

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

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Executive Summary

During the reporting period, there was a relative decline in reported heritage incidents in Syria and Iraq. There were credible reports of the detonation of a tunnel bomb south of the main entrance of the Aleppo Citadel/north of the Khan Shouneh. Various factions of opposition groups in Aleppo have detonated a large number of tunnel bombs in this area since May 2014. The intended target is unclear, but this attack may signal future efforts to bomb this area to supplant regime forces occupying the citadel.

On November 12, Prof. Mamoun Abdulkarim (Director-General of Antiquities and Museums in Syria) presented a lecture detailing the cultural heritage crisis in Syria at the Royal Geographical Society in London. The event was organized by the World Monuments Fund Britain. Other speakers included James Davis of the Google Cultural Institute and Lisa Ackerman (Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the WMF). Abdulkarim made multiple appearances in Europe to build international support for efforts to save Syrian heritage from destruction. In other news, the media continued to focus on alleged antiquities trafficking in the U.S. by Hobby Lobby as well as the potential impact of Russian airstrikes on Syrian cultural assets.

Key Points

- Russia conducted airstrikes near the archaeological sites of Palmyra in Homs Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0145**) at Tell al-Hara in Daraa Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0144**).
- Newly-released DigitalGlobe satellite imagery reveals evidence of conflict-related looting at the site of Rasha el-Qibliye (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0143**).
- The DGAM reported damage to the site of Al Bara, which forms part of the Dead Cities region of Syria (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0146**). **The Day After Heritage Protection Initiative** has produced a report on the damage as well.
- On November 8, the DGAM reported that some media outlets had released information on an alleged tunnel bombing west of the main (south) entrance of the Aleppo Citadel. The DGAM’s regional office in Aleppo later verified the report and localized the damage to the

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 may contain unverified material. As such, they should be treated as preliminary and subject to change.

open area between the Citadel's main gate and the Khan Shouneh. ASOR CHI is currently gathering additional details.

Heritage Timeline

- November 9, 2015 *The Australian* published an article entitled "**Heroes of the ancient world save antiquities from destruction**" (by Richard Morrison). This article includes an interview with Maamoun AbdulKarim, Director General of the DGAM, who urges the world to separate the DGAM from the current outlook of the regime because, he maintains, there is a distinct difference between his department's mission and SARG's aims.
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/heroes-of-the-ancient-world-save-antiquities-from-destruction/story-e6frg6n6-1227600792580>
- November 8, 2015 *Al Bawaba News* published an article entitled "**Here's what we know about Da'esh's antiquities department.**" This article sheds light on the heavy looting going on in Palmyra, pointing out that not only is ISIL issuing licenses to looters to secure a steady stream of antiquities, but they are also collecting a tax on antiquities sales ranging from 30%-60% of sales price.
<http://www.albawaba.com/loop/here%E2%80%99s-what-we-know-about-daesh%E2%80%99s-antiquities-department-765406>
- **World Monuments Fund Britain** announced an event titled "**Heritage & Conflict: Syria's Battle to Protect its Past.**"
http://www.wmf.org.uk/activities/heritage_and_conflict/
 - *Syrian Radio & TV* published an article titled "**Antiquities Chief briefs Italian Parliamentarians on the dangers threatening Syria's archaeological heritage.**" DGAM Director-General Dr. Maamoun Adbulkarim presented an expanded review of threats to archaeological heritage in Syria to Italy's Cultural and Foreign Affairs Committee and called for concerted efforts between Italy and Syria to find antiquities dealers and recover stolen artifacts.
<http://www.syriaonline.sy/?f=Details&catid=22&pageid=19349&g=1>
 - *Valley News* published an editorial column entitled "**Syria, Before the War**" (by Mary M. Jenkins). It is a nostalgic narrative of a western tourist's travels throughout Syria before the breakdown of civil society and the outbreak of the civil war.
<http://www.vnews.com/opinion/19311418-95/column-syria-before-the-war>
 - **DGAM** published an article entitled "**Physical damages at the main gate of the Citadel of Aleppo.**" The article details the explosion that occurred at the entrance of Khan Souneh, facing the Citadel.

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1857>

- *The Art Newspaper* published an article entitled, “**We’ll store your artefacts, US tells Syrian museums**” (by Emily Sharpe). US Congress is beginning to construct a bill named The Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act that would aid in the preservation of antiquities from the Middle East, as well as abide by the new AAMD Protocols. According to the article the bill would, “[target] works unlawfully removed from Syria on or after 15 March 2011.”
<http://theartnewspaper.com/news/museums/160505/>
- November 7, 2015 *NPR* published an article titled “**Syrian Antiquities Chief Calls For Help From International Community**” (by Sylvia Poggiolo). DGAM Director Dr. Maamoun Adbulkarim addressed the Italian Parliament regarding damage to archaeological sites in Syria. Italy has been helping in efforts to protect antiquities in conflict zones. Adbulkarim claims that between 200 and 300 sites are currently under ISIL control.
<http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/11/07/455092931/syrian-antiquities-chief-calls-for-help-from-international-community>
- *ARTNEWS* published an article titled “**A Look At The Full Scope Of ISIS’S Destruction Of Cultural Heritage Sites**” (by Hannah Ghorashi). The article provides a partial list of sites of destruction in Syria and Iraq.
<http://sputniknews.com/world/20151106/1029689862/russia-hopes-unesco-syria-afghanistan-iraq.html>
- November 6, 2015 *In-Cyprus* published an article titled “**Cyprus on alert over Iraq, Syria cultural property.**” Education and Culture Minister Costas Kadis said Friday that Cyprus authorities are on alert for incoming cultural property from Iraq and Syria. Cyprus still suffers from the effects of lost heritage resulting from war and military occupation.
<http://in-cyprus.com/cyprus-on-alert-over-iraq-syria-cultural-property/>
- *Sputnik International* published an article titled “**Russia Urges UNESCO to Examine Damage to Cultural Heritage by Terrorists.**” While addressing the 38th UNESCO conference, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated his hopes that UNESCO will follow through with its mandate to send expert groups to Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq to assess damage to cultural heritage sites.
<http://sputniknews.com/world/20151106/1029689862/russia-hopes-unesco-syria-afghanistan-iraq.html>
- *The Times* published an article entitled “**Whatever you think of its government Syria’s culture must be saved**” (by Richard Morrison).

This is an editorial describing the current state of the DGAM.
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/article4605584.ece>

November 5, 2015

The UN News Centre published an article titled “**Trafficking in cultural property ‘source of enormous illicit profits,’ UN official tells forum.**” At a special event in St. Petersburg, Russia, the Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Division of Treaty Affairs, John Brandolino, discussed with delegates the increase in the participation of “violent extremists and terrorists in the destruction, looting trafficking and sale of cultural property, in complicity with organized criminal groups.”
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52475>

- *The Daily Star* published an article titled “**Russia bombs Palmyra, eastern Syria: military.**” The Russian air force said it carried out strikes near Palmyra for a second time, claiming targets were far from the historic sites. The Defense Ministry confirmed the destruction of a large, fortified location of ISIL militants, including an air-defense gun and a tank.
<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-05/321811-russia-bombs-palmyra-eastern-syria-military.ashx>

- **AAAS** published an announcement entitled “**Developing a Research Community and Capacity for the Study of Cultural Heritage in Conflict.**” The organization announced the award of a \$199,876 grant from the National Science Foundation to further aid in the tracing of damage to monuments in the Middle East.
www.aaas.org/page/developing-research-community-and-capacity-study-cultural-heritage-conflict

- *The Art Media Agency* published an article entitled “**Warzone or Political Pawn: The Fading Heritage of the Middle East,**” which provides an analysis of the politics surrounding the Middle East and recent destruction of cultural heritage.
<http://en.artmediaagency.com/116173/warzone-or-political-pawn-the-fading-heritage-of-the-middle-east/>

November 4, 2015

MIT Technology Review published an article entitled “**Turning to Technology to Preserve Cultural Sites**” (by Kaylyn Hlavaty). The article describes ongoing technological projects, including the use of 3D cameras and digital photogrammetry to create models to document destruction to archaeological sites in Iraq and Syria.
<http://techreviewpanarab.com/en/energy/technology-cultural-sites/>

November 3, 2015

DGAM published an article entitled “**In photos: deliberate destruction of heritage in Bara in Jabal.**” This article provides photographic evidence that there was deliberate destruction and

vandalism to the pyramid temples of Al Bara. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0146.**

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1852>

- *Scoop Independent World News* published an article entitled “**Syria’s Monument Citizens Taking Risks**” (by Franklin Lamb). This article reviews some of the techniques Syrians are using to record and expose the destruction of monuments and antiquities.
<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1511/S00008/syrias-monument-citizens-taking-risks.htm>

November 2, 2015

BBC published an article titled “**Russia warplanes bomb IS positions in Palmyra.**” Activists say it is difficult to assess the extent of the damage, however, the Russian Defense Ministry issued a statement claiming that a fortification, an underground bunker, and anti-aircraft guns were destroyed in the Russian airstrike. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0145.**

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34705128>

- *The Guardian* published an article titled “**Russia’s air force bombs Isis base near ancient city of Palmyra.**” Moscow’s defense ministry reported that one of their Su-25 jets hit a fortified ISIL position in the ancient city of Palmyra. The airstrike reportedly destroyed a fortification, an underground bunker, and anti-aircraft military.
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/02/russias-air-force-bomb-isis-base-near-palmyra>

- *The New York Times* published an article titled “**Activists Say Suspected Russian Jets Hit Syria’s Palmyra.**” An on-the-ground activist in Palmyra by the name Nasser al-Thaer reported at least eight airstrikes in Palmyra, resulting in smoke and clouds of dust from an area that includes a historic castle.
<http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/11/02/world/middleeast/ap-ml-islamic-state.html>

- *The Huffington Post Arabic* published an article titled “**See the first video leaked from the ancient city of Palmyra controlled by Daash.**” Article includes footage showing the current state of Palmyra, including the Arch of Triumph. It adds that Russian airstrikes have officially struck Palmyra on the western edge of the archaeological site, although the effects of the devastation could not be verified.
http://www.huffpostarabi.com/2015/11/02/story_n_8453954.html

- *Voice of America* published an article titled “**Disappeared Syrian Activist’s 3-D Models Could Save Palmyra**” (by Diana Logreira). Syrian web developer and open source activist Bassel Khartabil remains detained by the Syrian government, but the technologies of

his New Palmyra Project are beginning to digitally document damaged structures in the ancient city of Palmyra.

<http://www.voanews.com/content/bassel-khartabil-palmyra-creative-commons-syria-islamic-state/3033453.html>

- *Deutschland Radio Kultur* published “**Rückgabe von irakischer Tontafel ist ein tolles Zeichen**” (by Herman Parzinger).
http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/hermann-parzinger-rueckgabe-von-irakischer-tontafel-ist-ein.1013.de.html?dram%3Aarticle_id=335823
- October 31, 2015 **The International Research Institute for Archaeology and Ethnology** hosted an event entitled “**Operation ‘Civilization Ground Zero’-The Archaeological Mapping to Save the World Heritage from Oblivion in the Era of Global Jihad**” in Naples, Italy.
<http://membership9.wix.com/iriae#!blog1/ciwp>
- October 30, 2015 *The Washington Post* published an article entitled “**Probe of Steve Green’s antiquities may be inevitable; his response is not**” (by Gary Vikan). The article distinguishes two major issues in the case against the Green family the Hobby Lobby and the Museum of the Bible and the alleged illegal acquisition of antiquities from conflict zones — the paperwork describing the objects in question and the details of how these artifacts were excavated and exported from Iraq.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/probe-of-steve-greens-antiquities-may-be-inevitable-his-response-is-not-commentary/2015/10/30/3d8ad5dc-7f42-11e5-bfb6-65300a5ff562_story.html
- October 29, 2015 *NPR* aired a story titled “**ISIS-Threatened Sites Left Off Endangered Heritage List**” (by Neda Ulaby). Speculation on why certain cultural heritage sites have been excluded from the biannual list issued by the World Monuments Fund.
<http://www.npr.org/2015/10/29/452763146/isis-threatened-sites-left-off-endangered-heritage-list>
- *Reuters* published an article titled “**Warplanes believed Russia hit Syria’s Deraa for first time: rebel, monitor**” (by Tom Perry). The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported the jets that conducted airstrikes on the Tel al-Harah area were believed to be Russian according to a network of ground sources. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0144.**
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/29/us-mideast-crisis-syria-south-idUSKCN0SN0SX20151029>
- *Vanity Fair* published an article entitled “**Did Hobby Lobby’s C.E.O. Unknowingly Sponsor Terrorism?**” (by Tina Nguyen).
<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2015/10/hobby-lobby-ceo->

[antiquities-terrorism](#)

- *New Republic* published an online article titled “**Between Hobby Lobby and ISIS: The battle for Iraq’s Antiquities**” (by Elizabeth Bruenig).
<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/123262/between-hobby-lobby-and-isis-battle-iraqs-antiquities>
- October 28, 2015
Museums Journal published an article titled “**British Museum to help Iraq reconstruct archaeological sites**” (by Simon Stephens). London’s British Museum has set plans to train a group of Iraqi heritage professionals in the wake of the destruction in Nineveh, Nimrud, and Hatra.
<http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/29102015-bm-to-help-iraq-reconstruct-archaeological-sites>
- *The Art Newspaper* published an article titled “**British Museum helps ‘prepare for aftermath’ of ISIL**” (by Martin Bailey).
<http://theartnewspaper.com/news/160486/>
- *BBC* published an article titled “**UK gives £3m to protect Iraq antiquities from IS terrorism.**”
<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-34654633>
- *The Times* published an article titled “**The loss of the Middle East’s heritage affects us all**” (by John Whittingdale and Neil MacGregor). The authors insist that preserving cultural heritage in countries such as Iraq and Syria should be a global responsibility.
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/politics/article4598002.ece>
- *The Times-Picayune* published the article “**Stolen artifacts, ISIS money and a New Orleanian on the case**” (by Ted Lipinski). Tess Davis, executive director of the Washington-based nonprofit, Antiquities Coalition, is interviewed about her efforts to stop the trade of blood antiquities from Iraq and Syria.
http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2015/10/stolen_artifacts_isis_money_and_a_new_orleanian_on_the_case.html
- *The Guardian* published a blog post titled “**Islamic State’s latest attack on Palmyra is a picture of the end of civilisation**” (by Jonathan Jones).
<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2015/oct/28/isis-palmyra-temple-baalshamin-three-captives-attack-violence-art-humanity>

- **DGAM** published an article titled “**Our colleague Ismail Mohammed Ali was killed by ISIS.**” Mr. Ali worked in the Deir ez-Zor Museum as a guard and later as a watchperson for the archaeology sites around the city.
<http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1850>

Military and Political Context

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

1. Aleppo Governorate:
 - During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets in the area surrounding Mar’a.²
 - On October 29, a confidential report by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons concluded, “with the utmost confidence that at least two people were exposed to sulfur mustard” following an attack on the town of Mar’a on August 21, 2015. The reported source of the sulfur mustard was not released to media outlets.³
 - On October 31, 64 people, including 28 children, were killed in Syrian and Russian airstrikes across Aleppo according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.⁴
 - On November 1, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that clashes between rebel groups, backed by the US-led coalition, and ISIL militants killed 18 ISIL militants in the town of Harbil.⁵
 - On November 1, Turkey’s state-run Anadolu Agency news reported that air strikes, by both U.S. and Turkish aircrafts taking off from Incirlik base, struck eight ISIL targets just over the Syrian border near the Turkish governorate of Kilis, killing over 50 ISIL militants. The operation was supported by Turkmen forces located on the ground in Syria.⁶
 - On November 3, a “semi-official new agency” in Iran reported that Colonel Mostafa Ezzatollah Soleimani from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard had been killed in Aleppo. Reports later that day from Fars News Agency announced two additional officers’ deaths in Aleppo.⁷

² <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626662/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626953/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626852/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-targets-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627163/military-strikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627803/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628136/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628153/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/06/us-mideast-crisis-syria-chemicalweapons-idUSKCN0SU2PZ20151106>

⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34693670> ; https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/new-us-backed-syrian-rebel-alliance-launches-offensive-against-isis/2015/10/31/c6eeac0a-800e-11e5-afce-2afd1d3eb896_story.html

⁵ <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/193340-is-overruns-town-in-central-syria>

⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/01/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-idUSKCN0SQ1ET20151101>

⁷ <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/11/03/semi-official-iran-news-agency-says-revolutionary-guard-colonel-killed-in-syria/> ; <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx>

- On November 4, the Syrian army regained control of a highway southeast of Aleppo that had been captured by ISIL last month. The highway connects Aleppo to the cities of Hama and Homs and is the Syrian army's supply route to government-held parts of Aleppo.⁸
 - On November 5, the Russian Ministry of Defense reported that Russian airstrikes were carried out near the Neirab airport.⁹
 - On November 5, Jabhat al-Nusra captured the areas of Telat Saru and Telat al-Maqbara from pro-government fighters.¹⁰
 - November 10, Syrian government forces, backed by pro-government gunmen, Hezbollah forces, and Russian airstrikes, broke the two-year long ISIL siege on Kweiras Airbase, freeing hundreds of Syrian soldiers trapped inside.¹¹
2. Homs Governorate:
- During the reporting period, Russia conducted airstrikes near the UNESCO world heritage site of Palmyra, as well as near the town of al-Qaryatayn. Russian forces also moved military aircrafts to the Tiyas and Sharya bases, bringing the number of Russian bases in Syria to four.¹²
 - On October 31, ISIL militants reportedly captured the town of Maheen from Syrian government forces. Clashes also occurred near the majority-Assyrian Christian village of Sadad resulting in Syrian forces retreating from the village. Approximately 200 Syrian fighters have traveled to Sadad to reinforce and defend the town from ISIL.¹³
 - On November 8, US-led coalition strikes destroyed an ISIL "supply cache" and damaged a cave near the area of Homs.¹⁴
3. Damascus Governorate:
- During the reporting period, ongoing Russian and Syrian airstrikes took place in the rebel-held Damascus suburb of Douma. Over one hundred people have been killed, the majority of whom are reported to be civilians.¹⁵

⁸ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/04/us-mideast-crisis-syria-aleppo-idUSKCN0ST1AR20151104>

⁹ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-05/321811-russia-bombs-palmyra-eastern-syria-military.ashx>

¹⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/05/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN0SU0XY20151105>

¹¹ http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_SYRIA ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/10/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN0SZ15E20151110> ; <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/pro-regime-forces-relieve-besieged-airbase-symbolic-victory>

¹² <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/02/russias-air-force-bomb-isis-base-near-palmyra> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34705128> ; <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-claims-cooperation-syria-opposition-strikes/27343260.html> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-04/321559-apparent-russian-syria-strikes-killed-23-civilians-activist.ashx> ; <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/dod-no-us-russia-joint-exercise-russia-opens-new-syrian-n456651> ; <http://www.iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/11/russia-repositions-military-assets-in.html> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-05/321811-russia-bombs-palmyra-eastern-syria-military.ashx>

¹³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34693670> ; <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/193340-is-overruns-town-in-central-syria> ; http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/11/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-october-23_2.html ; <http://europe.newsweek.com/hundreds-christian-fighters-scramble-defend-syrian-town-isis-advance-336227>

¹⁴ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628153/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

- On November 1, UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura met with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem in Damascus to discuss the ongoing international talks on the conflict in Syria, where he urged local ceasefires in Syria.¹⁶
 - On November 1, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that Jaish al-Islam was using regime soldiers and Alawite citizens as human shields to prevent ongoing regime bombardments of the Eastern Ghouta and Douma area.¹⁷
 - On November 5, the Russian Ministry of Defense reported that Russian airstrikes had destroyed an ISIL base near the city of Damascus.¹⁸
4. Latakia Governorate:
- November 10, Syrian state TV reported explosions in two areas of Latakia killing at least 16 people and wounding 53. Both bombings and shellings were reported in different areas of the city by various news sources. The state news agency SANA blamed al-Nusra Front and Ahrar Al-Sham for the attacks.¹⁹
5. Daraa Governorate:
- On October 28, Russia reportedly carried out its first strikes in Daraa Governorate, striking the northern areas of Tel al-Harah, Tal Antar, Kafr Nasaj, and Aqraba. The strikes were reported by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.²⁰
6. Quneitra Governorate:
- On October 28, Iranian state news reported that Russian airstrikes targeted ISIL militants and Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra near the Syrian portion of the Golan Heights. The report was not yet substantiated by local media, however if true the Institute for the Study of War assesses that this represent the first coordinated military efforts between Russia, Jordan, and Israel.²¹
7. Hama Governorate:
- On November 5, Jabhat al-Nusra and Syrian rebel forces captured the city of Morek from Syrian government forces.²²
 - On November 6, Jabhat al-Nusra and Syrian rebel forces recaptured the village of Ashtan and Um Hartayn only days after it was taken by government forces.²³

¹⁵ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/syria-bombs-douma-human-shields-151103171542946.html> ; <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/syrians-killed-government-jets-hit-market-douma-151030084004586.html> ; <http://news.yahoo.com/syria-rebels-using-caged-captives-human-shields-monitor-152332114.html> ; <http://news.yahoo.com/suspected-russian-air-raids-kill-23-syria-civilians-152940704.html> ; <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/killed-injured-air-strikes-syria-douma-151107085450020.html> ; http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_SYRIA

¹⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34693670> ; <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/193448-u-n-envoy-urges-syria-ceasefires-to-build-on-talks>

¹⁷ <http://news.yahoo.com/syria-rebels-using-caged-captives-human-shields-monitor-152332114.html> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34693670> ; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/02/syria-armed-groups-use-caged-hostages-deter-attacks>

¹⁸ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-05/321784-russia-says-destroys-isis-base-near-damascus.ashx>

¹⁹ http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_SYRIA ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/10/us-mideast-crisis-syria-latakia-idUSKCN0SZ1QD20151110>

²⁰ <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/193126-syrian-observatory-apparent-russian-raids-in-syria-south-for-first-time> ; http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/10/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-september_31.html ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/29/us-mideast-crisis-syria-south-idUSKCN0SN0SX20151029>

²¹ http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/10/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-september_28.html

²² <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/05/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN0SU0XY20151105>

8. Rif Dimashq Governorate:

- On October 30, Syrian media sources reported that the Israeli Air Force destroyed two Syrian military and Hezbollah targets in the Qalamoun mountain region on the border with Lebanon. Israeli strikes also reportedly hit targets in the village of Ras al-Ein and an army base near the village of Al-Qutayfah. Israel and Syrian state media have yet to confirm the report.²⁴
- On November 2, Syrian sources reported that the Israeli Air Force destroyed an “advanced missile shipment” intended for Hezbollah in the Qalamoun mountain region. Israel has yet to confirm the report.²⁵

9. Hasakah Governorate:

- During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets in the area surrounding Al-Hawl and Hasakah.²⁶
- On October 31, a coalition of US-backed rebel groups and Kurdish militia members, known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), began their first operation against ISIL-held territory in northeast Syria according to Sherfan Darwish, a spokesman for one of the groups. The towns targeted included Shadadi and al-Hol.²⁷
- On November 7, ISIL militants released a group of Assyrian Christians, including 27 women and 10 men, who had been captured from the towns of Tal Shiram and Tal Jazira by the group in February 2015. The conditions for their release are unknown.²⁸

10. Deir ez-Zor Governorate:

- During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the area of Deir ez-Zor and Abu Kamal.²⁹
- On November 5, airstrikes struck a school in the ISIL-held city of Abu Kamal, located on the border between Syria and Iraq, killing at least 25 civilians according to activists. The ISIL-affiliated news agency, Amaq, released videos of the bombing

²³ http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_SYRIA ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/11/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-october-29.html>

²⁴ <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/202716>

²⁵ <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/202798>

²⁶ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627987/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626852/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-targets-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/NewsArticleView/Article/626953/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627163/military-strikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627620/military-forces-strike-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627803/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628136/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628153/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628395/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

²⁷ <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/193302-syria-kurdish-arab-alliance-launches-first-anti-is-attack>

²⁸ <http://news.yahoo.com/suspected-russian-air-raids-kill-23-syria-civilians-152940704.html> ; <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/isil-frees-37-assyrians-christians-syria-151108050447217.html>

²⁹ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626852/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-targets-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627163/military-strikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627620/military-forces-strike-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627987/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628136/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628395/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

and reported that at least 50 civilians were killed. It is unknown if the airstrikes were carried out by the Russian or Syrian army. Another airstrike struck a training base near the town of al-Muhasan.³⁰

- On November 8, French forces bombed an ISIL-held oil supply center near Deir ez-Zor.³¹

11. Raqqa Governorate:

- During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the area of Raqqa.³²
- During the reporting period, Russia repeatedly carried out airstrikes on the city of Raqqa and surrounding areas, reportedly killing ISIL militants as well as civilians.³³

12. Idlib Governorate:

- On November 4, Russian airstrikes hit areas surrounding the towns of Maarat Masrin and Ram Hamdan despite the fact that the area was under a local ceasefire agreement, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.³⁴
- On November 5, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced its airstrikes had struck a munitions base belonging to Jabhat al-Nusra near the city of Maaret al-Numan.³⁵
- On November 5, 'insurgents' took over the area of Tal Skik from the Syrian army and Hezbollah, who captured the area last month.³⁶

Other Key Points:

- During the reporting period ongoing discussions occurred in Vienna between the U.S., Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt as well as representatives from other countries, with the exception of any Syrian representation, regarding the ongoing conflict in Syria. Before the next round of discussions, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated at a news conference with UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, that it was necessary to determine which groups operating in Syria would be considered terrorist group and which would be considered opposition groups.³⁷

³⁰ http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_SYRIA ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-05/321811-russia-bombs-palmyra-eastern-syria-military.ashx>

³¹ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/11/09/French-strike-hits-ISIS-oil-facility-in-Syria-French-defence-minister.html>

³² <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626852/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-targets-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626953/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

³³ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-06/321892-russian-airstrikes-kill-42-in-isis-held-raqqa-syria.ashx> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/11/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-october-25.html> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-05/321811-russia-bombs-palmyra-eastern-syria-military.ashx>

³⁴ <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/syrian-monitor-jets-bel/2238918.html>

³⁵ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-05/321811-russia-bombs-palmyra-eastern-syria-military.ashx>

³⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/05/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN0SU0XY20151105>

³⁷ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/report-iran-to-join-talks-on-syria-crisis-alongside-assad-ally-russia/2015/10/28/aa917eb2-7d65-11e5-afce-2af1d3eb896_story.html ; <http://af.reuters.com/article/egyptNews/idAFL8N12S2XL20151028> ; <http://www.wsj.com/articles/diplomats-meet-in-vienna-for-syria-talks-as-gap-appears-to-be-narrowing-over-assad-future-1446204142> ; <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-backs-off-hard-line-on-syrian-presidents-future-1446161540> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/04/mideast-crisis-syria-russia-un-idUSR4N12L00020151104>

- During the reporting period the U.S. approved a plan to send 50 U.S. commandos to northeastern Syria to advise U.S.-backed moderate Syrian rebels, as well as an additional 100 million dollars in aid to various factions of Syrian opposition including: “local and provincial councils, civil society activists, emergency services, and other needs”.³⁸
- On November 3, a U.S. and Russian aircraft conducted a communication test above south central Syria.³⁹
- During the reporting period, Russia boosted its ground force in Syria by adding 2,000 troops, bringing the total number to 4,000, and deployed anti-aircraft missiles. In addition, the ministry of defense claimed that it had established “coordination groups” with Syrian opposition figures, and used their information to carry out airstrikes.⁴⁰
- On November 5, the French defense ministry announced it was deploying its largest warship, the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, closer to the region to assist in the country’s operations against ISIL militants in Syria and Iraq.⁴¹
- On November 5, a report by *The Guardian* detailed Iran’s use of refugees from Afghanistan as fighters in Syria. The group, known as the Fatemioun military division, is reportedly “the second largest foreign military contingent” fighting in support of Assad after Hezbollah.⁴²

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

1. Salah ad Din Governorate:
 - During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the areas of Beiji and Samarra.⁴³
 - On October 28, ISIL militants attacked a “Popular Mobilization” unit and Iraqi police with four vehicle-borne explosive devices in the areas of al-Abbasiyyah and al-Sharif Abbas, north of Samarra. ISIL militants clashed with Iraqi security forces in the areas of Thar Thar and al-Hwesh, west of Samarra. ISIL militants also attacked Iraqi Security Forces and a Popular Mobilization unit in the Fatha area, northeast of the city of Beiji.⁴⁴

³⁸ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-send-special-forces-to-syria-1446216062> ; <http://www.newsweek.com/us-send-20-30-special-operations-forces-syria-fight-islamic-state-official-388713> ; <http://news.yahoo.com/saudi-fm-assads-future-among-sticking-points-syria-123612784.html>

³⁹ <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/dod-no-us-russia-joint-exercise-russia-opens-new-syrian-n456651>

⁴⁰ <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-military-activity-october-27-november-3-2015> ; <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-claims-cooperation-syria-opposition-strikes/27343260.html> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/04/us-mideast-crisis-russia-syria-idUSKCN0ST2G020151104> ; <http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-russia-syria-missiles-20151105-story.html>

⁴¹ <http://www.ibtimes.co.in/france-deploy-its-largest-warship-charles-de-gaulle-syria-fight-isis-653485> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34738177>

⁴² <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/05/iran-recruits-afghan-refugees-fight-save-syrias-bashar-al-assad>

⁴³ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626178/coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626662/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626852/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-targets-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626953/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627163/military-strikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627620/military-forces-strike-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627803/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

⁴⁴ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/11/iraq-situation-report-october-27.html>

2. Baghdad Governorate:

- During the reporting period, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi faced parliamentary opposition towards reforms as a result of his perceived lack of willingness to consult with other parliamentarians.⁴⁵
- On October 28, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced that Iraq had no interest in the “direct action on the ground” that was discussed by the Pentagon.⁴⁶
- On October 28, Iraq’s Finance Minister Hoshiyar Zebari announced that Iraq will put “major weapons deals on hold” in order to contribute 20 percent of the country’s 2016 budget toward the country’s defenses, including 10,000 new recruits, to fight against ISIL.⁴⁷
- On October 29, the Mukhtar Army, a Shia militia operating in Iraq, attacked Camp Liberty, a former military base that has been housing Iranian exiles of the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK). According to the MEK, 23 members and three policemen were killed in the attack.⁴⁸
- On November 10, a series of attacks in Baghdad, including three bombings and a drive by shooting left 10 people dead. The perpetrators of the attack remain unknown.⁴⁹

3. Ninewa Governorate:

- During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the areas of Mosul, Sinjar, Sultan Abdallah, Tal Afar, Kisik, and Qayyarah.⁵⁰
- On October 28, Peshmerga forces, backed by the US-led coalition, launched a military offensive against the southern areas of the ISIL-held Shingal area. Syrian Kurdish fighters also reportedly participated in the offensive.⁵¹

⁴⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/29/iraq-abadi-reforms-idUSL8N12T2XQ20151029> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/11/iraq-situation-report-october-27.html> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/02/us-iraq-abadi-idUSKCN0SR0TZ20151102> ; <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2015/11/06/world/middleeast/06reuters-mideast-crisis-iraq-reforms.html>

⁴⁶ <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/iraq-we-didnt-ask-u-s-ground-operations-n452756>

⁴⁷ <http://news.yahoo.com/iraq-adjust-military-spending-hire-10-000-forces-153713082--business.html> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/28/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-spending-idUSKCN0SM23520151028>

⁴⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34674185>

⁴⁹ <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iraq-multiple-attacks-kill-10-civilians-baghdad-35095523>

⁵⁰ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626178/coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626403/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626662/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626852/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-targets-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626953/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627163/military-strikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627803/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627987/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628136/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628153/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628395/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

⁵¹ <http://aranews.net/2015/10/backed-by-u-s-forces-kurds-launch-military-campaign-to-liberate-yezidi-region-from-isis/>

- On October 30, the Kurdish Popular Defense Forces and the Shingal Resisting Units announced that they had killed over 100 ISIL militants in the Shingal area in their efforts to regain the area.⁵²
- 4. Al Anbar Governorate:
 - During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the areas of Ramadi, Al Qaim, Habbaniyah, Albu Hayat, Fallujah, and Baghdadi.⁵³
 - On November 1, Iraqi security forces “crossed the Abu Faraj Bridge, north of Ramadi, into central Ramadi” as well as continued their advance towards Anbar Operations Command headquarters, located north of Ramadi.⁵⁴
- 5. Erbil Governorate:
 - On October 28, the Prime Minister of Iraq’s Kurdistan region, Nechervan Barzani, appointed four new members to the Kurdish Regional Government cabinet, replacing four members of the Gorran party who were expelled earlier this month. The Gorran party was one of four parties “pushing for a reduction of the president’s powers as a condition for extending his mandate, which expired in August”.⁵⁵
 - On October 31, President Obama authorized a new special operations task force based in Erbil to bolster US-led efforts against ISIL in Iraq.⁵⁶
 - On November 2, one US-led coalition strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position near the town of Makhmur.⁵⁷
- 6. Kirkuk Governorate:
 - During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the area of Huwayjah.⁵⁸

⁵² <http://aranews.net/2015/10/100-isis-militants-killed-in-clashes-with-kurdish-forces-in-yezidi-region-north-iraq/>

⁵³ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626178/coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626403/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626662/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626852/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-targets-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626953/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627163/military-strikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627803/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627987/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628136/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628153/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/628395/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

⁵⁴ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/11/iraq-situation-report-october-27.html>

⁵⁵ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Oct-28/320562-iraqi-kurdish-pm-appoints-new-ministers-after-expulsions.ashx>

⁵⁶ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/11/iraq-situation-report-october-27.html>

⁵⁷ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626953/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

⁵⁸ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626403/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626662/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626852/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-targets-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627163/military-strikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/627803/military-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

- On November 3, ISIL militants attacked a local government compound on the Peshmerga-held city of Dibis. Four Kurdish security forces and the four ISIL militants involved in the attack were killed.⁵⁹

Other Key Points:

- On an unknown date during the reporting period, ISIL beheaded four Peshmerga fighters. The beheadings were thought to be retribution by ISIL militants for the U.S. special operation that released 70 prisoners held by ISIL in Hawija on October 22.⁶⁰
- On October 30, government employees and teachers protested against “salary scale changes” in Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Diwaniyah, Dhi Qar, Najaf, and Muthanna. Protests against corruption also occurred in Babil, Baghdad, Basra, Diwaniya, Diyala, Karbala, Muthanna, Maysan, and Wasit. Some demonstrators in Diwaniya were injured when they attempted to storm government buildings and the Fadhila and Dawa political parties’ headquarters.⁶¹

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

- On October 30, two anti-ISIL Syrian journalists were assassinated at their home in the city of Sanliurfa in southeastern Turkey. The men were identified as Ibrahim Abd al Qader, a member of the activist group Raqqa is Being Silently Slaughtered, and Fares Hammadi, “a journalist with a Syrian media collective called Eye on Homeland”. Other reports described both men as activist-journalists from Raqqa is Being Silently Slaughtered. The deaths were confirmed via the group’s Twitter and Facebook accounts.⁶²
 - On November 1, Turkey held parliamentary elections that resulted in the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the party of President Tayyip Erdogan, gaining 49.4% of the vote. The prime minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu, will now begin to form a new government. This is the second parliamentary election this year. The previous election in June saw the AKP party losing its majority for the first time in 13 years. The election has been criticized both internationally and nationally as an unfair and restricted vote, preceded by violence and crackdowns on the media. In addition, this election means that Erdogan’s government will be able to continue supporting Syrian rebels against the Assad regime, blocking the advocations of other parties for talks with the Syrian president.⁶³
 - On November 1, an explosion in the mainly-Kurdish southeastern Turkish city of Nusaybin killed one person and injured at least 25, hours after the Turkish parliamentary elections concluded. Clashes also erupted between Turkish police

⁵⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/03/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-violence-idUSKCN0SS28X20151103>

⁶⁰ <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/30/middleeast/isis-iraq-hawija-executions-video/> ; <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/10/31/ISIS-beheads-four-Iraqi-Kurds-in-revenge-video.html>

⁶¹ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/11/iraq-situation-report-october-27.html>

⁶² http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_ISLAMIC_STATE ; <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-death-of-two-syrian-journalists> ; <https://cpj.org/2015/10/cpj-calls-for-investigation-into-murder-of-syrian-.php> ; <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/details-revealed-chilling-plot-execute-anti-isis-activists-turkey-n455416>

⁶³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34704834> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34694420> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/11/turkish-elections-empower-erdogan-to.html>

and activists outside the HDP headquarters in the Kurdish-majority city of Diyarbakir.⁶⁴

- On November 2, Turkish jets struck Kurdish PKK targets, including shelters, underground bunkers, and weapon sites, in the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq.⁶⁵
- On November 4, Turkish officials announced that police in the southern governorate of Gaziantep had detained nine alleged ISIL militants who were planning a suicide bombing in the Turkish city of Istanbul. The exact date of the arrest is unknown.⁶⁶
- On November 4, clashes between the PKK and the Turkish military killed 15 PKK fighters and 2 Turkish soldiers in the mainly Kurdish southeast region of Diyarbakir, where, one day prior, the Turkish military carried out air strikes and curfews were announced in provincial districts.⁶⁷
- On November 6, Turkish police detained 20 ISIL suspects in Antalya.⁶⁸

Other significant political and military events during the reporting period:

- On October 29, unidentified warplanes struck ISIL targets in the Libyan city of Sirte. This is the second airstrike of this kind, with the origins of the planes being unknown. There were no immediate reported casualties.⁶⁹
- On October 31, a Russian commercial airplane carrying mainly Russian tourists from the Egyptian resort town of Sharm al Sheikh crashed in northern Sinai, killing all 224 people on board. The cause of the crash remains unknown, but some Russian officials have announced that they believe an “external influence” was responsible. ISIL-affiliate, Sinai Province, has since released two statements claiming responsibility for the downing of the jet, although many officials dispute this claim. During the reporting period, U.S. and the U.K. officials declared their strong belief that the plane was in fact brought down by a bomb on board the aircraft. Many airlines have canceled flights in and out of Sharm al Sheikh.⁷⁰
- On November 4, ISIL-affiliate Sinai Province, claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing attack near a police club in northern Sinai town of El Arish that killed at least 4 Egyptian police officers.⁷¹
- On November 5, a bombing killed at least six people, including a leading Sunni Muslim scholar, and wounded five more outside of the headquarters of the Muslim Scholars Committee in the northeastern town of Aرسال in Lebanon. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the bombing

⁶⁴ <http://www.businessinsider.com/report-bomb-explodes-southeastern-turkey-2015-11> ;

<http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/violence-erupts-kurdish-regions-following-akp-electoral-victory-turkey-67817370>

⁶⁵ http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_TURKEY_KURDS

⁶⁶ http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_TURKEY_ISLAMIC_STATE

⁶⁷ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/04/us-turkey-politics-kurds-clashes-idUSKCN0ST1LJ20151104>

⁶⁸ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-06/321877-turkish-police-detain-20-isis-suspects-in-antalya-ahead-of-g-20-summit.ashx>

⁶⁹ <http://af.reuters.com/article/libyaNews/idAFL8N12T6GW20151029>

⁷⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34697416> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/01/us-egypt-crash-idUSKCN0SP06V20151101> ; <http://www.wsj.com/articles/isis-offshoot-invites-russian-plane-crash-investigators-to-prove-it-wasnt-us-1446646925> ; https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/britain-suspends-flights-to-sinai-citing-bomb-fears/2015/11/04/45ab066c-826f-11e5-8bd2-680fff868306_story.html ; <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/07/world/middleeast/egypt.html>

⁷¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/05/world/middleeast/egypt-bombing-sinai-police.html>

of the headquarters which works with Syrian refugees and assists in releasing people who have been captured by al-Qaida affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, in Syria.⁷²

- On November 5, International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, in a report to the Security Council, said that ISIL militants are responsible for the majority of civilian deaths in Libya.⁷³

Satellite Imagery and Geospatial Analysis

Over the course of the reporting period, the Geospatial Initiatives team analyzed four recent satellite images of portions of Syria. These included images in Latakia, Hama, Idlib, and Hasakah Governorates. This new imagery provided coverage of 160 heritage sites. Within these images, new damage is visible in the form of destruction of modern villages from the recent increase in airstrikes. These sites show little to no additional damage to historical buildings or archaeological sites. This included the site of Apamea, which showed only a few new looting pits in the northwest area inside the city wall. Sites within the city of Latakia also showed no new damage.

⁷² <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/11/05/Sources-Two-killed-three-wounded-in-blast-in-Lebanon.html> ; <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/05/middleeast/lebanon-deadly-bombing/index.html> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34735117>

⁷³ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/162815/World/Region/IS-group-responsible-for-most-Libya-killings-ICC-p.aspx>

Incident Reports: Syria

SHI 15-0143

Report Date: November 1, 2015

Site Name: Rasha el Qibliye

Date of Incident: Ongoing since 2011

Location: Rasha el Qibliye, Idlib Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Settlement of Seleucid–Byzantine structures forming part of the Dead Cities.

Site Date: Seleucid–Byzantine Period

Incident Summary: Ongoing illegal excavation with a few new pits on the western side of the site.

Incident Source and Description: DigitalGlobe satellite imagery acquired by ASOR CHI shows increasing looting is occurring at the site of Rasha el Qibliye. Imagery dating to May 16, 2011 shows some damage but no looting pits, but imagery dating to December 12, 2012, November 28, 2013 and October 26, 2015 has evidence of new pits on the western side of the site where there is an open, flat area.

Pattern: Illegal excavation, theft, and vandalism.

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 Rasha el Qilibye.

Sources:

Scholarly:

Tchalenko, G. (1953-1958). *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord. Le Massif du Bélus à l'époque romain I-III*. Paris: P. Geuthner.



Rasha el Qibliye (DigitalGlobe; May 16, 2011)



Rasha el Qibliye, new pits (DigitalGlobe; December 12, 2012)



Rasha el Qibliye, new pits (DigitalGlobe; November 28, 2013)



Rasha el Qibliye, new pits (DigitalGlobe; October 26, 2015)

SHI 15-0144

Report Date: October 30, 2015

Site Name: Tell al-Hara (al-Harrah; Khirbet al-Harra; Tel Al-Hara)

Date of Incident: October 28, 2015

Location: Daraa Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Tell al-Hara, located in southern Syria close to the Israeli border, is a village built around the eastern part of a small crater lying in front of the southern-eastern foot of the mountain of the same name. The village is characterized by its proximity to a series of volcanoes, the Tell el Hârâ Mt. being one of them. The region is embedded with high peaks and plateaus and intersected by lava streams and perennial brooks.

In the late 1800s, the plain between the crater and the mountain was used for agricultural purposes along with the slopes of the mountain itself. Village huts were built of stone and numbered 126 in 1897. There was an estimated five hundred inhabitants at the time. The city also contained several ancient building stones, some of which featured Haurân ornamentation, which included vine leaves, grapes, wreaths, and representations of the local acanthus-like thistles. The lintels of doors contained weathered and only partly legible Arabic inscriptions. Greek inscriptions were found in other areas of the city.⁷⁴

Site Date: Pre-Islamic

Incident Summary: Russian airstrikes struck the region of Tell al-Harah.

Incident Source and Description: According to local sources reporting to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, and later reported by Reuters, warplanes believed to be Russian bombed targets in the Tell ah-Hara area on October 28, 2015.⁷⁵ This is the furthest south Russian jets have struck since the beginning of airstrikes approximately one month ago. Reuter's source, Bashar al-Zoubi, head of the political office of the Yarmouk Army concurred that the airstrikes were "most probably Russian." He also noted that the Syrian air force did not mount nighttime raids. Today the area is reportedly held by Syrian insurgents. Russia and Israel have supposedly agreed to coordinate military operations in the area.⁷⁶

On October 30, 2015 the Qasioun News Agency released footage of rising smoke clouds over the Hara hill.⁷⁷ The source later released a video showing a Russian warplane flying over the site on the same day. The chronology of these videos is unclear, and putative Russian warplane does not appear to be engaging targets.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

⁷⁴ Schumacher, G. 1897. "Notes from Jedûr." *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*.

⁷⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/29/us-mideast-crisis-syria-south-idUSKCN0SN0SX20151029>

⁷⁶ ANSA Med: http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/generalnews/2015/10/30/syria-ngo-first-russian-raids-in-south-at-golan-border_61e195f5-bced-413d-8866-8fa82c1ae48b.html

⁷⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YT061JtGtoc>

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 Tell al-Hara.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Reuters:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/29/us-mideast-crisis-syria-south-idUSKCN0SN0SX20151029>

Qasioun News Agency:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTO61JtGtoc>;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6HZU1nhKA4>;

ANSA Med:

http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/generalnews/2015/10/30/syria-ngo-first-russian-raids-in-south-at-golan-border_61e195f5-bced-413d-8866-8fa82c1ae48b.html

Scholarly:

Schumacher, G. 1897. "Notes from Jedûr." *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*. 190-194.
<https://archive.org/details/quarterlystateme29pale>

SHI 15-0145

Report Date: November 3, 2015

Site Name: Qalaat Shirkuh or the Citadel of Palmyra, UNESCO World Heritage Site of Palmyra

Date of Incident: November 2, 2015

Location: UNESCO World Heritage Site of Palmyra, Homs Governorate, Syria

Site Description: From Ross Burns:

“The castle has for long been attributed to the Lebanese Maanite amir, Fakhr al-Din (1590-1635), who tested the limits of Ottoman flexibility in the early 17th century ... Recent Polish research has confirmed, however, that Fakhr al-Din simply briefly occupied an earlier Ayyubid castle built by the Homs amir, al-Mujahid Assad al Din Shirkuh II (r 1186-1240) who was also responsible for Qalaat al-Shmemis and Qalaat Rahba.

Relatively small in size, the fortifications are based on an original triangular fortress of seven towers (1230), extended later in the 13th century with curtain walls to the east and west, the whole ringed by a deep ditch. The effect is spectacular. You enter from the south via a metal bridge that brings you to a landing between two towers. Like many Muslim castles, the internal arrangement of chambers and defences is compact, with a steep passage taking you up to the internal court. This is surrounded by battlements with a substantial thickening of the defences on the south side.”⁷⁸

Site Date: 1230 CE

Incident Summary: Russian airstrikes hit ISIL positions near the Citadel.

Incident Source and Description: On November 2, 2015, activists in Palmyra reported at least eight airstrikes on the western outskirts of the ISIL-held city, sending smoke rising out of an area that includes the historic citadel. Activist Nasser al-Thaer told the Associated Press that an earlier round of airstrikes hit behind the castle on the previous day. He noted that it was difficult to assess the damage because of the ongoing airstrikes.⁷⁹ The same day, Moscow’s Defense Ministry stated that a Russian “Su-25 jet hit a fortified Isis position in the [Palmyra] area of Homs province,” destroying “a fortification, an underground bunker, and an anti-aircraft artillery.” Russia did not explicitly say when the strikes took place.⁸⁰

On November 5, 2015, the Russian air force announced another series of airstrikes on ISIL militants in Palmyra. The defense ministry said in an official statement that the strikes “destroyed a large fortified location of ISIS militants,” which included an air-defense gun and a tank. They added that the strikes only targeted terrorist infrastructure and occurred a considerable distance from Palmyra’s historical architecture.⁸¹ Khaled Al Homsy, Syrian activist and nephew of the late Chief of Antiquities in Palmyra, Khaled al-Assad, published photos of two of these bombings on November 5,

⁷⁸ Burns 2010, *The Monuments of Syria: A Guide*, I.B. Taurus; London. pp. 243

⁷⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/11/02/world/middleeast/ap-ml-islamic-state.html>

⁸⁰ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/02/russias-air-force-bomb-isis-base-near-palmyra>

⁸¹ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-05/321811-russia-bombs-palmyra-eastern-syria-military.ashx>

2015. The black smoke in the second photo indicates that the airstrike may have triggered the secondary detonation of stored munitions and/or stored fuel.⁸²

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: At this time it is unclear if explosives have damaged extant or subsurface cultural remains. ASOR CHI will attempt to gather further information on these reports via in-country sources and is continuing to monitor the situation in Palmyra given its high visibility and the significance of the city as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

BBC: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34705128>

The Guardian: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/02/russias-air-force-bomb-isis-base-near-palmyra>

The New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/11/02/world/middleeast/ap-ml-islamic-state.html>

The Huffington Post Arabic: http://www.huffpostarabi.com/2015/11/02/story_n_8453954.html

The Daily Star: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Nov-05/321811-russia-bombs-palmyra-eastern-syria-military.ashx>

Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/PalmyraPioneer/status/662361362270670848>

<https://twitter.com/PalmyraPioneer/status/662362760366456832>

⁸² <https://twitter.com/PalmyraPioneer/status/662362760366456832>



Palmyra area, cluster bombs (Twitter; November 5, 2015)



Palmyra area, possible detonation of stored munitions (Twitter; November 5, 2015)

SHI 15-0146

Report Date: November 5, 2015

Site Name: Al Bara; Kapropera

Date of Incident: November 3, 2015

Location: Al Bara, Jabal ez-Zawiyeh, Idlib, Syria

Site Description: From Ross Burns:

“This is one of the most impressive of the ‘dead cities’ and one which those unfamiliar with the area might choose as a good starting point. The site is huge, extending over an area of 2 km by 3 km... The importance of the settlement resulted from its location between the two major sections of Jebel Zawiye, the trough in which it is located forming a north-south corridor essential for internal access. Though it expanded rapidly during its boom period in the fifth and sixth centuries, settlement at Bara only began in the fourth century...The first settlers gathered around a church on the eastern edge of the Wadi al-Goz. At about the same period, a second development, originally isolated in its own compound began at the great basilica today called al-Husn. The settlement rapidly enriched itself through its olive oil and wine industry...The style of buildings was lavish, indicating the high level of prosperity, and the processing facilities, particularly olive oil presses, were built to industrial standard. The people who could finance these buildings could also afford to bury themselves in style and there are two pyramidal-roofed tomb buildings from the sixth century built on an monumental scale.”⁸³

Site Date: Byzantine period

Incident Summary: Standing architectural remains and features at Al Bara were destroyed or vandalized in early November according to the DGAM.

Incident Source and Description: On November 3, 2015, the DGAM released photographs showing vandalism and destruction of historic monuments in Al Bara. Local informants have documented intentional damage to the sarcophagi in the famous pyramid tombs, as well as shrapnel damage to the standing buildings.⁸⁴ The DGAM alleges that stones have also been removed from the site with the use of explosives and heavy machinery. It is worth noting that the site of Al-Bara, as well as multiple other Dead Cities, have been used as camps for internally displaced peoples since the beginning of the conflict.⁸⁵

The Day After Heritage Protection Initiative has also produced a brief, illustrated report of the damage to Al Bara below.

Pattern: Explosives, gunfire/light weaponry; Reuse of ancient/historic structure; Illegal construction; Intentional destruction, vandalism.

⁸³ Burns, Ross *The Monuments of Syria* pp.72

⁸⁴ <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1852>

⁸⁵ <http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/1404915801#.VklXs7erR1M>

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 Al Bara.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

DGAM: <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1852>

A Report on the Internally Displaced and the Camps in Idlib Governorate <http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/1404915801#.VkiXs7erR1M>

Scholarly:

Burns, Ross 2009. *The Monuments of Syria*. I.B. Taurus: London



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



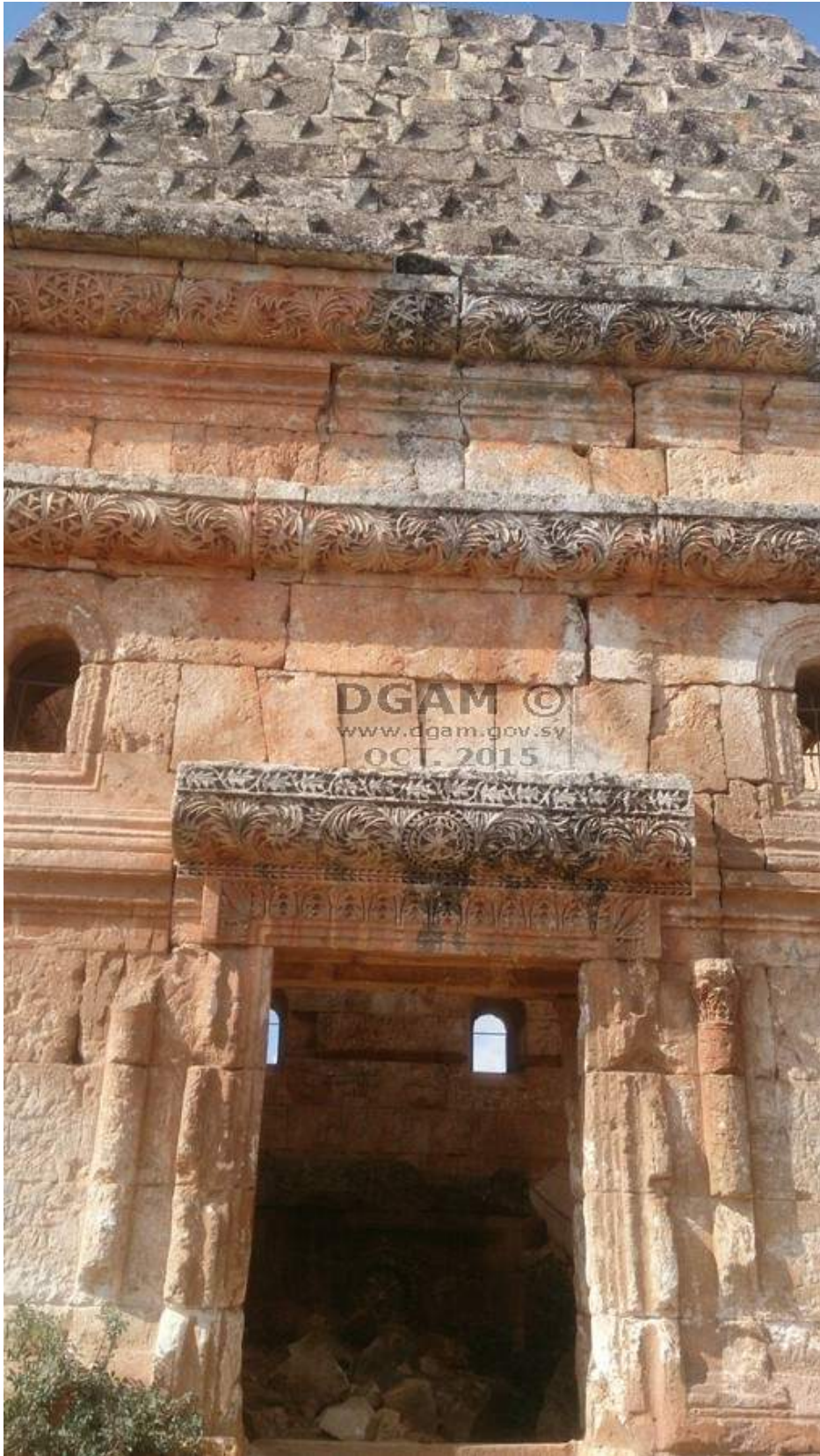
Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



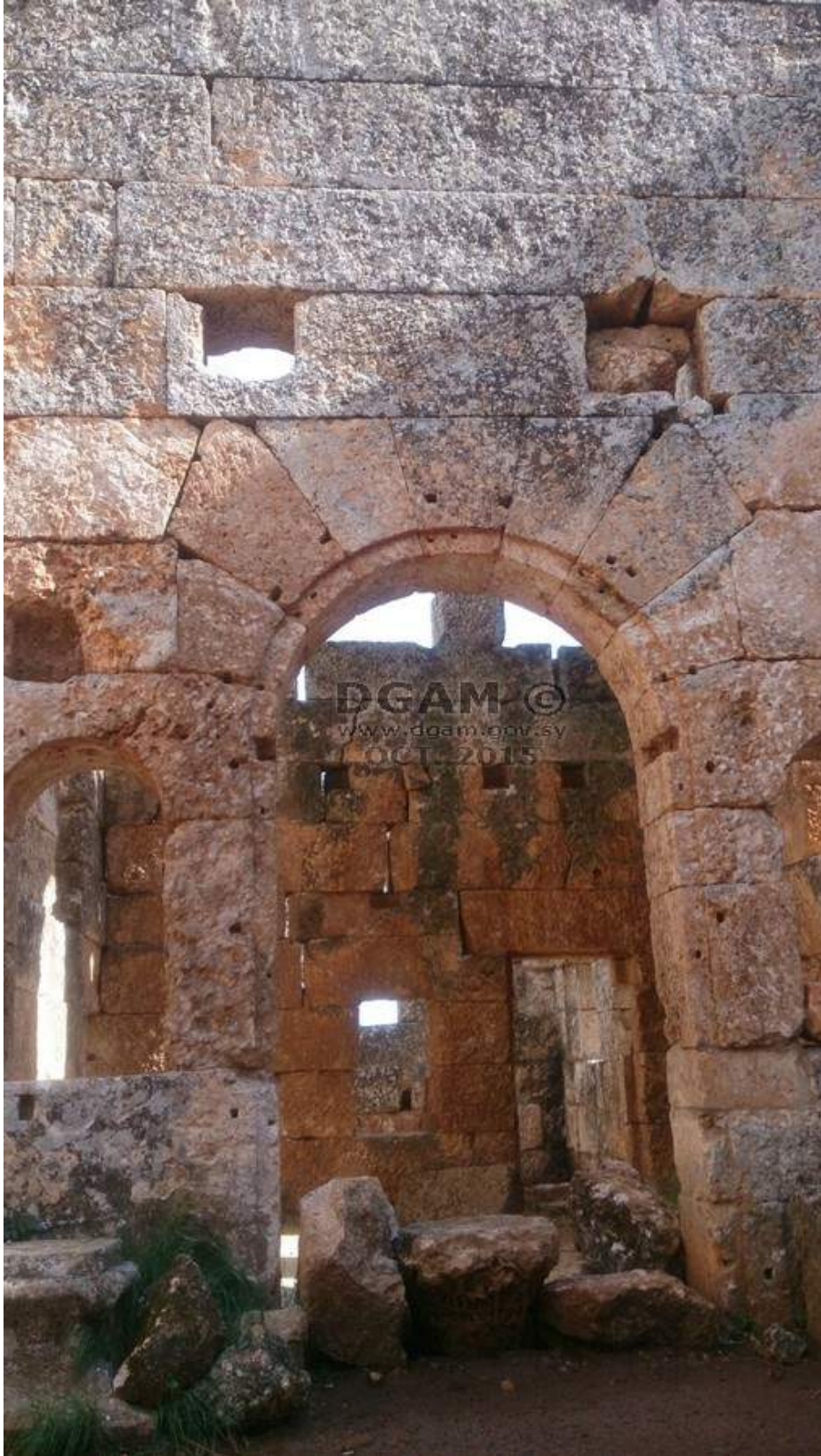
Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



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Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



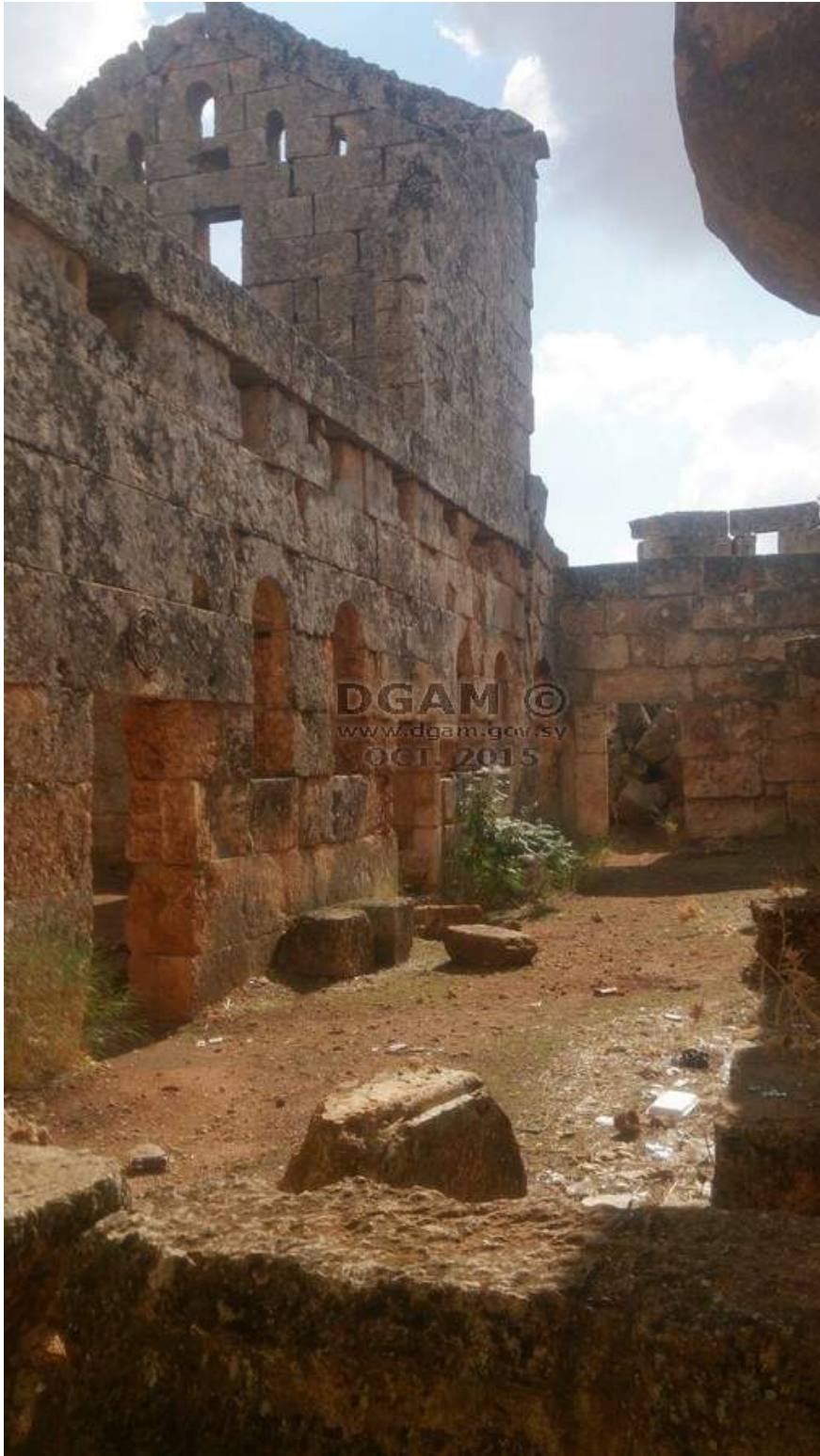
Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



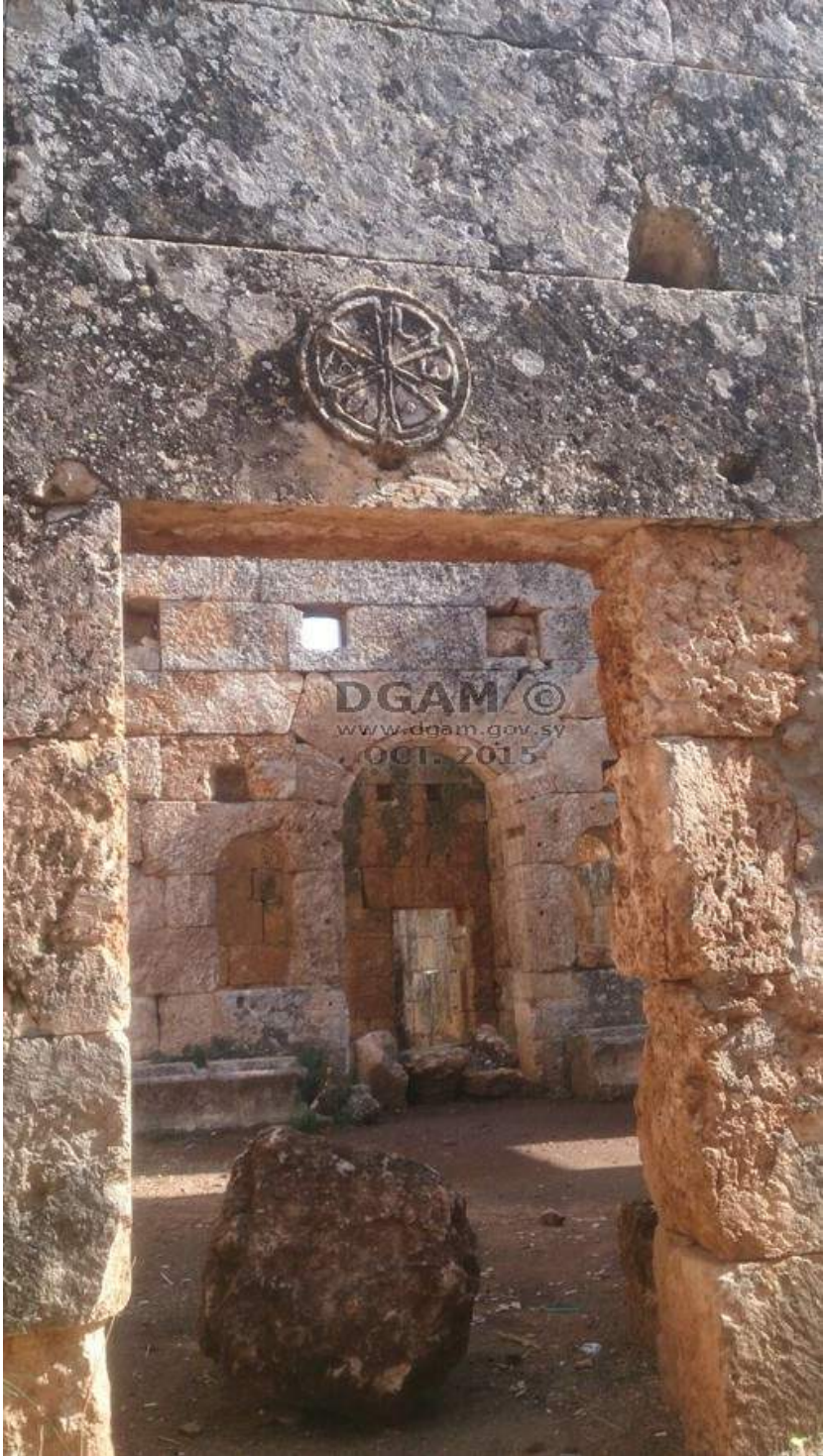
Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



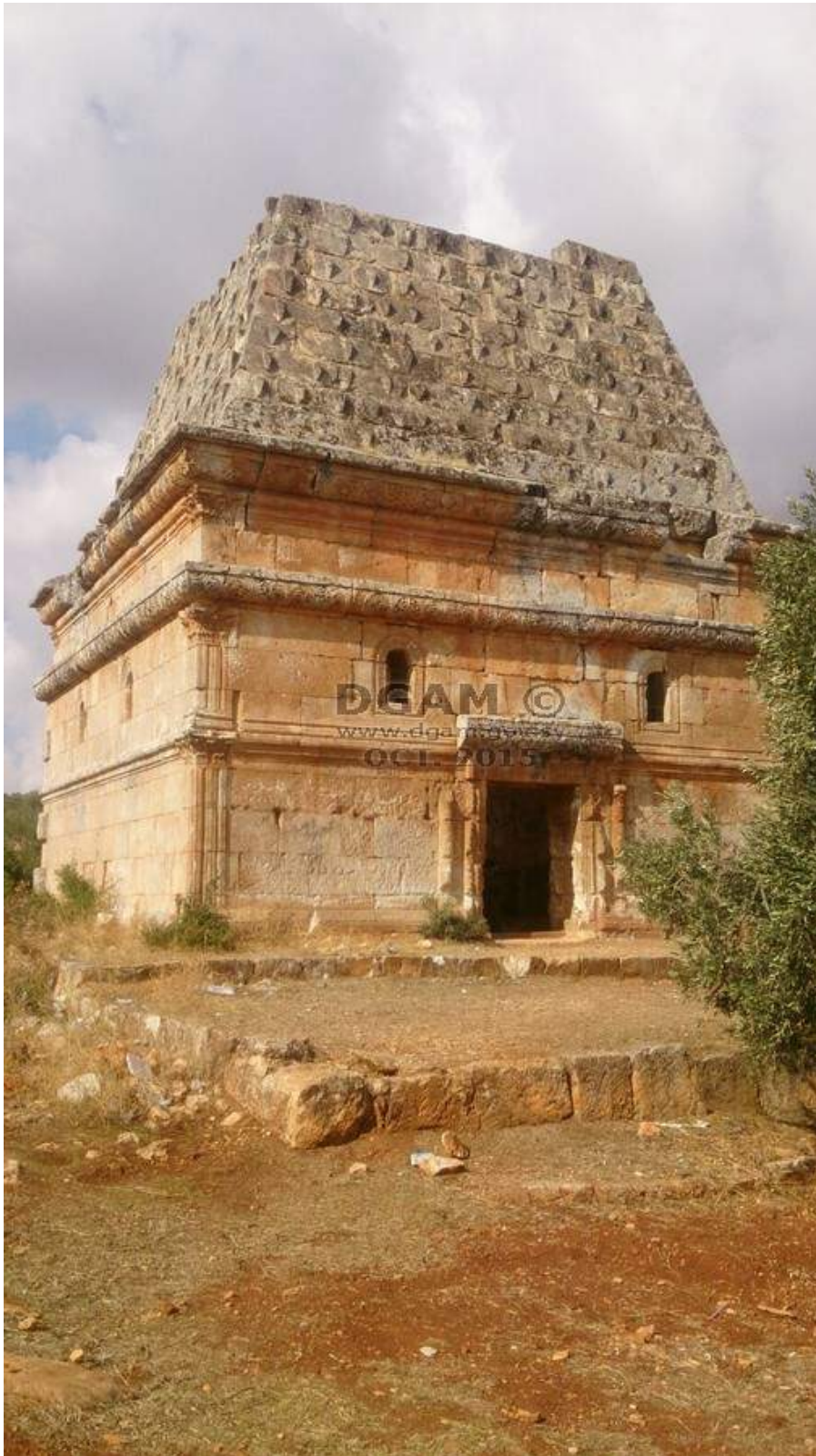
Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



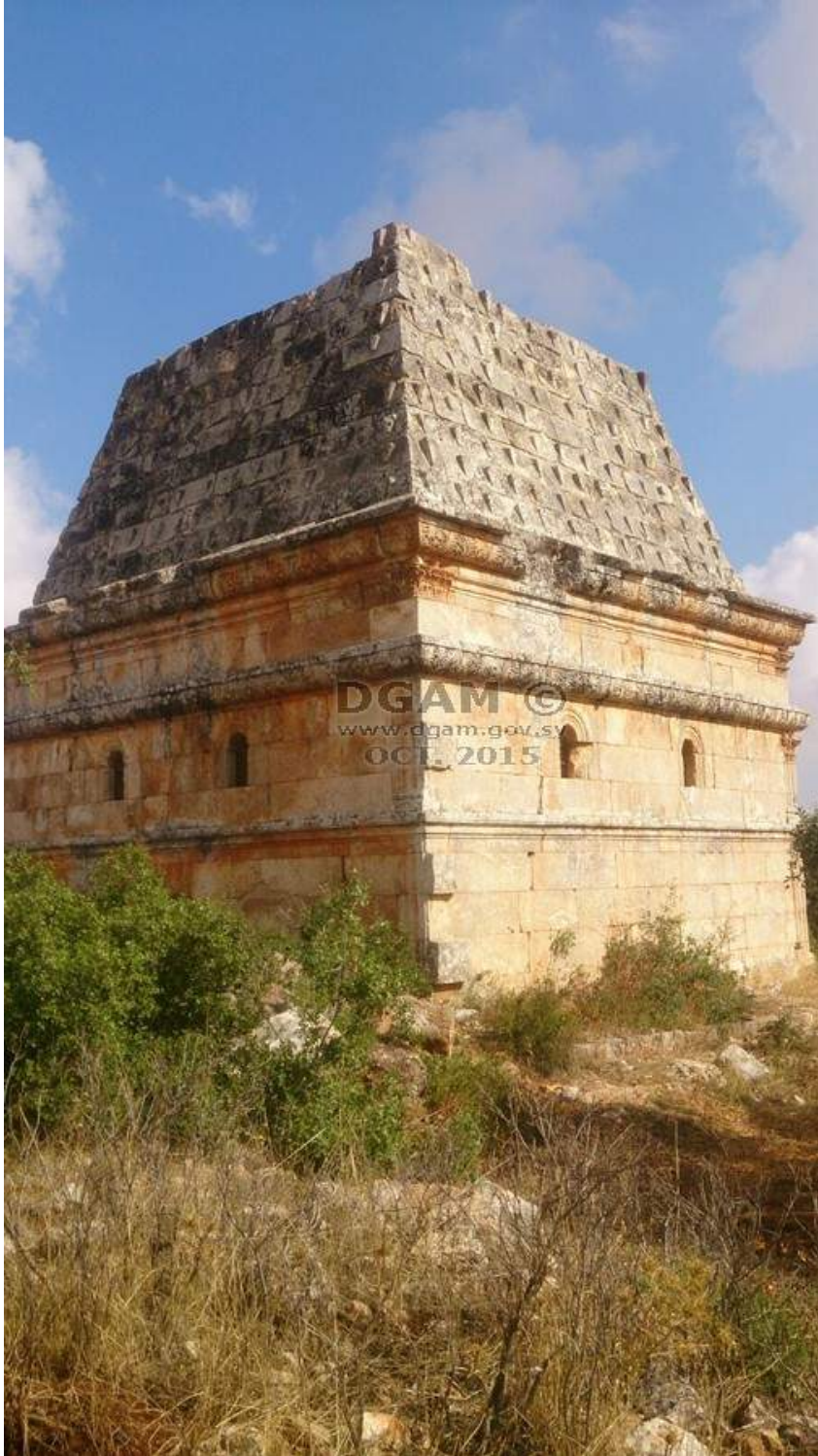
Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



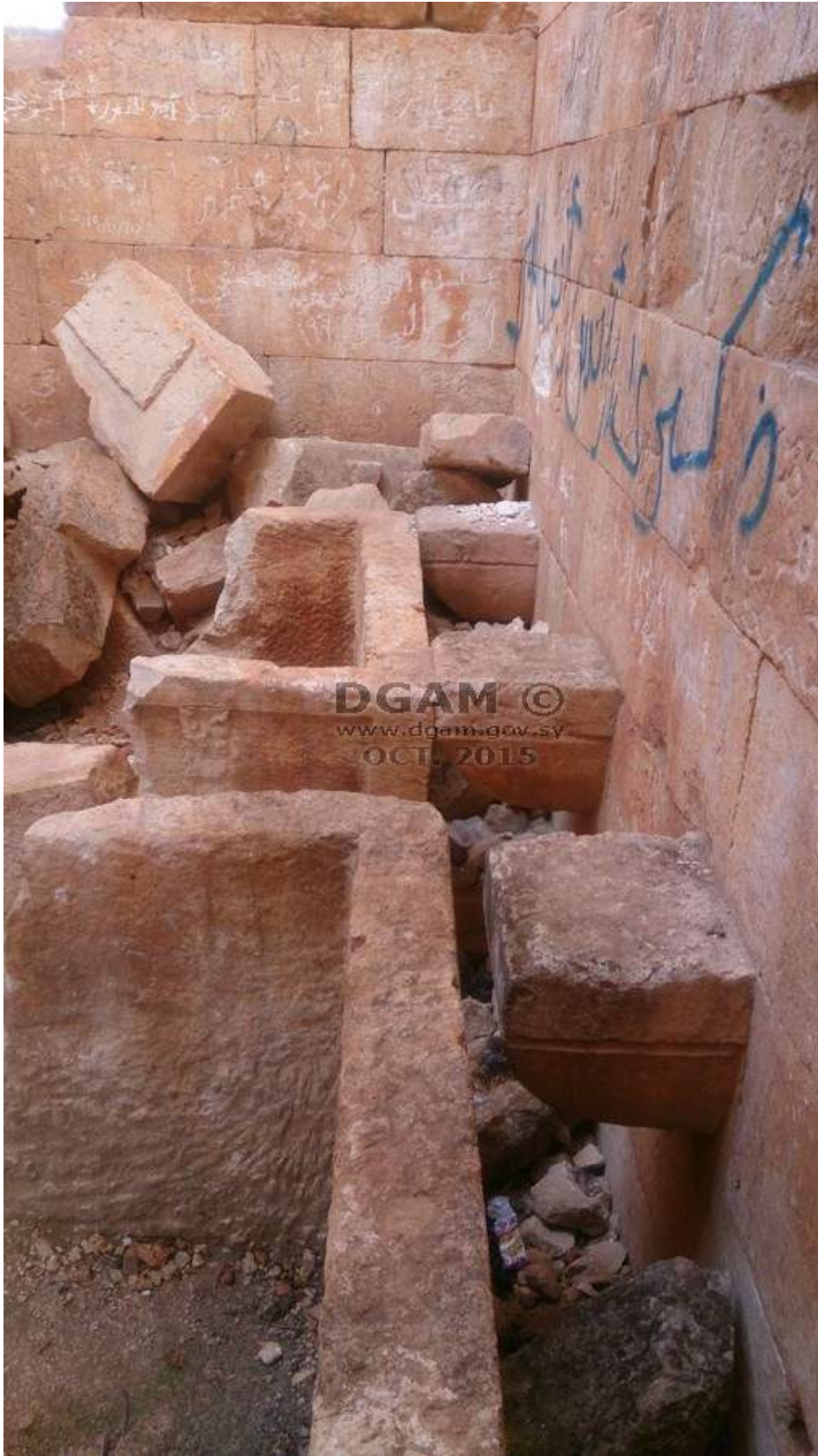
Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



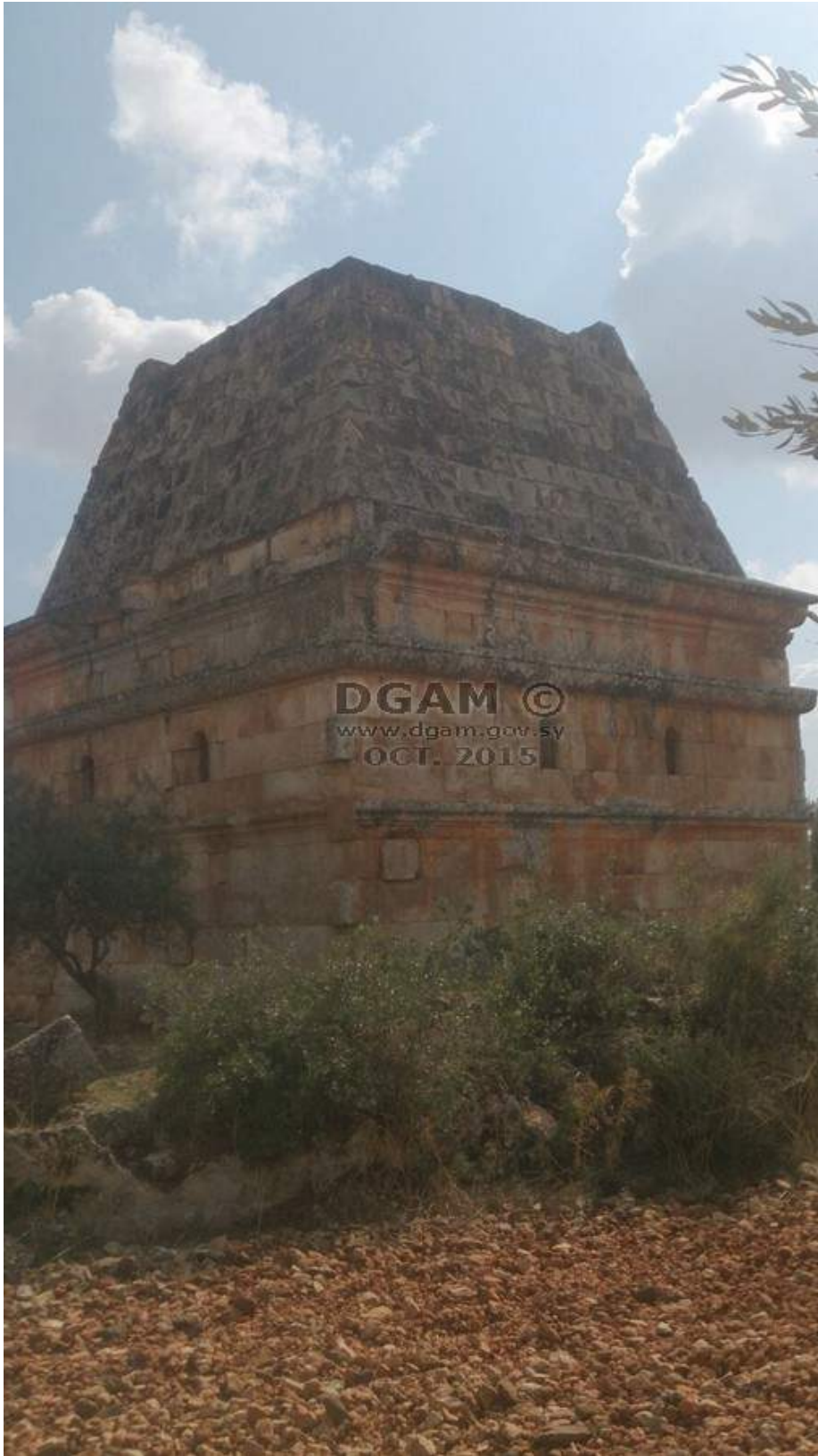
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Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



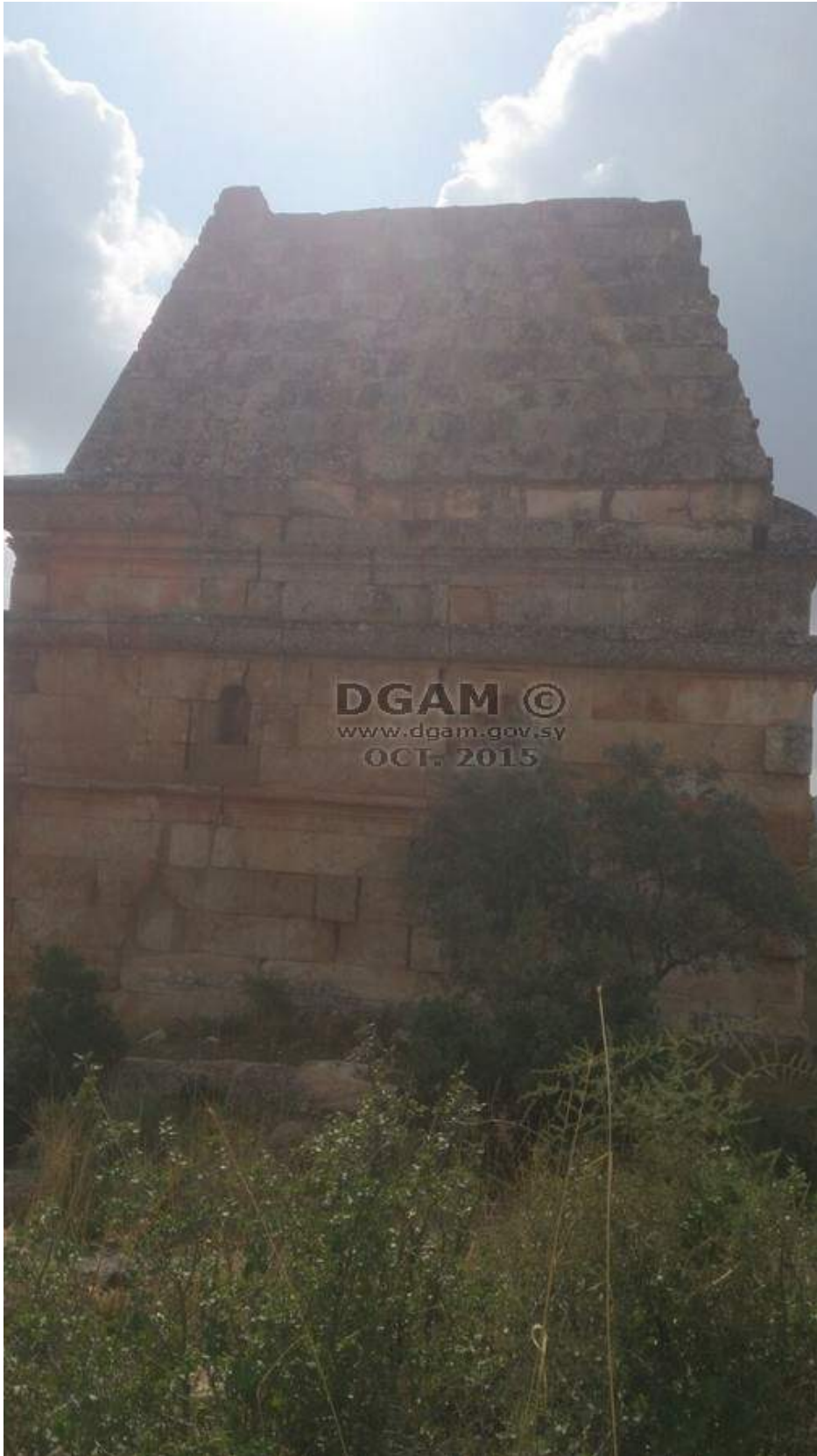
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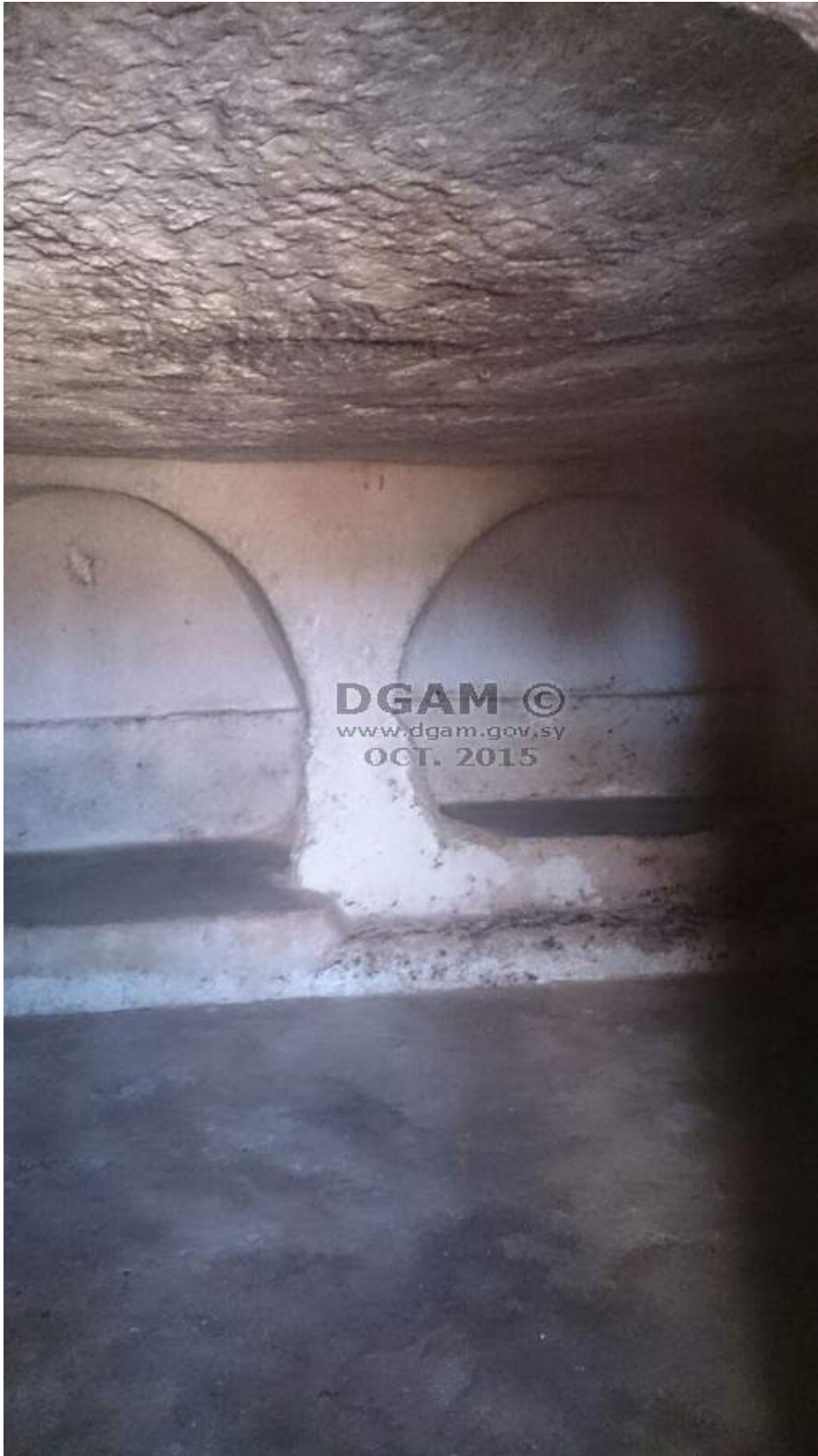
Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



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Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



Al Bara (DGAM; November 3, 2015)



**The Day After “Heritage Protection Initiative”
Site Monitors Project:
The Pyramid Tomb of Mezweqa at the Site of Al-Bara
2015**

The pyramid tomb (Mezweqa) at Al-Bara

With its square 9-meter long base, Mezweqa is considered to be the biggest tomb in the area and the most beautifully adorned. The structure earned it its name Mezweqa (meaning elegant) due to the intricate exterior molding to the cross bearing leaves carved on the arch over its entrance and the vine leaves embellishing the top of its entrance chandelier. It stands 15 meters high and holds five large stone coffins adorned with carvings. The most outstanding carving is that of a disc with a cross and the alpha and omega symbols on it. The Tomb of Mezweqa was visited and photographed by the site monitors in 2013, 2014 and 2015. The photos show the gradual degradation and destruction of the site.



Photos taken in 2011 prior to recent damage.

Photos taken in June 2013



Photos taken in June 2014



Damage caused by neglect





Damage inside the tomb caused by vandalism and neglect

Photos taken in October 2014



Marked increase in deterioration inside the tomb



Photos taken in March 2015



Site monitors at work



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