Nina Burleigh, and Hugh Eaken.

July 29, 2015

Counter Punch published an article titled “**Is the Phoenix Rising from the Ashes in Syria?**” (by Franklin Lamb)

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/07/29/is-the-phoenix-rising-from-the-ashes-in-syria/>

Military and Political Context

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

1. Homs Governorate
 - On Wednesday, August 5, ISIL began to attack Qaryatayn, a town near a road linking Palmyra to the Qalamoun mountains and also the Lebanese border. On Thursday, August 6, ISIL completely seized the town after fighting between Syrian regime fighters and Islamic State militants, and on Friday, August 7, ISIL kidnapped many local residents, including a number of Christians. In the past, the Islamic State has considered Christians as infidels, and it has killed members of religious minorities and Sunni Muslims who do not swear allegiance to ISIL's so-called caliphate.²
2. Aleppo Governorate
 - Many rival insurgents in Umm Housh village in the northern Aleppo countryside were killed after an ISIL suicide bomber attacked the group late in the night on Saturday, August 8. ISIL militants then seized the village after heavy fighting with the rival groups.³

² <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/8/7/isil-kidnaps-scores-of-christians-in-syrias-homs.html> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/07/us-mideast-crisis-christians-idUSKCN0QC0ST20150807> ; http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2015/08/07/dans-al-qaryatayn-fraichement-conquise-l-ei-cible-les-chretiens-et-les-sunnites_4715758_3210.html ; <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2015/08/06/islamic-state-group-seizes-central-syrian-town>

³ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/08/09/uk-mideast-crisis-syria-attack-idUKKCN0QE00620150809>

3. Damascus Governorate

- On Wednesday, August 12, Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister, met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Zarif proposed an Iranian plan to end the Syrian civil war, including an immediate ceasefire, the formation of a national unity government, protections for Syrian minorities, and internationally supervised elections.
- During Zarif's visit, rebel forces shelled Damascus to show their disapproval of Iran's support for Assad's government. The Syrian government responded with airstrikes, killing and injuring a number of people.⁴
- On Sunday, August 16, the Syrian government conducted airstrikes in Douma, a suburb of Damascus, killing at least 80 people and injuring even more citizens in one of the civil war's deadliest air attacks yet.⁵

4. Rif Dimashq and Idlib Governorates

- Early on Wednesday, August 12, a 48-hour humanitarian cease-fire between Lebanese Hezbollah fighters and Syrian rebel and militant groups started in Zabadani, a town that sits near Syria's border with Lebanon. Reports stated that the deal was brokered with the help of Turkish and Iranian mediation. In addition to exchanging prisoners, the deal was intended to secure safe passage for Ahrar al-Sham, a rebel group, and civilians out of Zabadani after they allowed humanitarian aid through to Foua and Kfarya in Idlib governorate, two villages with a majority pro-government population sympathetic to Hezbollah.⁶
- On Saturday, August 15 the cease-fire ended, however, and fighting resumed in Zabadani with reports of shelling in Foua as well. Ahrar al-Sham accused Shi'ite Iran of trying to rid Zabadani of its Sunni residents and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said conflict also ensued after disagreements over how many prisoners the Syrian government would release.⁷

Other key points:

- After the United States and Russia announced on Thursday, August 6 that they had agreed on the resolution text, all 15 members of the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution on Friday, August 7 to create an investigative panel to identify chemical weapons

⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/13/world/middleeast/irans-foreign-minister-visits-syria-for-talks-with-assad.html> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/12/us-mideast-crisis-syria-attack-idUSKCN0QH15I20150812>

⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/17/world/middleeast/government-airstrikes-on-syrian-market-kill-more-than-80.html>

⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/13/world/middleeast/irans-foreign-minister-visits-syria-for-talks-with-assad.html> ; http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_SYRIA?SITE=AP ; <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2015/08/15/syrian-rebel-group-says-cease-fire-with-hezbollah-over> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/12/us-mideast-crisis-syria-ceasefire-idUSKCN0QH1CQ20150812>

⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/13/world/middleeast/irans-foreign-minister-visits-syria-for-talks-with-assad.html> ; http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_SYRIA?SITE=AP ; <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2015/08/15/syrian-rebel-group-says-cease-fire-with-hezbollah-over> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/12/us-mideast-crisis-syria-ceasefire-idUSKCN0QH1CQ20150812>

users in Syria. Previously, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had pledged to join the treaty banning chemical weapons, but reports of attacks involving weapons such as chlorine bombs have risen over the course of Syria's civil war.⁸

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

1. Diyala Governorate

- On Wednesday, August 5, militants presumed to be from the Islamic State detonated bombs in northeastern Diyala, killing and wounding a number of citizens.⁹
- Early on Thursday, August 6, an explosion targeted the Mirsad electrical line west of Mandali coming from Iran, reducing the flow of electricity by 400 megawatts when electricity was already in high demand due to Iraq's summer heat wave. The line had previously been targeted by ISIL in recent months.¹⁰

2. Baghdad Governorate

- On Wednesday, August 5, militants presumed to be from the Islamic State detonated bombs in commercial areas of the city, killing and wounding a number of citizens.¹¹
- On Thursday, August 13, ISIL staged a bomb attack in a market in the Souk Jameela neighborhood of Baghdad's Shi'ite-majority Sadr City district, killing and wounding many people. When claiming responsibility for the attack, ISIL stated that its target was Shi'ite militias, specifically Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units.¹²
- On Saturday, August 15, ISIL targeted a popular car dealership in Al Habibiya, another neighborhood in Baghdad's Shi'ite-majority Sadr City district. A number of people were killed or injured when a parked car bomb detonated. Other bombings in Madain, Taji, and Baghdad's al-Askan district were reported as well, with a number of casualties from each attack.¹³

3. Anbar Governorate

- U.S. coalition-led airstrikes continued during the reporting period near Ramadi; simultaneously, Iraqi security forces fought to maintain control of the University of Anbar. Additionally, on Wednesday, August 5, the ISF clashed with ISIL east of Ramadi and near the Habbaniyah military base; a number of fighters were wounded or killed.¹⁴

⁸ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/08/world/middleeast/un-security-council-measure-aims-to-identify-users-of-chlorine-bombs-in-syria.html>

⁹ AP, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/clashes-in-iraqs-anbar-province-kill-government-troops-1438788748>

¹⁰ <http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2015/08/iraq-situation-report-august-4-6-2015.html>

; Reuters, <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-explosion-in-eastern-iraq-cuts-power-line-from-iran-2015-8>

¹¹ AP, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/clashes-in-iraqs-anbar-province-kill-government-troops-1438788748>

¹² <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/13/middleeast/iraq-blast/>

¹³ <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/15/middleeast/baghdad-car-bomb/> ;

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/16/baghdad-car-bomb-kills-at-least-11-iraqis-amid-spate-of-attacks-around-capital> ; <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/middle-east/car-bomb-at-popular-baghdad-dealership-kills-13-1.2318663>

¹⁴ <http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2015/08/iraq-situation-report-august-4-6-2015.html>

; http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0814_iraq/Airstrikes6.html

; AP, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/clashes-in-iraqs-anbar-province-kill-government-troops-1438788748>

4. Ninawa Governorate

- On Friday, August 7, Iraq's defense minister stated that the ISIL has executed more than two thousand Iraqis in Ninawa, a region in the north. If verified, the reports would indicate that most of the deaths occurred over the last six months, and many of the victims were killed for common crimes such as theft.¹⁵

Other key points:

- On Wednesday, August 5, the Iraqi government implemented Law 21, decentralizing the central ministries' powers – Agriculture, Education, Finance, Health, Housing and Construction, Labor and Social Affairs, Municipalities and Public Works, and Youth and Sports – and reassigning them to provincial governments with the exception of Iraqi Kurdistan. Some argue that this will allow regional governments to more effectively fight ISIL, while others believe that disagreements over the law and differing provincial government capabilities will delay the law's implementation.¹⁶
- Despite the government's announcement of Law 21, protestors took to the streets of Baghdad on Friday, August 7 to demand an end to corruption and sweeping changes to Iraq's governmental system. With tens of thousands of citizens involved, it was one of the largest Iraqi protests of late, and with the Shi'ite religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, in support, the protest came as a challenge to Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi from his own Shi'ite constituency. He promised to address the protesters' concerns.¹⁷
- Following protests by Iraqi citizens in Baghdad last week, Iraqi lawmakers voted on Tuesday, August 11 to terminate a number of senior government posts, end sectarian and party quotas for state positions, reopen corruption investigations, and give Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi the power to fire regional and provincial bosses. On Wednesday, August 12, Abadi dismissed his cabinet secretary to begin reforming the government. Such reform has received wide public approval as well as support from Western governments and the Shi'ite Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. On Sunday, August 16, Abadi then eliminated and merged certain governmental positions to cut 11 ministerial posts in all. That same day, Abadi also approved an investigative council's decision to refer those military commanders who abandoned their positions in the battle against ISIL over Ramadi in May 2015 to a court martial. On Monday, August 17, Abadi officially blamed former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for the fall of Mosul in 2014.¹⁸
- On Thursday, August 13, U.S. officials announced that ISIL likely used a mustard agent against Iraqi Kurdish forces, the Peshmerga, in Makhmur, Iraq the previous week. U.S.

¹⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/07/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-executions-idUSKCN0QC25320150807>

¹⁶ <http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2015/08/iraq-situation-report-august-4-6-2015.html> ; <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/3501/>

¹⁷ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/weve-had-enough-baghdad-protests-challenge-iraqs-abadi/2015/08/07/a129caca-3d21-11e5-a312-1a6452ac77d2_story.html

¹⁸ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/12/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-reform-idUSKCN0QG0UI20150812> ; <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/08/16/Iraq-s-Abadi-orders-commanders-to-face-trial-over-Ramadi-withdrawal.html> ; <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/17/middleeast/iraq-mosul-report/index.html>

intelligence agencies continue to investigate the matter, but officials such as one German Defense Ministry spokesman stated that the Peshmerga fighters suffered injuries consistent with those of a chemical attack after fighting with ISIL. In discussing the source of the weapons, officials postulated that ISIL could have obtained the mustard agent from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's stockpiles or possibly from former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's old stockpiles. During the reporting period, there were also allegations of chemical weapons attacks by ISIL in northern Syria that U.S. officials are now investigating. Some believe the introduction of chemical weapons to ISIL's military tactics could push the United States to increase its involvement in fighting ISIL on the ground.¹⁹

Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions

- ASOR CHI is currently reviewing several funding proposals submitted by in-country Syrian heritage groups to conduct damage mitigation/preservation and site assessment projects.
- We predict recent territorial gains by Kurdish (YPG) forces in northern Syria at the expense of ISIL will result in reductions in the frequency of deliberate destructions of heritage places in those areas but will not significantly reduce the looting, trafficking, and sale of antiquities in/from these areas. Shifting zones of territorial control will likely result in concomitant adjustments in smuggling routes with Sunni Arab belligerents in Syria and Iraq increasingly relying on northwest Lebanon (Tripoli and Miniyeh), west Beirut, and Sidon as transshipment points for contraband entering and leaving the conflict zone. Kurdish smuggling networks are now poised to control the bulk of smuggling (viz. illicit cultural property) from the conflict zone to southern Turkey with the exception of the ISIL-controlled Djerablous border region and areas of northwest Syria controlled by the Opposition.
- All evidence suggests that Kurdish paramilitary forces are actively engaged in, or complicit in, the looting, sale, and trafficking of illicit cultural property. ASOR CHI recommends investigating methods for reducing looting in Kurdish controlled areas.

¹⁹ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-suspected-of-using-chemical-weapon-u-s-says-1439499549> ; <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/15/world/middleeast/isis-suspected-of-chemical-attack-against-kurds-in-syria.htm>

Incident Reports: Syria

SHI 15-0106 UPDATE

Report Date: July 5, 2015; August 13, 2015

Site Name: Daraa National Museum

Date of Incident: July 3, 2015; July 30, 2015; August 13, 2015

Location: Daraa, Daraa Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Regional museum that houses archaeological finds from the area; regional headquarters for the DGAM were also located in this facility.

Site Date: Modern

Incident Summary: Multiple combat-related explosions have caused damage to the garden, building structure, and interior spaces of the museum. The building facade, windows, doors, and walls, as well as interior ceilings and furniture have been affected; artifacts in the museum grounds/garden have also likely been damaged.

Incident Source and Description: On July 3, 2015 the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums stated that museum suffered non-structural damage to the building and garden due to nearby military operations. Windows and doors in the museum were blown out and cracks appeared in walls, and the pool on the garden grounds was damaged. The Daraa antiquities Department was able reach the museum and temporarily close the damaged areas. The DGAM reported that the museum's collection had been recently relocated prior to the damage, and exhibit cases appear empty in photographs following the incident. Large stone artifacts (i.e. dark basalt sarcophagi and fragments of column capitals) do appear present in the background of images of the museum's garden.

On July 30, 2015, the Director General of Antiquities and Museums stated that the museum suffered new minor damage to the building and the outer wall of the garden.

On August 13, 2015, the Director General of Antiquities and Museums stated that the museum has suffered new minor damage to the eastern entrance of the Museum. Images show damage to the roof, ceiling, and walls in areas that appear to be used for administrative purposes. Medium to large sized holes in walls and ceilings are present with corresponding collapse and damage to at least one drop ceiling. Debris from the damage is scattered on top of desks, shelves, and floors. On the exterior of the building, debris from the damage is scattered over an entrance stairway, ramp, and walkways. Large fragments of ancient stone sculptures that surround these exterior spaces are visible in photos and have likely been impacted.

Pattern: Combat-related damage from explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI is monitoring the condition of the Daraa Museum, given its significance as a cultural repository.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

DGAM (July 3, 2015): <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1735>

DGAM (August 13, 2015): <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1766>



Museum of Daraa, interior damage (DGAM; July, 3, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, interior damage (DGAM; July, 3, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, interior damage (DGAM; July, 3, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, interior damage (DGAM; July, 3, 2015)



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www.dgam.gov.sy
July, 2015

Museum of Daraa, exterior damage (DGAM; July, 3, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, exterior damage (DGAM; July, 3, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, exterior damage (DGAM; July, 3, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, interior damage (DGAM; August 12, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, interior damage (DGAM; August 12, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, interior damage (DGAM; August 12, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, exterior damage (Anonymous source; August 12, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, exterior damage (Anonymous source; August 12, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, exterior damage (Anonymous source; August 12, 2015)

SHI 15-0110 UPDATE

Report Date: July 12, 2015

Site Name: Aleppo Citadel

Date of Incident: July 11, 2015

Location: UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of Aleppo, Aleppo Governorate, Syria

Site Description: From UNESCO:

The monumental Citadel of Aleppo, rising above the suqs, mosques and madrasas of the old walled city, is testament to Arab military might from the 12th to the 14th centuries. With evidence of past occupation by civilizations dating back to the 10th century B.C., the citadel contains the remains of mosques, a palace and bath buildings. The walled city that grew up around the citadel bears evidence of the early Graeco-Roman street layout and contains remnants of 6th century Christian buildings, medieval walls and gates, mosques and madrasas relating to the Ayyubid and Mameluke development of the city, and later mosques and palaces of the Ottoman period.

A ring of crenellated walls and towers rises 50m above the city from a steep glacis, encircling a mass of ruins of every period. The nail-heads on the doors themselves are beautifully worked, the lintels have comic or enigmatic carvings on them, and there are fine Kufic inscriptions calling upon the power and the mercy of Allah. The interior of the citadel shows all too clearly how it has been ravaged by its enemies.

Site Date: Hittite through Ottoman

Incident Summary: A tunnel bomb detonated under the Citadel of Aleppo, causing a portion of the northeastern fortification wall between two towers to collapse.

Incident Source and Description: On July 11th, 2015, in the early morning, a tunnel bomb was detonated under the citadel of Aleppo, causing a portion of the citadel wall to collapse. Aleppo-based activist Nazeer al-Katib (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) said about 2 meters of the wall collapsed.²⁰

Lina Quteifan, head of the World Heritage List Syrian Archaeological Sites department reported that part of the wall between two towers on the northeastern side of the citadel was destroyed.²¹ The Aleppo Citadel is one of several sites on UNESCO's world heritage list. She stated that the main iron gate of the citadel, its main entrance, and its northern tower have also sustained damage during the conflict. Quteifan went on to say that the damage could not be assessed by DGAM because of the fighting in Aleppo.²²

Following the incident, an international expert who has previously worked at the citadel provided ASOR CHI with an assessment of the damage. This CHI contact has explained that the area damaged by the explosions had undergone conservation treatment in recent years and was an area where

²⁰ <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/tunnel-explosion-lightly-damages-syrias-citadel-aleppo-32393114>

²¹ <http://sana.sy/en/?p=48157>

²² <http://sana.sy/en/?p=48157>

historic underground tunnels had been documented. Previously documented condition issues include unstable slope and significant erosion, which lessen the stability of the foundations of the nearby wall and towers. These issues have been compounded by lack of drainage within the citadel and now by explosions and associated vibrations. The recent explosive damage on July 11th appears to have caused an element of the flanking wall between the towers to have collapsed outwards. Some of the fresh losses along the upper areas of the walls and towers are to areas that had recently been restored with replacement stone blocks. Diagonal cracking patterns observed on the towers due to previous tilting and foundation issues will now be even more susceptible to collapse due to vibrations. The significant level of damage caused by this explosion will have impacted not only this section of the citadel but nearby towers and walls, as it will have caused fractures within the already weak and brittle core mortar and rubble fabric.

Pattern: Combat damage by explosives. Syrian Arab Republic Government (SARG) forces have been using the citadel as a military position, but at the time of publication it was unclear who detonated the bomb. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights states that SARG detonated the bomb, and opposition news sources are reporting that SARG was trying to destroy tunnels in the old city that they suspected the opposition was using.²³ The Syrian Arab News Network (SANA) states that opposition fighters detonated the bombs.²⁴ The blast was followed by clashes between rebels and government forces in the western portion of Aleppo.

For further information on incidents leading up to the bombing, see:

ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0035 [Weekly Report 7](#)

ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0076 [Weekly Report 14](#)

ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0087 [Weekly Report 41](#)

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will attempt to confirm reports via in-country sources and is continuing to monitor the condition of the Aleppo Citadel and cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Al Wasat:

<http://en.alwasat.ly/en/news/world/411/Blast-in-Aleppo-does-major-damage-to-citadel-wall.htm>

DGAM: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1739>

BBC: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33499609>

APSA:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1420898448017262.1073741907.324869057620212&type=3>

²³ <http://en.alwasat.ly/en/news/world/411/Blast-in-Aleppo-does-major-damage-to-citadel-wall.htm>

²⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33499609>

ABC News:

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/tunnel-explosion-lightly-damages-syrias-citadel-aleppo-32393114>

SANA: <http://sana.sy/en/?p=48157>



Aleppo Citadel, before and after (APSA; July 12, 2015)



Aleppo Citadel, before and after (APSA; July 12, 2015)



Aleppo Citadel, after bombardment (APSA; July 12, 2015)



Aleppo Citadel, after bombardment (APSA; July 12, 2015)



Aleppo Citadel, after bombardment (APSA; July 12, 2015)

SHI 15-0115

Report Date: August 18, 2015

Site Name: Damascus Citadel and Damascus National Museum

Date of Incident: August 12, 2015

Location: Damascus Governorate, Syria

Site Description: The Damascus Citadel is a large medieval fortified palace/citadel, and is part of the Ancient City of Damascus World Heritage Site as of 1979. This citadel was fortified in 1076 by the Turkman Atsiz bin Uvak, but a citadel dating to the Hellenistic and Roman Periods may have also stood on this ground. The Citadel has been rebuilt multiple times throughout its history.

The Damascus National Museum was founded in 1919 at the Madrassah al-Adiliyeh, and the current building was constructed in 1936 with wings being added in 1956 and 1975. The museum contains artifacts from across Syria, spanning from the Neolithic to Modern Ages.

Site Date: Citadel dates to 1076 BCE to Present; Museum built in 1936 with collections from the Neolithic to modern period.

Incident Summary: Rocket fire landed near the citadel and the front entrance to the museum with multiple casualties, including the DGAM deputy director responsible for mosaics, Qasim Abdullah Yahya .

Incident Source and Description: On August 12, 2015, Yahoo News reported that opposition forces had fired rockets into Damascus, killing 50 people and wounding many more. Rockets struck near the Citadel and the entrance to the National Museum. The DGAM deputy director responsible for mosaics, Qasim Abdullah Yahya, was also killed.²⁵

Pattern: Military Activity: Explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will attempt to confirm reports via in country sources and is continuing to monitor the condition of ancient cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq. Additionally, ASOR CHI offers its sincerest condolences to the family and colleagues of Mr. Qasim Abdullah Yahya.

²⁵ <http://news.yahoo.com/deadly-rocket-fire-hits-syrian-capital-state-news-072329501.html> ; <http://sana.sy/en/?p=51212>

Sources:

Online Reporting:

DGAM: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1764>

Yahoo: <http://news.yahoo.com/deadly-rocket-fire-hits-syrian-capital-state-news-072329501.html>

SHI 15-0116

Report Date: August 18, 2015

Site Name: Palmyra Museum

Date of Incident: August 18, 2015

Location: The Museum at Palmyra, built to house artifacts from Palmyra and the surrounding area, Tadmor, Homs Governorate, Syria

Site Date: Modern

Incident Summary: On August 18, 2015, damage was reported to the Palmyra Museum and Prof. Khalid al-Asaad was executed by ISIL militants.

Incident Source and Description: On July 29, 2015, the DGAM posted photos of damage at the Palmyra Museum. The date of these photographs is unknown. The explosive damage, caused by recent military clashes in the area, destroyed the NE part of the garden museum wall. The museum building suffered damage to the windows, which were blown out, and the suspended ceilings were knocked down.²⁶

On August 18, 2015, APSA in-country sources stated that part of the surrounding wall of the Palmyra Museum (the east side) was destroyed in an airstrike. They also report destruction to the house of the local director of the Department of Antiquities, Khalid al-Assad, and his murder.²⁷

For previous reporting on the Palmyra Museum within the context of the situation at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Palmyra see Weekly Reports 51-52, 50, 46, 42-43, and 41.

Pattern: Military Activity: Explosives. Terrorism: murder of academics.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI is monitoring the condition of the Palmyra Museum, given its significance as a cultural repository and strongly condemns the murder of academics like Khalid al-Asaad and innocent civilians. ASOR CHI offers its sincerest condolences to the family and colleagues of Prof. Khalid al-Asaad.

Sources

DGAM (July 29, 2015): <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1751>

DGAM (August 18, 2015): <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1773>

²⁶ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1751>

²⁷ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1773>

Incident Reports: Iraq

IHI 15-0091

Report Date: August 11, 2015

Site Name: Shrines in Fallujah

Date of Incident: Sometime between mid-July and mid-August, 2015

Location: Fallujah, Al Anbar Governorate, Iraq

Site Description: Multiple Shrines

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: ISIL deliberate destruction of multiple shrines in Fallujah.

Incident source and Description: On August 10, 2015 19 photos were posted to Justpaste.it within the last week. The post is issued by ISIL as "The Bureau of Propaganda for the District of Fallujah." The document is dated Shawwal 1436, indicating that the destruction probably occurred within the last month. The photos show the destruction of several shrines in and around Fallujah by ISIL militants equipped with explosives and sledgehammers. Each photo is captioned with the same Arabic phrase, "Destruction of shrines not dedicated solely to Allah," though none of the shrines are identified.

Pattern: Military activity: intentional destruction of multiple shrines with both explosives and sledgehammers. The statement in the caption indicates that ISIL will target any shrine associated with a grave or cemetery. ISIL often uses the Justpaste website to distribute official propaganda.²⁸

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will attempt to confirm reports via in country sources and is continuing to monitor the condition of religious cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq.

Sources:

Just Paste It: <http://justpaste.it/hdem4>

²⁸ <https://gatesofnineveh.wordpress.com/2015/08/14/isis-destroying-graves-in-fallujah-syria/>



Unidentified shrines, Fallujah (JustPaste.It; August 10, 2015)



Unidentified shrines, Fallujah (JustPaste.It; August 10, 2015)



هدم وتفجير الأضرحة التي تُعبد من دون الله

Unidentified shrines, Fallujah (JustPaste.It; August 10, 2015)



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هدم وتفجير الأضرحة التي تُعبد من دون الله

Unidentified shrines, Fallujah (JustPaste.It; August 10, 2015)



تفجير ما تبقى من الأضرحة التي تُعبد من دون الله

Unidentified shrines, Fallujah (JustPaste.It; August 10, 2015)



Unidentified shrines, Fallujah (JustPaste.It; August 10, 2015)



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