

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

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Weekly Report 83–84 — March 2–15, 2015

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Executive Summary

Peace talks between the Syrian government and the opposition resumed in Geneva on March 14. UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura met separately with both the High Negotiations Committee and representatives from the Syrian government. As of the end of this reporting period, peace talks were ongoing. As peace talks began in Geneva, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that he would begin the withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria beginning on March 15th. It is understood that several hundred Russian forces will remain in Syria and that Russia will maintain their air defense systems, as well as continue to carry out targeted airstrikes. Russia will also continue to maintain and protect its Hmeimeem Airbase in Latakia Governorate and naval base in Tartus.

As a result of the cessation of hostilities in Syria, the number of collateral damage incidents significantly decreased during the current reporting period. However, bombardment of ISIL positions in Syria and throughout Iraq continued unabated, resulting in two heritage incidents. In Syria, SARG and Russian airstrikes on ISIL strongholds in and around Palmyra continued, hitting a mosque and possibly the ancient site in the process. Additionally, Coalition airstrikes in Iraq struck a mosque located in al-Anbar Governorate.

Newly released information revealed more details for previous incident reports. Video footage from Aleppo and Homs demonstrate the full extent of the damage from earlier airstrikes. In Raqqa, secretly obtained footage shows two churches previously vandalized by ISIL militants are now being occupied by the militant group. Furthermore, the DGAM provided another report of illicit excavation in the Dead Cities region and provided on-site photographs of heavy looting at Tell Ajaja in al-Hasakah Governorate.

No new satellite images were analyzed for this reporting period.

Key Points

- Recent video shows the damage to the al-Kabir Mosque in Hayan, Aleppo Governorate, which was destroyed on February 10, 2016 ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0025 UPDATE](#)).
- DGAM reports illegal ongoing excavations at the Dead Cities of Dahes, Babisqa, and Dar Qita in the Jebel Barisha area of Idlib Governorate ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0034](#)).

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.

- Several sources reported damage to the archaeological area of Palmyra, the Qalaat Shirkuh, and the Sayyeda Khadija Mosque in modern Palmyra, Homs Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0035**).
- Video footage shows damage to two churches in Raqqa, which were first damaged in September 2013, which are now occupied by ISIL (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0036**).
- A new video of the Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque in Tadmor, Homs Governorate, reportedly struck by SARG missiles in December 2015, shows the extent of the damage (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0160 UPDATE**).
- DGAM reports illegal excavation with heavy machinery has caused significant damage at the archaeological site of Tell Ajaja in al-Hasakah Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0037**).
- Coalition airstrikes caused extensive damage to al-Farouq Mosque in Kubaysah, al-Anbar Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 16-0008**).

Heritage Timeline

March 15, 2016

DGAM published an article titled “**In photos: latest news from Tell Ajaja in Rural al-Hassakah.**” DGAM visited Tell Ajaja to assess damage to the site from illegal excavations and “heavy drilling” allegedly perpetrated by ISIL and al-Nusra Front in 2014. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0037**

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1939>

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=239&id=1938>

- *Al Monitor* published an article titled “**Najaf’s forgotten Christian heritage**” (by Wassim Bassem). This article discusses the challenges faced by neglected ancient Christian sites in Iraq, which receive comparatively less recognition and support as non-Islamic sites.
<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/03/iraq-najaf-islam-christian-historical-sites.html>
- *ABC News* published an article titled “**History Lost Amid the Destruction of These Syrian UNESCO World Heritage Sites**” (by Elizabeth McLaughlin). The article discusses Syrian sites damaged or destroyed during the last five years.
<http://abcnews.go.com/International/history-lost-destruction-syrian-unesco-world-heritage-sites/story?id=37654762>
- *al-Fanar Media* published an article titled “**Czech Scholars Chart the Destruction of Mosul Heritage**” (by Gilgamesh Nabeel). This article discusses the efforts of the Monuments of Mosul in Danger project to document sites in Mosul destroyed and damaged by ISIL.
<http://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2016/03/czech-scholars-chart-the-destruction-of-mosul-heritage/>

- **Heritage for Peace** published the “**Damage to Syria’s Heritage**” bi-weekly newsletter.
<http://www.heritageforpeace.org/syria-culture-and-heritage/damage-to-cultural-heritage/previous-damage-newsletters/damage-occurring-to-syrias-heritage-15-march-2016/>
- March 14, 2016 *Iraqi Media Network* published an article titled “مبادرون يطلقون مطالبهم لمناسبة ذكرى تدمير آثار نينوى.. في إحياء يوم للثقافة العراقية (Entrepreneurs demand the revival of Iraqi culture on the anniversary of the destruction of Nineveh).” A diverse group of people in Baghdad protested the destruction of Nineveh by ISIL one year ago.
<http://www.imn.iq/?p=20623>
- *Al Arab* published an article titled “استعمار داعش الثقافي.. تدمير الآخر واجتثاث رموزه التراثية (The Cultural Colonization of Daesh: Destroy the Other and Uproot Symbols of Heritage)” (by Hammam Taha). This article discusses how ISIL uses the destruction of cultural heritage to their advantage in maintaining power in Iraq and Syria.
<http://www.alarab.co.uk/?id=75378>
- March 13, 2016 **DGAM** published a post titled “**Virtual Tour for the Theatre of Jableh.**” ICONEM and DGAM have collaborated in creating virtual tours of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, the archaeological site of Ugarit, and now the Roman Theatre of Jableh in Lattakia Governorate using photogrammetry techniques.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1937>
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=177&id=1936>
- March 12, 2016 **APSA** published two posts titled “**Russian Bombing in the Archaeological Area 10.03.2016.**” APSA Facebook posts show the immediate aftermath of airstrikes southwest of the colonnaded *decumanus* and near Qalaat Fakhr ad-Din al-Maani near Palmyra.
<https://www.facebook.com/apsa2011/posts/1553878301385942>
<https://www.facebook.com/apsa2011/posts/1553877974719308>
- *El Espectador* published an article titled “**Cómo se roban la historia siria** (How the history of Syria is stolen)” (by Juan David Torres Duarte). The article argues that all sides of the conflict in Syria have destroyed or looted cultural heritage to gain a profit.
<http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/elmundo/se-roban-historia-siria-articulo-621670>

- *Press TV* published an article titled “**Daesh burns 100s of ‘Christian books’ in new video.**” ISIL has released a video showing militants burning Christian books and pamphlets collected from schools and churches, including in Mosul.
<http://www.presstv.com/Detail/2016/03/12/455274/Daesh-Iraq-Mosul-United-States/>
<http://aranews.org/2016/03/الموصل-في-المسيحية-الكتب-يحرق-داعش/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dn5CtJyX7iA>
- The **Center for Middle Eastern Studies** at University of California Berkeley held a symposium on March 11–12 titled “**Beyond Destruction: Archaeology & Cultural Heritage in the Middle East and North Africa.**”
<http://cmes.berkeley.edu/cultural-heritage-symposium/>

March 11, 2016

The Creators Project published a post titled “**To Fight ISIS, Art Dealers & Archaeologists Join Forces**” (by Catherine Chapman). The article discusses efforts by various archaeologists and cultural heritage experts to work with art dealers in order to stem the flow of looted objects from Iraq and Syria.
<http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/art-dealers-archaeologists-join-fight-against-isis>
- *The New York Times* published an article titled “**Escalating the War on Looting**” (Celestine Bohlen). International organizations are stepping up efforts to suppress the market for looted antiquities in hopes of cutting off incentive to supply them.
http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/12/arts/international/escalating-the-war-on-looting.html?_r=0

March 10, 2016

BBC published an article titled “**Museum of Lost Objects: The Armenian church in Deir al-Zour**” (by Kanishk Tharoor & Maryam Maruf). The ninth of 10 stories about lost or destroyed ancient objects, this article discusses the Armenian Martyrs’ Memorial Church in Deir ez-Zor, destroyed in 2014.
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35757576>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072n5xf>

- UNESCO World Heritage Centre** published an article titled “**UNESCO and French and Swiss heritage professionals stand up for the safeguarding of Syrian heritage.**” In 2015, UNESCO joined efforts with French and Swiss heritage and archaeology professionals to launch a new initiative, which aims to identify the specific needs of workers and professionals in the field in Syria, particularly the need for tools and equipment, in order for them to successfully pursue their heritage safeguarding mandate.
<http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1465/>
<http://www.moheet.com/2016/03/12/2397436#.VurNr2Qr11i>
 - Syrian Network for Human Rights** published a post titled “**Regime forces targeted Al Sayeda Khadija Mosque in Palmyra city in Homs governorate in March 9.**” Reports claim that SARG warplanes fired missiles on a mosque in Palmyra, damaging the mosque and its minaret, and rendering it inoperable.
ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0035
<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/03/10/19264/>
- March 9, 2016
- DGAM** posted an article titled “**The 13th Meeting of the Interpol Expert Group on Stolen Cultural Property.**” The meeting was dedicated in part to discussing the current situation in Syria and Iraq, and to finding ways of restricting the financing of organized crime and terrorism from the Middle East through the trafficking of stolen cultural property.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1934>
- BBC** published an article titled “**Museum of Lost Objects: The Genie of Nimrud**” (by Kanishk Tharoor & Maryam Maruf). The eighth of 10 stories about lost or destroyed ancient objects, this article discusses an Assyrian stele stolen from Nimrud during the first Gulf War.
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35755273>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072mq8v>
- March 8, 2016
- DGAM** posted an article entitled “**باريشا بريف آخر الأخبار من داحس في جبل إدلب** (Latest News from Dahes in Jebel Barisha).” Reports indicate ongoing looting and theft of archaeological materials for modern construction at the Dead City sites of Dahes, Dar Qita, and Babisqa in the Jebel Barisha region of Idlib. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0034**
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=239&id=1931>
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1932>

- Good* published an article titled “**One Foot in the Levant: Amr al-Azm Struggles to Save Syria’s Fracturing Cultural Heritage**” (by Jed Oelbaum). Amr Al-Azm discusses his work trying to save Syria’s antiquities from ISIL and other groups.
<https://www.good.is/features/issue-36-amr-al-azm>
- March 7, 2016

BBC published an article titled “**Museum of Lost Objects: Mar Elian Monastery**” (by Kanishk Tharoor & Maryam Maruf). The sixth of 10 stories about lost or destroyed ancient objects, this article discusses the Mar Elian Monastery in al-Qaryatain, Syria.
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35725220>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072j329>
- Worldcrunch* published an article titled “**How French Art Police Are Hunting ISIS Antiquities Racket**” (by Dominique Perrin). The Central Office for the Fight Against Cultural Goods Trafficking (OCBC) of the French police force tracks Syrian and Iraqi antiquities on the French art market.
<http://ht.ly/ZbMe0>
- The Art Newspaper* published an article titled “**‘This is living antiquity’: The director of the Hermitage wants to rebuild Palmyra**” (by Sophia Kishkovsky). The Hermitage is collecting materials and documents in order to rebuild Palmyra.
<http://theartnewspaper.com/news/museums/this-is-living-antiquity-the-director-of-the-hermitage-wants-to-rebuild-palmyra/>
- March 6, 2016

ABNA published an article titled “**ISIS steals 99 rare archaeological pieces from Mosul University Museum.**” ISIL stole artifacts from a museum in Mosul and allegedly moved them to Raqqa, Syria to be sold.
<http://en.abna24.com/service/middle-east-west-asia/archive/2016/03/06/739189/story.html>
- DGAM* published an article entitled “**Post-Trauma Reconstruction - ICOMOS colloquium in Paris.**” On March 4th, 2016 in Paris, ICOMOS organized the International Colloquium on Post-Trauma Reconstruction.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1930>
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=177&id=1929>

March 5, 2016

Al Arabiya published an article titled “**Killings, violations as Syrian fragile truce continues.**” Anti-government protesters staged a protest in the Roman Theater at Bosra.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/03/05/135-killed-in-areas-covered-by-Syria-truce-in-first-week.html>

<http://news.trust.org/item/20160305095120-9mop8/>

March 4, 2016

BBC published an article titled “**Museum of Lost Objects: The Lion of al-Lat**” (by Kanishk Tharoor & Maryam Maruf). The fifth of 10 stories about lost or destroyed ancient objects, this article discusses the history and destruction of the Lion of al-Lat at Palmyra.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35720366>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b071x87f>

- **OHCHR** published an article titled “**The destruction of cultural heritage is a violation of human rights – UN Special Rapporteur.**” United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Karima Bennouna, stresses that “the destruction of cultural heritage by States and non-State actors must be urgently addressed by the international community,” citing cultural destruction in Mali, Syria, and Iraq.
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17151&LangID=E>

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/destruction-historical-monuments-by-isis-be-treated-war-crime-landmark-case-1548799>

March 3, 2016

BBC published an article titled “**Museum of Lost Objects: Aleppo’s minaret**” (by Kanishk Tharoor & Maryam Maruf). The fourth of 10 stories about lost or destroyed ancient objects, this article discusses the history and destruction of the minaret of Aleppo’s Great Umayyad Mosque.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35707634>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b071v1mj>

- **Saving Antiquities for Everyone** published an article titled “**The Power of One, and Community in Protecting Cultural Heritage.**” SAFE discusses the work of Sarah Parcak and Cheikhmous Ali, and argues that cultural heritage protection should be a community initiative, not just an academic one.
<http://savingantiquities.org/power-one-community-protecting-cultural-heritage/>

- *International Journal of Cultural Property* (Vol. 23.1) includes a paper titled “**The Destruction of Cultural Property in the Syrian Conflict: Legal Implications and Obligations**” (by Emma Cunliffe, et al). The authors provide an overview and explanation of the national and international legal framework for protecting cultural property in conflict as it applies to the Syrian State and the non-state actors involved.
<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=10215279&fileId=S0940739116000011>

- *The Straits Times* published an article titled “**Looted ancient sculptures found in Slovenia refugee tent.**” Three ancient Mesopotamian sculptures, thought to have been excavated illegally in Syria or Iraq, were found in a Slovenian refugee camp on the border with Croatia.
<http://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/looted-ancient-sculptures-found-in-slovenia-refugee-tent>

March 2, 2016

- *National Geographic* published an article titled “**This Crumbling Dam Could Wipe Out Cultural Treasures**” (by Kristin Romey). The U.S. Government is urging Iraqis to prepare for the collapse of the structurally unsound Mosul Dam, which could create a massive humanitarian problem and wipe out thousands of archaeological and cultural sites along the Tigris River.
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/03/160302-Iraq-Mosul-Dam-Islamic-State-Archaeology-Nineveh-Nimrud-Assyria-ISIS-ISIL/>

- *BBC* published an article titled “**Museum of Lost Objects: Tell Qarqur**” (by Kanishk Tharoor & Maryam Maruf). The third of 10 stories about lost or destroyed ancient objects, this article discusses Tell Qarqur in Hama Governorate, Syria. First settled ca. 8500 BCE, the site was occupied almost continuously through the Mamluk era. Jesse Casana is interviewed.
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35696798>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b071v594>

Military and Political Context

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

1. Homs Governorate:
 - From March 8–15, local sources reported increased Russian airstrikes in and around the city of Palmyra.²
 - On March 10, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that 35 Russian and SARG airstrikes had targeted the city of Palmyra. Clashes between pro-regime forces and ISIL militants were also reported.³
 - On March 11, clashes between SARG forces and ISIL militants in the area of Palmyra were reported, with Russian state-TV announcing that regime forces were amassing near the frontline. Russian airstrikes continued in and around the city.⁴
 - On March 15, SARG forces, backed by Russian airstrikes, reportedly advanced to within 2.5 miles south and west of the city of Palmyra. However, local sources disputed those claims, stating that no such progress had been made. SOHR reported intense clashes between pro-regime forces and ISIL militants.⁵
2. Idlib Governorate:
 - On March 8, anti-government protests occurred in the city of Idlib. The protests ended when members of Al-Nusra Front threatened to shoot the demonstrators.⁶
 - On March 13, Al-Nusra Front, backed by allied Islamist groups, clashed with the Syrian opposition group known as the 13th Division in the town of Maarat al-Numan, reportedly arresting members and stealing weapons from the group. According to SOHR, many outposts of the 13th Division across Idlib Governorate had been previously evacuated after raids carried out by Al-Nusra Front.⁷
 - On March 14, local sources reported popular demonstrations in support of the 13th Division in the town of Maarat al-Numan.⁸

² <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-palmyra-idUSKCN0WC26G><http://slnnews.co/?p=41297> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aAkadE4vTU> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uc6lGcbEC3s> ; https://twitter.com/mod_russia/status/706780565870092288

³ <http://www.globalpost.com/article/6744609/2016/03/10/syria-russia-strikes-kill-20-jihadists-palmyra> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-palmyra-idUSKCN0WD1GN>

⁴ <http://www.ibtimes.com/russia-airstrikes-syria-2016-thousands-isis-targets-hit-moscows-jets-year-2259339>

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/15/russian-fighter-jets-continue-syria-raids-as-troops-withdraw> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-15/342316-syria-army-with-heavy-russian-air-cover-makes-major-gains-west-of-isis-held-city-of-palmyra-al.ashx> ; <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=45060> ; <https://twitter.com/PalmyraRev1/status/709711175525785600>

⁶ <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/204001-al-nusra-front-threatens-to-fire-on-anti-regime-protesters>

⁷ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-13/341944-nusra-in-syria-seizes-bases-weapons-of-western-backed-group-monitor.ashx> ; <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/al-nusra-front-arrests-backed-fighters-syria-160314075333200.html> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-rebels-idUSKCN0WG17D> ; <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=45026>

⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35798128> ; <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/jabhat-al-nusra-oversteps-mark-idlib-crackdown>

3. Aleppo Governorate:

- On March 6, Al-Nusra Front fighters fired at least one hundred rockets into residential areas of the mainly-Kurdish Sheikh Maqsoud district in the city of Aleppo, killing at least 9 civilians. The Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG) forces reported the use of yellow phosphorous by the group. In addition, heavy fighting occurred in the neighborhoods of Ashrafiyah and Sakan al Shabibi as Kurdish YPG forces attempted to advance their positions.⁹
- On March 7, SARG forces recaptured the village of al-Ais from Al-Nusra Front and the Islamist group Jund al-Aqsa just hours after the Islamist groups had taken control of the area.¹⁰
- On March 7, a Kurdish YPG official reported that Turkey had fired "artillery shells" at its fighters located in the town of Tel Rifaat in northern Aleppo Governorate.¹¹
- On March 9, SOHR reported shelling by opposition forces, including Islamist opposition groups, in the neighborhood of Sheikh Maqsoud while SARG forces shelled the neighborhood of Bustan al-Basha in the city of Aleppo.¹²
- On March 11, SARG airstrikes targeted the neighborhood of Salhin in Aleppo city, killing at least five civilians; the highest death toll since the cessation of hostilities came into effect.¹³

4. Deir ez Zor Governorate:

- On March 5, Syrian opposition forces, reportedly crossing through Jordan, recaptured the al-Tanf border crossing (aka al-Waleed border) which links the governorates of Homs in Syria and Anbar in Iraq. The capturing of al-Tanf was aided by the use of remote rocket fire deployed by US-troops located on the Jordanian border with Syria.¹⁴
- On March 9, local activists reported that suspected Russian airstrikes struck the district of al-Tabiya in the city of Deir ez Zor, killing at least 20 people including civilians.¹⁵

5. Latakia Governorate:

- On March 8, the Syrian opposition group, First Coastal Division, announced that it had come under SARG attack on the opposition-held Kabani hill. The group's spokesman reported seeing both SARG and Russian warplanes in the sky.¹⁶

6. Raqqa Governorate:

- During the reporting period, local sources reported, and at times disputed, rising defections of ISIL militants as well as ongoing clashes between the group in the city of Raqqa.¹⁷

⁹ <http://in.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-syria-aleppo-idINKCN0W80RU> ; <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2016/03/09/454661/Syria-chemical-attack-Aleppo-YPG> ; <http://aranews.net/2016/03/syrian-islamists-bomb-kurdish-district-aleppo-chemical-weapons-ypg/>

¹⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-village-idUSKCN0WA0Y1>

¹¹ <http://news.trust.org/item/20160307152404-t1zpt>

¹² <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=44931>

¹³ <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/204321-five-civilians-killed-in-regime-raids-on-syria-s-aleppo>

¹⁴ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/03/05/Syrian-rebels-seize-Iraq-crossing-from-ISIS.html> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32840508> ; <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2016/03/11/us-artillery-jordan-launches-first-strike-isis/81646504/>

¹⁵ <https://en.zamanalwsl.net/news/14559.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-village-idUSKCN0WA0Y1>

- On March 9, the US Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff announced that Syrian Democratic Forces and Iraqi Security Forces were engaged in ongoing operations to break the connections between the cities of Raqqa and Mosul in order to prevent ISIL from “using Raqqa as a planning hub or an area from which the terror group [could] launch attacks”.¹⁸
- 7. Quneitra Governorate:
 - On March 2, a car bomb targeted a meeting of commanders of the Syrian Revolutionary Front, killing at least 18 members of the western-backed opposition group including the group’s top commander, Abu Hamza al-Naimi. No group has taken responsibility for the attack.¹⁹
- 8. Damascus Governorate:
 - On March 4, two airstrikes, carried out by either Russian or SARG forces, struck the town of Douma in Eastern Ghouta in the first airstrikes on the area since the cessation of hostilities.²⁰
- 9. Hama Governorate:
 - On March 10, Islamist forces, reported to be from Al-Nusra Front and other Islamist groups, attacked several SARG positions in Hama Governorate in the largest assault since the start of the cessation of hostilities in Syria.²¹
- 10. Hasakah Governorate:
 - On March 15, the Pentagon confirmed the death of ISIL senior operative Abu Umar al-Shishani, aka “Omar the Chechen”, who was targeted along with his convoy on March 4, 2016 near the town of al-Shaddadi.²²

Other Key Points:

- During the reporting period, the US-led coalition conducted airstrikes in the areas of Abu Kamal, Al-Hawl, Ayn Isa, Deir ez Zor, Hasakah, Manbij, Mar’a, Palmyra, Raqqa, and Tel Abyad.²³
- On March 4, protests against the Syrian regime occurred in the governorates of Aleppo, Damascus, Daraa, and Homs.²⁴

¹⁷ <http://aranews.net/2016/03/200-jihadis-desert-isis-raqqa/> ; <http://aranews.net/2016/03/top-tunisian-jihadi-killed-isis-internal-rifts-syrias-raqqa/> ; <http://www.raqqa-sl.co/en/?p=1691>

¹⁸ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/688916/counter-isis-operations-aim-to-isolate-raqqa>

¹⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN0W41VO> ; <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/syria-rebel-leader-assassinated-golan-car-bombing-160303034518423.html>

²⁰ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/03/04/First-strikes-on-rebel-bastion-east-of-Syria-capital-since-truce-monitor-.html>

²¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-attack-idUSKCN0WC14I>

²² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35772380> ; <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/14/politics/u-s-confirms-death-of-isis-operative-omar-al-shishani/index.html> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/688823/pentagon-provides-details-on-target-of-march-4-syria-airstrike>

²³ See: “US DOD News Release Military Strikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq”. *Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve*. News Release No: [684164](#), [684924](#), [686076](#), [686772](#), [686948](#), [688015](#), [689136](#), [689809](#), [692135](#), [692222](#), [692430](#), [693696](#)

²⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/12183779/Hundreds-across-Syria-protest-against-Assad-for-the-first-time-in-years.html> ; <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/05/world/middleeast/bashar-al-assad-protesters-syria-truce.html>

- On March 14, separate negotiations took place between representatives of the Syrian government, the High Negotiations Committee, and the UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura in Geneva. Both sides of the debate have yet to agree on the position of President Bashar al-Assad in the future of political negotiations.²⁵
- On March 14, the Syrian American Medical Society released a report claiming that chemical weapons had been used “at least 161 times” since the start of the conflict up through 2015.²⁶
- On March 14, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that he would withdraw the “main part” of Russian troops from Syria beginning on March 15. Russia will however continue to carry out airstrikes and maintain several hundred personnel in Syria. In addition, Russia will continue to operate and protect their air base in Latakia Governorate as well as their naval base at Tartus.²⁷

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

1. Al Anbar Governorate:
 - During the reporting period, Iraqi Security Forces clashed with ISIL militants near the border crossing of Arar between Iraq and Saudi Arabia.²⁸
 - On March 4, Iraqi security forces and tribal fighters arrived in the districts of Albu Aitha and Hamidiya northeast of Ramadi in order to “participate in the liberation operation of Khalediya Island” located east of Ramadi.²⁹
 - Between March 4-5, Iraqi Security Forces sent reinforcements to the areas of Jazeerat Ramadi, Albu Obeid, and Albu Bali north of the city of Ramadi. In the following days, Iraqi soldiers, tribal fighters, artillery, and US-led coalition airstrikes began clearing operations in the area.³⁰
 - On March 8, clashes reportedly occurred between ISIL militants and Iraqi al-Muhammadah tribal members in the city of Fallujah, following the execution of 50 ISIL detainees.³¹
 - On March 10, Iraqi security forces recaptured the town of Zankura, northwest of the city of Ramadi.³²
 - On March 13, several ISIL suicide car bombings occurred in the villages of Qutainiyah and Zuwaiyah, Safiyrah, and Abu Taiban, killing least 47 Iraqi security force members.³³

²⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35798128> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35798128> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35809087>

²⁶ http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/S/SYRIA_CHEMICAL_WEAPONS_ATTACKS

²⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806626> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35807689>

²⁸ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/03/iraq-situation-report-march-8-14-2016.html>

²⁹ <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/anbar-operations-announces-arrival-military-reinforcements-northeast-ramadi/>

³⁰ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/03/iraq-situation-report-march-1-7-2016.html>

³¹ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/03/iraq-situation-report-march-8-14-2016.html>

³² <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/iraqi-forces-advance-against-isil-in-anbar.aspx>

³³ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/isis-attack-kills-22-iraqi-army-soldiers-ramadi-160314082417532.html>

- On March 15, hundreds of residents fled the ISIL-held town of Hit as Iraqi security forces continued to advance toward the town. Some ISIL militants, including several officials, reportedly fled the town between March 12-13, 2016. The number of ISIL militants remaining in Hit is unknown.³⁴
2. Ninewa Governorate:
- On March 4, ISIL militants attacked Kurdish Peshmerga forces in the areas of Kisik, Mount Badush, and Iski Mosul, west of the city of Mosul as well as the village of Tel al-Rim, southwest of the city of Mosul.³⁵
 - On March 10, US aircraft dropped pamphlets over the city of Mosul, assuring the residents of the city that “they haven’t been forgotten” and including a list of cities that have been liberated from ISIL. ISIL reportedly locked down the areas where the leaflets fell in order to collect the documents.³⁶
 - On March 11, the Iraqi activist group Mosul Eye reported that ISIL militants had executed prisoners in the city of Mosul, in part to relieve the financial expense of the prisoners and to “overcome any security gaps” in the city. According to the group, more than 132 prisoners were summarily executed in the graveyard of Wadi Iqab.³⁷
 - On March 14, local reports stated that ISIL executed 21 of their own fighters in the city of Mosul after the fighters fled combat in the areas of Makhmour, Waski, Mosul, Khazar, Nuran, and Bashiqa.³⁸
 - On March 14, the spokesman for the Iraqi Water Resources Ministry announced that engineers from the Italian Trevi Group needed at least two months to conduct an assessment of the Mosul Dam and that it may take another six months before any repair work can begin.³⁹
3. Diyala Governorate:
- On March 2, reprisal attacks by Shia militias against Sunni civilians in the city of Muqdadiya were reported two days after an ISIL suicide bombing targeted a Shia funeral in the city. Instances of mortar attacks, clashes with police, and unknown gunmen breaking into Sunni homes were reported, with some suggesting that Iraqi security forces have pulled out of the area and left the local police in charge. Arabic news sources reported that 14 Sunni were dead and another eight were missing.⁴⁰
 - On March 10, demonstrations occurred in the Diyala capital of Baqubah, demanding the removal of Shia militias and security forces from Diyala Governorate. As many as 10,000 Sunni Iraqis have fled the area to northern Kurdistan.⁴¹

³⁴ <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/civilians-flee-iraq-town-battle-looms> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/03/iraq-situation-report-march-8-14-2016.html>

³⁵ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/03/iraq-situation-report-march-1-7-2016.html>

³⁶ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/691914/oir-spokesman-82nd-airborne-division-completes-iraq-mission>

³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/552514844870022/photos/a.552572524864254.1073741828.552514844870022/876876749100495/>

³⁸ <http://en.abna24.com/service/middle-east-west-asia/archive/2016/03/14/741018/story.html>

³⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-dam-idUSKCN0WG10G>

⁴⁰ <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/3/2/militias-carry-out-revenge-attack-in-iraqs-diyala> ; <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=492512>

⁴¹ <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/100320164>

4. Kirkuk Governorate:
 - On March 8, ISIL militants carried out a suspected mustard gas attack on the mainly Shia-Turkmen village of Taza, south of the city of Kirkuk. According to a Kurdish Peshmerga general in the area, “chemical-laden mortar shells and Katyusha rockets” struck the village late on Tuesday. More than 400 people suffered “partial choking and skin irritation,” and one child later died from injuries sustained in the attack.⁴²
 - On March 10, hundreds of protesters blocked the main highway in Iraq following the reported chemical weapons attack on the village of Taza. The protesters demanded that the Iraqi Air Force carry out strikes on the town of Bashir, where the rockets were reportedly fired from.⁴³
 - On March 12, ISIL militants carried out two chemical attacks on the village of Taza, killing a child and wounding dozens more.⁴⁴
5. Salah ad Din Governorate:
 - On March 3, journalists affiliated with the Iraqi Ministry of Defense announced that Iraqi security forces had recaptured the villages of al-Salam, al-Gouza, Ein al-Faras, al-Salihiya, and al-Fiadiya, as well as “all the villages in the northern axis of the [governorate].” Iraqi security forces also recaptured the village of Um al-Araneb and raised “the Iraqi flag over the banks of al-Tharthar Lake.”⁴⁵
6. Babil Governorate:
 - March 6, an ISIL suicide truck bomb detonated at the Babylon Ruins checkpoint in the town of Hilla. The attack killed 61 people including around 20 members of the Iraqi security forces.⁴⁶
7. Erbil Governorate:
 - On March 8, a fifth group of Iraqi security forces, from the Iraqi Army’s 15th Division, arrived at the temporary military base in the town of Makhmour in preparation for the eventual fight to retake the city of Mosul.⁴⁷
 - On March 14, the Turkish Air Force carried out strikes on 18 Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) targets in northern Iraq, including in the Qandil and Gara Mountain areas, following a car bombing on March 13 that killed 37 people and wounded 125 more in the Turkish capital of Ankara. Turkish security sources stated that the bomber was a female member of the PKK.⁴⁸

⁴² <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-idUSKCN0WB21H> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-11/341739-iraqi-girl-dies-after-isis-chemical-attack.ashx> ; <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/03/12/Iraq-PM-vows-retaliation-after-ISIS-chemical-attack.html>

⁴³ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-10/341513-residents-of-iraqi-town-protest-after-isis-chemical-attack.ashx>

⁴⁴ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-12/341885-iraqi-officials-isis-chemical-attacks-kill-child-wound-600.ashx>

⁴⁵ <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/official-journalists-announce-liberation-of-5-villages-in-northern-salahuddin/> ; <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/security-forces-raise-iraqi-flag-in-tharthar-lake-liberate-um-al-araneb-village/>

⁴⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35739729> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-07/340941-tight-security-measures-after-deadly-iraq-suicide-attack.ashx> ; <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/07/world/middleeast/iraq-truck-bomb-kills-33-at-checkpoint-near-babylonian-ruins.html>

⁴⁷ <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/08032016>

⁴⁸ <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/d4f4ade2104b406c8d1f691f00bc3780/death-toll-ankara-bombing-raises-37> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35799998>

8. Karbala Governorate:
 - On March 6, Iraq's main Shia group, the National Alliance, issued a statement voicing their support for Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's proposed plan for changing the Iraqi cabinet and combating corruptions. The announcement came following a Shia meeting in the city of Karbala attended by senior Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and PM Abadi.⁴⁹
9. Baghdad Governorate:
 - On March 11, "tens of thousands" of demonstrators attended a rally in Baghdad's Tahrir Square at the encouragement of "Sadrist Trend leader" Muqtada al-Sadr. The demonstration protested against the government's failure to address corruption.⁵⁰

Other Key Points:

- During the reporting period, the US-led coalition conducted airstrikes in the areas of Albu Hayat, Baghdadi, Beiji, Fallujah, Habbaniyah, Haditha, Hit, Huwayjah, Kirkuk, Kisik, Makhmour, Mosul, Qaim, Qayyarah, Ramadi, Samarra, Sinjar, Sultan Abdullah, Tal Afar, Tikrit, and Waleed.⁵¹
- On March 4, supporters of "Sadrist Trend leader" Muqtada al-Sadr demonstrated in the governorates of Babil, Basra, Dhi Qar, Al Qadisiya, Diyala, Karbala, Kirkuk, Al Muthanna, An Najaf, and Wasit, as well in front of the Green Zone in Baghdad.⁵²
- On March 9, US and Iraqi officials reported that the ISIL official, captured by US Special Forces one month ago, was being questioned about the group's plans to use mustard gas. The captive has been named as Sulayman Dawud al-Bakkar, "a chemical and biological weapons expert who once worked for Saddam Hussein's Military Industrialization Authority." al-Bakkar is being held at a "temporary detention facility" in Erbil.⁵³
- On March 10, the Pentagon announced that the US-led coalition launched multiple airstrikes against ISIL's "chemical weapons capabilities." The strikes were partially based on information provided by captive ISIL official Sulayman Abu Dawud. The exact locations of the strikes in either Syria or Iraq were not released.⁵⁴

Other significant political and military events during the reporting period:

- On March 10, "tens of thousands of [ISIL] documents" were obtained by German, UK, and Syrian opposition media containing the personal information of 22,000 ISIL members. The documents were reportedly stolen by a former ISIL militant who fled to Turkey.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-politics-idUSKCN0W80Y8> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/03/iraq-situation-report-march-1-7-2016.html>

⁵⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-politics-cabinet-idUSKCN0WD1JO>

⁵¹ See: "US DOD News Release Military Strikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq". *Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve*. News Release No: [684164](#), [684924](#), [686076](#), [686772](#), [686948](#), [689136](#), [689809](#), [691312](#), [692135](#), [692222](#), [692430](#), [693696](#)

⁵² <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/03/iraq-situation-report-march-1-7-2016.html>

⁵³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/10/world/middleeast/isis-detainee-mustard-gas.html> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35768377> ; <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/03/10/world/middleeast/isis-detainee-mustard-gas.html>

⁵⁴ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/690456/information-from-captured-isil-leader-enables-counter-chemical-strikes> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35780216>

⁵⁵ <http://news.sky.com/story/1656777/is-documents-identify-thousands-of-ijihadis> ; <https://en.zamanalwsl.net/news/14563.html> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35773649>

Incident Reports: Syria

SHI 15-0160 UPDATE

Report Date: March 14, 2016

Site Name: Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque (مسجد أبي ذر الغفاري)

Date of Incident: December 19, 2015

Location: West Quarter, Tadmor, Homs Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Large, likely modern mosque, in western quarter of the city.

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: New video footage shows damage to the mosque.

Incident Source and Description: On March 14, 2016 the Syrian activist group Coordination Committee in Palmyra released a video depicting scenes of destruction in the city of Palmyra.⁵⁶ Within the video footage are shots of the Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque, reportedly struck by SARG missiles on December 19, 2015.⁵⁷ The footage show extensive damage to the exterior and interior of the mosque including the minaret. In addition, large amounts of rubble are present in the immediate surroundings of the mosque.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the condition of the Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque, other heritage sites within the city of Palmyra, and the condition of other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns and intense military activity.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Coordination Committee in Palmyra: <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=485136234944654>

SNHR: <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2015/12/09/15367/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=485136234944654>

⁵⁷ For additional detail see **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0160** in **Weekly Report 71-72**



Still image of Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque (Coordination Committee in Palmyra; March 14, 2016)



Still image of Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque (Coordination Committee in Palmyra; March 14, 2016)



Still image of Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque (Coordination Committee in Palmyra; March 14, 2016)



Still image of Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque and minaret (Coordination Committee in Palmyra; March 14, 2016)



Still image of the minaret at Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque (Coordination Committee in Palmyra; March 14, 2016)



Still image of Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque (Coordination Committee in Palmyra; March 14, 2016)



Still image of Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque (Coordination Committee in Palmyra; March 14, 2016)



Still image of Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque (Coordination Committee in Palmyra; March 14, 2016)



Still image of Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque (Coordination Committee in Palmyra; March 14, 2016)



Still image of Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque (Coordination Committee in Palmyra; March 14, 2016)

SHI 16-0025 UPDATE

Report Date: March 5, 2016

Site Name: Al Kabir Mosque (المسجد الكبير)

Date of Incident: February 10, 2016

Location: Hayan Town, Aleppo Governorate

Site Description: Mosque

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: New video footage of shows extent of damage to mosque.

Incident Source and Description: Hayan Media Office posted a video to Youtube on March 4, 2016 showing Friday prayers occurring in the ruins of the al-Kabir Mosque in Hayan.⁵⁸

The video footage shows the extent of the destruction to the mosque. Those who have gathered to pray appear to be sitting on what was once the roof of the mosque. The only standing features visible in the video are the remains of the mosque's dome, which has been largely damaged, and several support beams that remain standing. This video corroborates a Syrian Network for Human Rights report from February 10, 2016 that states that SARG warplanes fired missiles on the mosque, resulting in its destruction.⁵⁹ On the same day, the SNHR reported that SARG warplanes also struck a school in Hayan.⁶⁰

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the condition of the Al Kabir Mosque and the condition of other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns and intense military activity.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

SNHR: <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/02/10/18195/>

Hayan Media Office: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPGyQMKgnnU>

⁵⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPGyQMKgnnU>

⁵⁹ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/02/10/18195/>

⁶⁰ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/02/10/18181/>



SNHR: regime warplanes fired missiles on Al Kabir Mosque in Hayan town in Aleppo governorate, destroying it almost completely, February 10

Destruction to al-Kabir Mosque (Syrian Network for Human Rights; February 10, 2016)



Destruction to al-Kabir Mosque (Hayan Media Office; March 4, 2016)



Destruction to al-Kabir Mosque (Hayan Media Office; March 4, 2016)



Destruction to al-Kabir Mosque (Hayan Media Office; March 4, 2016)

SHI 16-0034

Report Date: March 9, 2016

Site Name:

- Dahes (داحس) (Dayhis, Dehis, Dehes, Dayhes, Deyhes)
- Dar Qita (دير قيتا) (Deir Qita, Darqita)
- Babisqa (بابيسقا) (Babesqa, Babiska, Babaska)

Date of Incident: Unknown

Location: Jebel Barisha region, Idlib Governorate

Site Description:

- **Dahes** (داحس) - Dahes is notable for its long period of occupation, having been settled in the 1st century CE and still inhabited long after the Arab conquest of Syria, probably until the tenth century. Its most prosperous period, as with many of the Dead Cities, was from the fourth to sixth centuries. Among the site's extensive remains is a badly ruined church with a *martyrium* in the northeast quarter, dating to the late fifth or early sixth century. It has a columned basilica with bema and rectangular sanctuary, and an adjoining baptistery to the southeast. Another church, to the west, is also a columned basilica with rectangular sanctuary and dates to the sixth century. There are a variety of villas scattered between the religious buildings, as well as some monumental Roman and Byzantine tombs and a cistern. Additionally, a monastery lies southeast of the main ruins. Its remains include a tower, church, and a *pandocheion* (an inn for travelers and pilgrims).⁶¹
- **Dar Qita** (دير قيتا) - This Byzantine village, located on the northeast side of the Jebel Barisha, is famous for its standing remains and dates back to the 1st century CE. The site contains three churches, several baptisteries, and numerous villas. Many of the structures are well preserved. The site is notable for the fact that many of its buildings contain inscriptions allowing for precise dating. These include the Church of St. Paul and Moses (church built 418 CE, baptistery 515 CE) and the Church of St. Sergius (church built 537 CE, baptistery 567 CE). With the exception of a house dating to 295 CE, most of the other buildings date between the late 4th and late 6th centuries CE.⁶²
- **Babisqa** (بابيسقا) - Babisqa is one of the most important sites in the region. By the Byzantine era, Babisqa was the largest commercial center in the northern Jebel Barisha, as evidenced by the remains of several *stoai* (public porticoes for commercial use) in the north and northwest of the site, and two bath complexes built in the southeast area of the site, of which many remains are visible. The site also contains an *andron* (a public meet place for men), a *pandocheion*, and many graves. Babisqa has two basilicas, one from 391 CE and the other from 609 CE. The first is characterized by a bema in the central nave, and an apse and Corinthian columns with several different styles of capitals. It was built by the priest-architect Markianos (who built many other churches in the region) and later modified in the 5th century. The *martyrion* contains two beautiful reliquaries. The second basilica was dedicated to St. Sergius, the most popular martyr in Syria at the time. It is the latest Christian religious building built in the Dead Cities. Further south of the main site are two

⁶¹ <http://www.syriaphotoguide.com/home/dahis-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%B3/>

⁶² Peña 1987: 88-91

monasteries, known as Deir Babisqa A and B. Deir Babisqa A contains the remains of a triumphal arch, the walls of a chapel, and the stylite column of a hermit named Gabriel.⁶³

Site Date:

- Dahes - 1st century through 10th century CE
- Dar Qita - 1st through 8th centuries CE
- Babisqa - 2nd century through 8th century CE

Incident Summary: Illegal ongoing excavation and theft of materials for modern construction in the Jebel Barisha area.

Incident Source and Description: On March 9, 2016 DGAM posted images of the Dead City of Dahes, and reported that “massive illegal excavations” are ongoing throughout the Jebel Barisha region, particularly at the Dead Cities sites of Dahes, Dar Qita, and Babisqa. DGAM reports heavy machinery has been used at these sites by looters who are conducting illegal excavations as well as stealing materials for the construction of modern buildings.⁶⁴ DGAM states the photos of Dahes apparently show minor damage to the site, although no damage is immediately apparent in the images provided.

Many of the Dead Cities have been damaged by illegal excavations, looting, and combat. This is the first reported damage at Dahes. Reports from Ross Burns and APSA indicate much of Babisqa was damaged when the FSA used the site as a logistics base in 2014.⁶⁵ For previous reports of damage from looting at Dar Qita, see **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0043 in Weekly Report 29.**

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

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the situation in the Dead Cities and other Syrian heritage sites vulnerable to looting as a result of decreased local security and economic instability.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

DGAM:

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1932>

APSA:

<http://apsa2011.com/apsanew/idlib-dead-cities-in-northern-syria-destruction-of-the-byzantine-monuments-at-babisqa/>

Burns, R. “Syria Damage List Mar 2016.” March 14, 2016. <http://monumentsofsyria.com/syria-conflict/attachment/syria-damage-list-mar-2016/>

⁶³ Pena 1987: 27-32

⁶⁴ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1932>

⁶⁵ <http://apsa2011.com/apsanew/idlib-dead-cities-in-northern-syria-destruction-of-the-byzantine-monuments-at-babisqa/>; <http://monumentsofsyria.com/syria-conflict/attachment/syria-damage-list-mar-2016/>

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Daniel Demeter: <http://www.syriaphotoguide.com/home/dahis-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%B3/>

Peña, I., P. Castellana, R. Fernandez (1987) *Inventaire du Jebel Baricha*. Milan: Franciscan Printing Press. pp. 88-91.



Two-story villa at Dahes (DGAM; March 9, 2016)



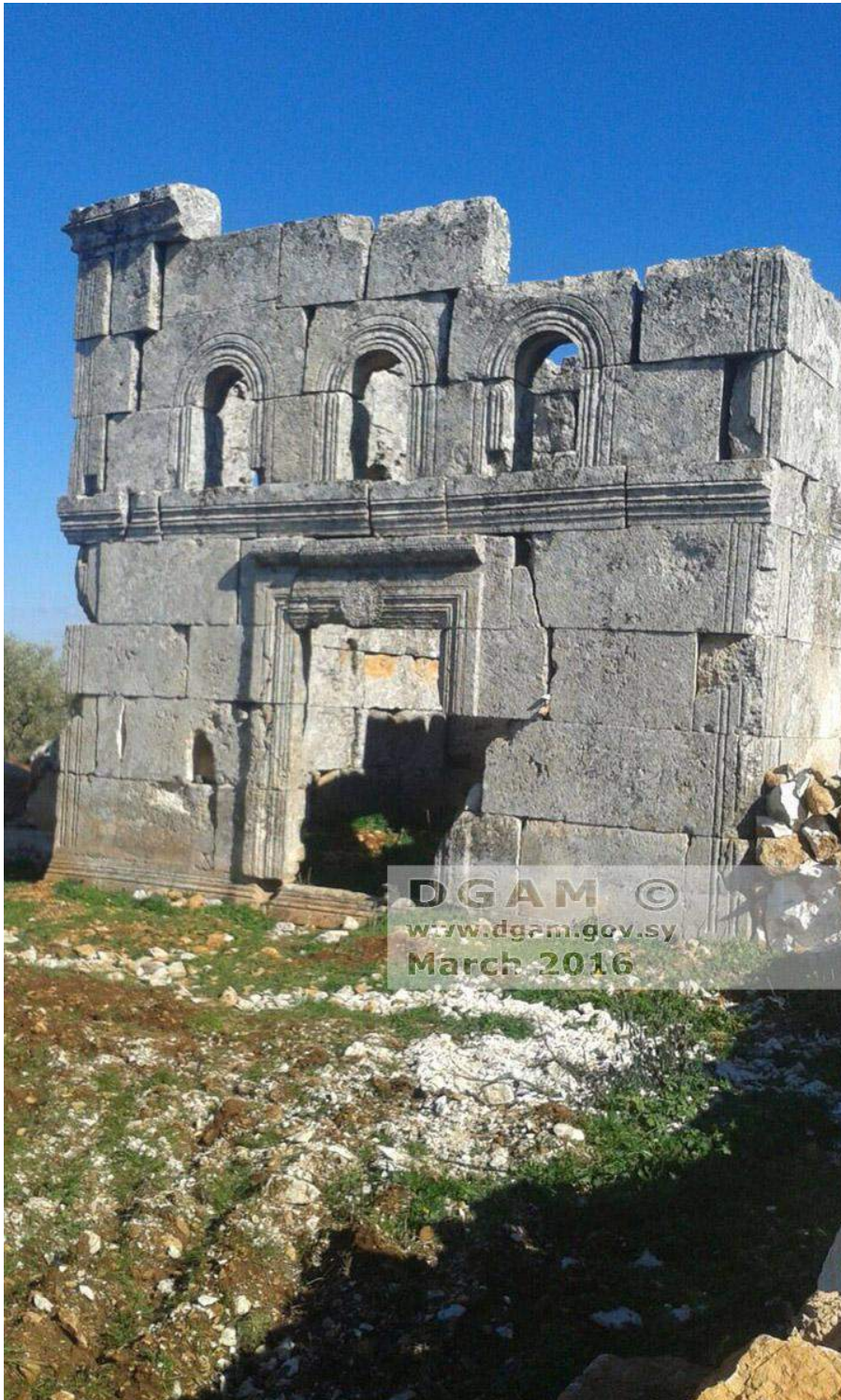
Possible damage from illegal excavation at Dahes (DGAM; March 9, 2016)



Panoramic view of Dahes (DGAM; March 9, 2016)



Portico of villa at Dahes (DGAM; March 9, 2016)



Byzantine basilica at Dahes (DGAM; March 9, 2016)



Vaulted cistern at Dahes (DGAM; March 9, 2016)



Villa at Dahes (DGAM; March 9, 2016)



Villa at Dahes (DGAM; March 9, 2016)

SHI 16-0035

Report Date: March 11, 2016

Site Name:

- Al Sayeda Khadija Mosque
- UNESCO World Heritage Site of Palmyra
- Qalaat Shirkuh or the Citadel of Palmyra

Date of Incident: March 10, 2016-March 15, 2016

Location: Palmyra City, Palmyra, Homs Governorate

Site Description:

- Al Sayeda Khadija Mosque - Mosque in Palmyra city.
- Palmyra - According to UNESCO:

“First mentioned in the archives of Mari in the 2nd millennium BC, Palmyra was an established caravan oasis when it came under Roman control in the mid-first century AD as part of the Roman province of Syria. It grew steadily in importance as a city on the trade route linking Persia, India and China with the Roman Empire, marking the crossroads of several civilisations in the ancient world. A grand, colonnaded street of 1100 metres' length forms the monumental axis of the city, which together with secondary colonnaded cross streets links the major public monuments including the Temple of Ba'al, Diocletian's Camp, the Agora, Theatre, other temples and urban quarters. Architectural ornament including unique examples of funerary sculpture unites the forms of Greco-roman art with indigenous elements and Persian influences in a strongly original style. Outside the city's walls are remains of a Roman aqueduct and immense necropolises.”⁶⁶

- Qalaat Shirkuh or the Citadel of Palmyra - According to 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.”⁶⁷

Site Date: Al Sayeda Khadija Mosque - Unknown; Palmyra: - Primarily Hellenistic (Palmyrene), Roman, and Islamic

⁶⁶ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/23>

⁶⁷ Burns 2010: 243

Incident Summary: Increased SARG and Russian airstrikes damage city and archaeological site.

Incident Source and Description: From March 4-March 15, 2016 local sources reported increased Russian and SARG airstrikes on both the archaeological site of Palmyra and the city itself.

On March 9, 2016 the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) reported that SARG airstrikes had targeted Al Sayeda Khadija Mosque in Palmyra City, “partially damaging the mosque and its minaret, and rendering [the building] inoperable.”⁶⁸ SNHR also reported four additional SARG airstrikes on civilian sites including two medical facilities and one food storage site.⁶⁹

On March 10, 2016 the Syrian activist group, Coordination Committee in Palmyra, released a bulletin detailing the current state of the city of Palmyra, calling the area a “Disaster Zone.”⁷⁰ According to the Coordination Committee:

“For the last two months, Russian [airstrikes] [have] destroyed at least half of the city’s neighborhoods, in addition to the destruction of two local medical points in the city - the national hospital and the general clinic of Palmyra....Russian raids [also] were targeting the ruins and the archaeological area, frequently and randomly. (T)he raids also destroyed most of [the] infrastructure and public buildings including schools, mosques, and the only church in the city.”

On March 10, 2016 new video from local sources reported to show Russian airstrikes targeting the archaeological site of Palmyra.⁷¹ The footage does not provide an exact location of the strike, however it is clear that the strikes were within the confines of the site. The extent of the damage is unknown. Additionally, on the same day the Coordination Committee released new images reported to show Russian airstrikes targeting the Qalaat Shirkuh (Palmyra Citadel). According to the group, “tens” of Russian airstrikes struck the site.⁷² The extent of the damage is unknown.

On March 14, 2016 the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that at least “200 shells and rockets, in addition to 80 airstrikes” struck the city of Palmyra amid ongoing clashes between SARG forces and ISIL militants.⁷³ The Coordination Committee released fourteen videos during this reporting period, which show the damage caused by aerial bombardments of the city. The video footage shows extensive damage to residential areas, the destruction of a truck carrying food, and scenes of vastly abandoned areas of the city where residents have fled.⁷⁴

ASOR CHI has previously covered the extensive damage to the ancient city of Palmyra due to looting,⁷⁵ military occupation,⁷⁶ deliberate destruction,⁷⁷ and destruction due to military

⁶⁸ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/03/10/19264/>

⁶⁹ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/03/11/19290/> ; <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/03/10/19257/> ; <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/03/09/19239/> ; <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/03/08/19232/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/revo.palmyra3/photos/pcb.483939675064310/483939621730982/>

⁷¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOOQHUMacV0>

⁷² <https://www.facebook.com/revo.palmyra3/photos/a.433973920060886.1073741829.410518082406470/483966871728257/>

⁷³ <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=45048>

⁷⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mDLwS5iKa0> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXHpy4xdVmA> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aAkadE4vTU> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuSVsqFDvIc> ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f07vbJKWY_8 ; <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=485136234944654> ; <https://www.facebook.com/revo.palmyra3/videos>

⁷⁵ For looting by SARG forces and civilians, see: **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 14-0023** in **Weekly Report 4**; **SHI 14-027** in **Weekly Report 6**; **SHI 15-0058** in **Weekly Report 34**

bombardment by SARG and Russian forces⁷⁸ on and around the archaeological area. For information on previous coverage of SARG and Russian bombardment please refer to the following reports:

- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0055 in Weekly Report 33:** Militarization of Temple of Bel by SARG forces, and previous destruction attributed to SARG bombardment in August 2013.
- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0086 in Weekly Report 41:** Damage to Palmyra Museum, Temple of Bel, and Palmyra Citadel from mortar shells during battles between SARG forces and ISIL.
- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0086 Update in Weekly Report 42-43:** SARG bombardment of modern Palmyra and at least one strike on the archaeological area, following ISIL capture of Palmyra.
- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0096 in Weekly Report 45:** SARG bombardment of the archaeological area of Palmyra.
- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0134 in Weekly Report 59-60:** SARG bombardment near Qalaat Shirkuhl.
- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0145 in Weekly Report 65-66:** Russian bombardment near Qalaat Shirkuh.
- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0016 in Weekly Report 77-78:** SARG bombardment damages Palmyra columns.
- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0026 in Weekly Report 79-80:** SARG bombardment on Palmyra temple and theater.

Airstrikes in the city of Palmyra have become increasingly frequent since Russian forces began launching airstrikes in Syria on September 30, 2015 in support of SARG forces. In October 2015, Russia deployed helicopters and artillery to the SARG front near Palmyra.⁷⁹ Shortly thereafter Russian airstrikes in and around Palmyra were reported.⁸⁰ These reports were first denied by Russia. However on November 5, 2015 the Russian Defense Ministry announced a series of attacks targeting 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

⁷⁶ For SARG occupation, see: **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 14-019 in Weekly Report 3; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 14-027 in Weekly Report 6; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0055 in Weekly Report 33.** For ISIL occupation, see: **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0058 UPDATE in Weekly Report 34.**

⁷⁷ For deliberate ISIL destruction, see: **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0101 in Weekly Report 6; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0127 in Weekly Report 55-56; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0138 in Weekly Report 61-62; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0104 in Weekly Report 47-48; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0142 in Weekly Report 63-64**

⁷⁸ For damage from SARG and Russian forces bombardment, see: **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0055 in Weekly Report 33; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0086 in Weekly Report 41; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0086 Update in Weekly Report 42-43; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0096 in Weekly Report 45; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0134 in Weekly Report 45; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0145 in Weekly Report 65-66; ASOR CHI Incident Report 16-0016 in Weekly Report 77-78; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0026 in Weekly Report 79-80.**

⁷⁹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/russia-strikes-palmyra-syria-isis_us_56139b39e4b022a4ce5f50a6

⁸⁰ <https://twitter.com/hadialbahra/status/670701823662141440> <http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/12/dzens-of-russian-airstrikes-target-tadmur-and-aleppo-countryside/> ; <https://twitter.com/PalmyraPioneer/status/672944564278308864> ; <https://twitter.com/PalmyraRev1/status/672503523259584512>

a tank. They added that the strikes were targeted strictly at terrorist infrastructure located a considerable distance from Palmyra's historical architecture.⁸¹ Russian military personnel and advisers have also been reported to be working alongside SARG and other pro-regime forces in efforts to reclaim the territory from ISIL.⁸² Russia has also offered, on more than one occasion, to aid Syria in restoring Palmyra in the future.⁸³ For more information on previous coverage of SARG and Russian bombardment on cultural heritage sites in the city of Palmyra please refer to the following reports:

- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0155 in Weekly Report 69-70:** SARG Russian bombardment damages El Eman Mosque.
- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0155 in Weekly Report 69-70:** SARG bombardment damages Al Furqan Mosque.
- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0160 in Weekly Report 71-72:** SARG bombardment damages Bilal Mosque and Abi Thar Al Ghafari Mosque.
- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0020 in Weekly Report 79-80:** SARG bombardment damages Al Sadeiq Mosque.
- **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0029 in Weekly Report 81-82:** SARG bombardment damages Al Souq Mosque.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI is directing critical attention to the condition of all periods of cultural heritage at Palmyra, given the high visibility and ongoing significance of the city and UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

APSA: <https://www.facebook.com/apsa2011/posts/1553878301385942>

Coordination Committee in Palmyra: <https://www.facebook.com/revo.palmyra3>

The Guardian: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/15/russian-fighter-jets-continue-syria-raids-as-troops-withdraw>

Reuters: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-palmyra-idUSKCN0WD1GN>

SNHR: <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/03/10/19264/>

SOHR: <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=45048>

The Times: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/article4710126.ece>

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

⁸² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/russia-strikes-palmyra-syria-isis_us_56139b39e4b022a4ce5f50a6

⁸³ <http://tass.ru/en/society/851691> ; http://rbth.com/multimedia/history/2015/12/16/state-heritage-gathering-materials-to-help-reconstruct-palmyra_551503

Scholarly:

Burns, Ross (2009) *The Monuments of Syria: A Guide*. I. B. Tauris; Revised and expanded edition.

UNESCO: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/23>



Video still of an airstrike within the archaeological site of Palmyra (Coordination Committee in Palmyra reposted by APSA; March 10, 2016)



Bombardment of the archaeological site of Palmyra (Reposted by APSA; March 12, 2016)



Airstrikes in the vicinity of the Qalaat Shirkuh (Coordination Committee in Palmyra; March 10, 2016)

SHI 16-0036

Report Date: March 14, 2016

Site Name: Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs (كنيسة الشهداء); Our Lady of the Annunciation (Sayyida al-Bashara) (كنيسة سيدة البشارة)

Date of Incident: September, 2013-Present

Location: Raqqa, Raqqa Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Armenian Catholic Church; Melkite Greek Catholic Church

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: ISIL vandalism of Christian religious iconography and repurposing of two churches in the city of Raqqa.

Incident Source and Description: On March 13, 2016 the Swedish news agency Expressen released footage provided by hidden cameras that had been carried by two Syrian women in Raqqa. The video footage shows the Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs that, according to one of the women, has now been turned into a police headquarters for ISIL.⁸⁴

The first ISIL-related damage to the church was reported in September 2013. According to media reports ISIL militants removed the cross from the church's tower and replaced it with the group's own flag.⁸⁵ An activist interviewed by the BBC stated that, "two carloads of armed fighters went onto the roof of the church. They broke the bell with hammers, and threw one of the crosses down into the street. They tried to break it, but it was iron."⁸⁶ Video footage from September 27, 2013 shows several ISIL militants placing the group's flag on the church tower. One ISIL member throws down a religious icon depicting the crucifixion of Jesus to the crowd gathered below where it is grabbed by children.⁸⁷

The Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyr's is likely to have been repurposed several times since the first ISIL attack in September 2013. According to the New York Times, ISIL militants "converted [the church] into an Islamic center that screens videos of battles and suicide operations to recruit new fighters."⁸⁸ Additionally, SOHR reported that most Christian property in Raqqa, including churches and vacated homes, have been confiscated by ISIL.⁸⁹

According to the activist group Raqqa Being Slaughtered Silently (RBSS), ISIL militants also attacked Our Lady of the Annunciation Church around the same time as the attack on the Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs in September 2013. The militants removed the cross and repurposed the building as an administrative office.⁹⁰ According to the Syrian Observatory for

⁸⁴ <http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/womens-secret-films-from-within-closed-city-of-islamic-state/>

⁸⁵ <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/As-jihadist-rebels-burn-two-Catholic-churches-in-ar-Raqqah%2c-Assad%27s-enemies-openly-split-29128.html>

⁸⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-24926584>

⁸⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s78-ysM2Udg&feature=youtu.be>

⁸⁸ <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/24/world/middleeast/islamic-state-controls-raqqa-syria.html>

⁸⁹ <http://www.raqqa-sl.co/en/?p=1562>

⁹⁰ <http://www.raqqa-sl.co/?p=331>

Human Rights (SOHR), "[ISIL] fighters broke the cross of the Sayida al-Bshara (Our Lady of the Annunciation) Church.... burned the church's contents (crosses, paintings and statues) and set up the [ISIL] banner on top of the church."⁹¹

Pattern: Military Activity: occupation, intentional performative destruction.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the condition of the Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs and Our Lady of the Annunciation Church, as well as other religious sites in the city of Raqqa.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Ahlu Bayt News Agency: <http://en.abna24.com/service/middle-east-west-asia/archive/2016/03/14/741021/story.html>

Akhbar Al An: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s78-ysM2Udg&feature=youtu.be>

Al Akhbar: <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/19173>

Asia News: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/As-jihadist-rebels-burn-two-Catholic-churches-in-ar-Raqqah%2c-Assad%27s-enemies-openly-split-29128.html>

BBC: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-24926584>

CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/13/world/syria-raqqa-video/>

Deutsche Welle: <http://www.dw.com/en/interview-islamic-state-fighter/a-18493931>

Eretz Zen: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZoYzUSg_9M

Expressen: <http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/womens-secret-films-from-within-closed-city-of-islamic-state/>

International Business Times: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/syria-islamist-rebels-storm-churches-raqqa-isis-509680>

Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently:

June 1, 2015: <http://www.raqqa-sl.co/?p=331>

November 23, 2015: <http://www.raqqa-sl.co/en/?p=1562>

⁹¹ <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/syria-islamist-rebels-storm-churches-raqqa-isis-509680>



The Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs prior to its takeover by ISIL (Deutsche Welle; June 6, 2015)



The Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs repurposed as an ISIL police headquarters (Expressen TV; March 13, 2016)



An ISIL banner hanging over the Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs (Yalla Souriya; November 27, 2015)⁹²



The Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs repurposed as an ISIL police headquarters (Expressen TV; March 13, 2016)

⁹² <https://yallasouriya.wordpress.com/2015/11/27/syriaraqqa-church-becomes-central-islamic-police-station/>



Photographs of the Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs showing the place of the cross and its removal by ISIL (Al Akhbar; March 24, 2014)



A close-up photograph of the Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs (BBC; November 13, 2013)



The Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs repurposed as a recruiting office (New York Times; July 23, 2014)⁹³



The Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs repurposed as a recruiting office in late September 2013 (Deutsche Welle; June 6, 2015)

⁹³ <http://www.alquds.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/picdata/2013/12/12-03/03qpt963.jpg>



The fallen cross outside of Our Lady of the Annunciation Church following destruction by ISIL (Raqqā is Being Slaughtered Silently; June 1, 2015)



The fallen cross outside of Our Lady of the Annunciation Church following destruction by ISIL (Raqqā is Being Slaughtered Silently; June 1, 2015)

SHI 16-0037

Report Date: March 15, 2016

Site Name: Tell Ajaja (تل عجاجة) (Tell Araban, Šadikanni)

Date of Incident: 2014

Location: al-Hasakah Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Tell Ajaja (ancient Šadikanni) was an important Middle and Neo-Assyrian client-state and provincial center on the Lower Khabur River, south of the Hasakah South Dam. Many monumental statues and stelae have been found at the site, including two *lamassu* (winged human-headed bull stela sculptures) that stood at the entrance of the palace of a local ruler and date to the mid-9th century BCE. Excavations began at the site under Austin Henry Layard in the 1850s and began again in the 1980s under the Syrian DGAM.⁹⁴

Site Date: Middle and Neo-Assyrian (ca. 1500-600 BCE)

Incident Summary: Damage from looting with heavy machinery at site known to have been looted previously.

Incident Source and Description: On March 15, 2016 DGAM reported that its regional office in al-Hasakah was able to make a field visit to Tell Ajaja in order to assess damages to the site. The report states that ISIL and Al-Nusra Front caused significant damage at the site in 2014 by illegally excavating using “heavy machinery.”⁹⁵ The DGAM report is accompanied by 16 photos dated March 2016, which appear to confirm that heavy machinery was used at the site. Distinctive lines in several of the images indicate the use of a backhoe or excavator, while large tire tracks appear in another image. Large piles of earth and debris from digging are also apparent. In one image, the illegal excavations appear to have uncovered stone stelae. Looters also appear to have dug large tunnels at the site.

Looting at Tell Ajaja has been widely documented by scholars and in the media. On May 14, 2013 and March 16, 2014 DGAM reported ongoing looting at the site.⁹⁶ On April 23, 2014 DGAM posted images of artifacts allegedly looted from Tell Ajaja, including several large stelae and inscribed columns.⁹⁷ On May 25, 2014 APSA published images showing ISIL militants destroying statues allegedly found at the site with hammers after arresting the looters.⁹⁸ On December 31, 2014 DGAM reported extensive illegal excavations at Tell Ajaja and indicated that looters had dug large tunnels at the site.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Holloway 2002: 215

⁹⁵ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1939>

⁹⁶ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=844> ;
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1187>

⁹⁷ <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1258>

⁹⁸ <http://apsa2011.com/apsanew/al-hasakeh-tell-ajajah-illegal-excavations-and-intentional-destruction-of-ancient-statues/>

⁹⁹ <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1564>

Based on the available satellite imagery, damage to the tell was focused on the eastern and northern areas of the site. Prior to August 2010, there was already damage to the eastern portion of the tell due to heavy machinery excavation. The majority of the new machinery excavations took place in 2014, with the largest portions of the site damaged between July 22, 2014 and November 25, 2014, and ended prior to March 26, 2015. No additional illegal excavations are seen in the most recent available image from September 11, 2015.

Pattern: Military activity: occupation/militarization; Military activity: vehicles/heavy weaponry; Illegal excavation; Theft.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the situation in the Tell Ajaja and other Syrian heritage sites vulnerable to looting as a result of decreased local security and economic instability.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

DGAM:

March 3, 2016: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1939>

March 16, 2014: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1187>

April 23, 2014: <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1258>

December 31, 2014: <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1564>

May 4, 2013: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=844>

APSA: <http://apsa2011.com/apsanew/al-hasakeh-tell-ajajah-illegal-excavations-and-intentional-destruction-of-ancient-statues/>

Scholarly:

Holloway, S.W. (2002) *Aššur is King! Aššur is King!: Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*. Leiden: Brill. p. 215 n.1



ASOR DigitalGlobe®
August 30, 2010: Damage prior to conflict



ASOR DigitalGlobe®
July 22, 2014: Small increase to damage on the eastern side



ASOR DigitalGlobe®
November 25, 2014: Increase in heavy machinery excavations on northern side and eastern side.



ASOR DigitalGlobe®
March 26, 2015: Additional damage to the eastern side



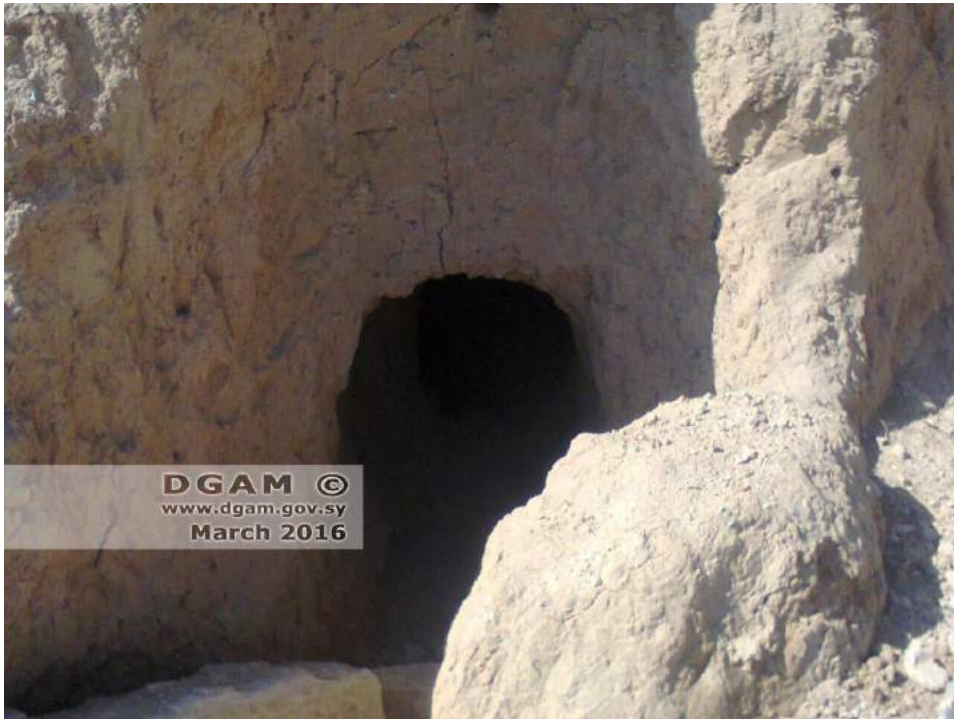
Large tunnel dug by looters at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Large tunnel dug by looters at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Large tunnel dug by looters at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Large tunnel dug by looters at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Evidence of use of heavy machinery in illegal excavations at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Illegally excavated stone stele still in situ at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Large piles of debris from illegal excavation at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Use of heavy machinery in illegal excavations at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



DGAM ©
www.dgam.gov.sy
March 2016

Large tunnel dug by looters at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Pits and debris from illegal excavation at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Evidence of looting and heavy machinery or vehicles at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Debris from illegal excavations at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Debris from illegal excavations and evidence of use of backhoe or excavator at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Debris from illegal excavations at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)



Illegally excavated grinding stone left at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2015)



Debris from illegal excavations at Tell Ajaja (DGAM; published March 15, 2016)

Incident Reports: Iraq

IHI 16-0008

Report Date: March 15, 2016

Site Name: Al-Farooq Mosque (aka Omar bin Khattab Mosque) (مسجد الفاروق)
(مسجد عمر بن الخطاب)

Date of Incident: March 10, 2016

Location: Kubaysah (Kabisa) City, District of Hit, Al Anbar Governorate

Site Description: Mosque, also described as a compound by some sources.

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Coalition airstrikes cause extensive damage to mosque.

Incident Source and Description: On March 9, 2016 local sources reported that US-led Coalition airstrikes struck Al-Farooq Mosque in the city of Kubaysah, causing extensive damage.¹⁰⁰ Video footage released online by a pro-ISIL Media group shows the extent of the damage.¹⁰¹

US-led Coalition Airstrikes (aka Operation Inherent Resolve) are documented by the US Department of Defense. On March 11, 2016 the Coalition reported that airstrikes struck “an ISIL facility and an ISIL bed-down location.”¹⁰² ASOR CHI can not independently verify that this airstrike is the same as the strike that damaged Al-Farooq Mosque. However, airstrikes have been frequent in the area around Hit, as Iraqi Security Forces attempt to advance into ISIL-held positions in Anbar Governorate.

ASOR CHI sources report that this site was likely being utilized as a strategic building by ISIL.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the condition of the Al-Farooq Mosque and the condition of other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns and intense military activity.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

A’Maq News Agency: <https://archive.org/details/1Ak15>

Air Wars: <http://airwars.org/military-reports-march-2016/>

Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/1Ak15>

¹⁰⁰ <https://twitter.com/trbrtc/status/709819963544981505>

¹⁰¹ <https://archive.org/details/1Ak15>

¹⁰² <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/691312/coalition-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>



Damage to Al-Farooq Mosque (Christian Triebert; March 15, 2016)¹⁰³



Still image of the damage to Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)

¹⁰³ <https://twitter.com/trbrtc/status/709816396302163968>



Still image of the damage to Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



Still image of the damage to Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



Still image of the damage to the surrounding area of Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



Still image of the damage to the surrounding area of Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



Still image of the damage to the surrounding area of Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



Still image of the damage to the surrounding area of Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



Still image of the damage to the surrounding area of Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



Still image of material damage to Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



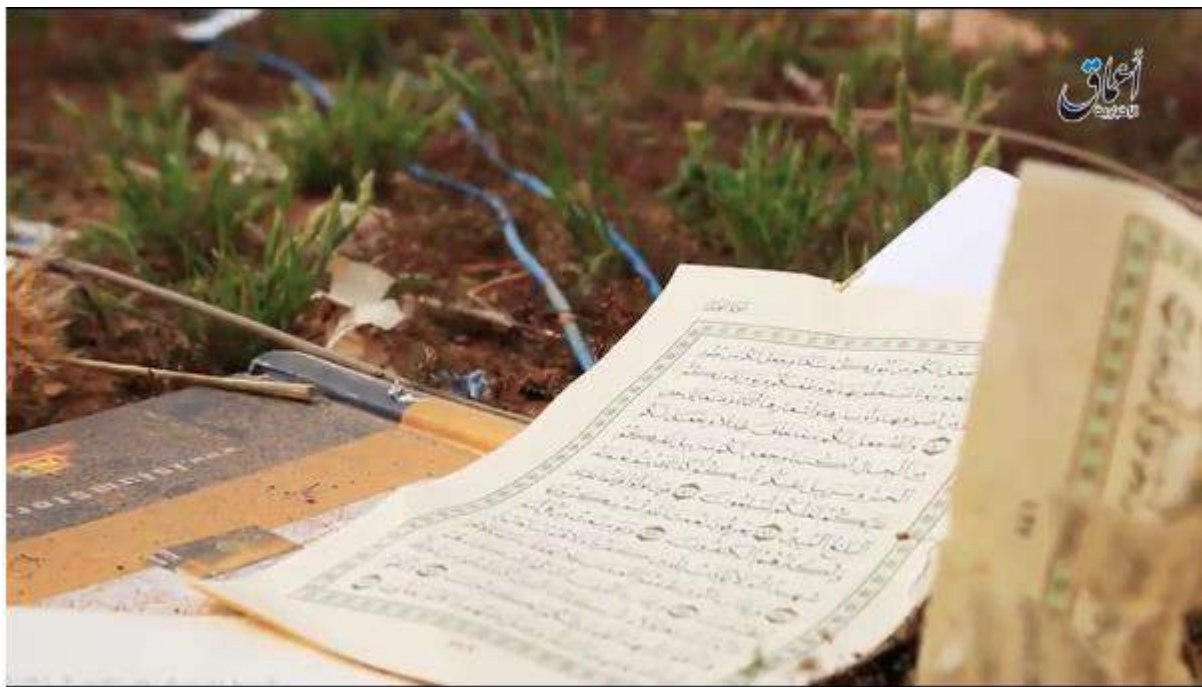
Still image of material damage to Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



Still image of material damage to Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



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Still image of material damage to Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



Still image of material damage to Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)



Missile fragment found at Al-Farooq Mosque (Internet Archive; March 15, 2016)