

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

NEA-PSHSS-14-001

Weekly Report 107-108 — August 17 - 31, 2016

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Executive Summary

During the reporting period, the frequency of new cultural heritage incidents in Syria remained at moderate levels with airstrikes causing the majority of new incidents in the Aleppo and Rif Dimashq theaters of operation. The DGAM released new information on the state of damaged cultural heritage sites in Aleppo linked to tunnel bombings, artillery strikes, and airstrikes. New, detailed information on recent heritage incidents in Aleppo remains scarce relative to initial incident reporting in the mainstream media and social media. ISIL territorial losses in northern Syria have provided opportunities to document damage and destruction in cities such as Djerablus and Manbij, and we may expect a steady flow of new information on the state of cultural assets and infrastructure in northern Aleppo and Raqqa Governorates in coming weeks. The current complex political and military environment in northern Syria, characterized by a wide array of forces, shifting loyalties and alliances, and tactical and strategic cross-purposes among supposed allies will contribute to instability and reduced operating capacity in coming months for humanitarian efforts, conflict resolution, and other emergency response efforts directed at the region's religiously and ethnically diverse population. A key concern remains the advance of Turkish ground forces into the area, which has severely raised the risk of violence between the US-backed FSA and SDF.

Syrian Director General of Antiquities and Museums, Maamoun Abdulkarim, traveled to Edinburgh Scotland to attend the Edinburgh International Cultural Summit. Abdulkarim conducted interviews on the state of Syrian heritage and the current challenges for cultural property protection efforts.

The capture of territory from ISIL in northern Iraq led to the release of new photodocumentation of previous ISIL deliberate destructions, vandalism, and repurposing of heritage sites in the hard-hit Sinjar region of Ninawa Governorate, as well as other crimes.

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.

Key Points

- Recent video footage and eyewitness accounts detailed damage to three churches located in Sinjar, Ninawa Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 16-0028**).
- Peshmerga forces discovered that ISIL militants dug tunnels and installed showers in a mosque in Abzakh, Ninawa Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 16-0029**).
- New video footage shows extensive damage to a cemetery in Arbin, Rif Dimashq Governorate, reportedly the result of SARG airstrikes (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0132**).
- An alleged SARG airstrike damaged a mosque in Khan al-Shieh, Rif Dimashq Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0133**).
- Allegedly, a SARG barrel bomb and Russian cluster bomb damaged a mosque and religious school in Aleppo (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0134**).
- The DGAM published photographs of extensive damage to two historic buildings in Aleppo (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0135**).
- New video footage shows damage to a mosque in Damascus, reportedly the result of ongoing SARG military activity in the area (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0136**).
- ISIL militants vandalized the exterior of a mosque in Djerablus, Aleppo Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0137**).

Heritage Timeline

August 30, 2016

The Wall Street Journal published an article titled “**A Landmark Precedent to Protect Cultural Heritage**” (by Melik Kaylan). The recent precedent-setting trial of Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi, charged at the International Criminal Court for destroying historic tombs in Timbuktu, is discussed.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/a-landmark-precedent-to-protect-cultural-heritage-1472590560>

August 29, 2016

SNHR published a report titled “**139 Incidents of Attacks against Vital Civil Facilities in July 2016.**”

<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/08/10/26211/>

- *Al Monitor* published an article titled “**After Babylon, Borsippa has its eye on World Heritage List**” (by Wassim Bassem). The director of the archaeological site of Borsippa hopes the ancient city will be nominated to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/borsippa-babylon-iraq-unesco.html>

- August 28, 2016 *The Edinburgh Reporter* published an article titled “**Edinburgh International Culture Summit 2016 ends with call to save heritage endangered by war.**” Discussions at the Summit centered around 40 cultural delegations who listened to over 60 speakers from around the world, including representatives from Libya, Syria, Oman, and China, who shared details of their efforts to save their cultural heritage.
<http://www.theedinburghreporter.co.uk/2016/08/edinburgh-international-culture-summit-2016-ends-with-call-to-save-heritage-endangered-by-war/>
- August 27, 2016 *The Herald Scotland* published an article titled “**Edinburgh heritage charity to aid Syrian cultural protection**” (by Phil Miller). Edinburgh World Heritage has offered to aid the DGAM’s Maamoun Abdulkarim, who called for help to protect Syria’s heritage.
<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/homenews/14708405.Edinburgh-heritage-charity-to-aid-Syrian-cultural-protection/>
- August 26, 2016 *BBC* published a live edition of *Newshour Extra* titled “**What’s the Cost of Preserving the Past?**” (by Owen Bennett Jones).
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04542nk>
- *The Conversation* published an article titled “**Why should cultural artefacts be more rooted than people?**” (by Robert Seddon). The author juxtaposes frequent calls to return cultural heritage to its country of origin with increasing numbers of migrants worldwide leaving their home countries.
<http://theconversation.com/why-should-cultural-artefacts-be-more-rooted-than-people-63954>
 - *AAS Architecture* published an article titled “**Syria: Post-War Housing Competition by MatterBetter**” (by Marco Rinaldi). Competition participants were asked to propose a solution for the housing scarcity crisis in Syria, which will affect the country as more refugees and IDPs return to their homes.
<http://aasarchitecture.com/2016/08/syria-post-war-housing-competition-matterbetter.html>
- August 25, 2016 *The Guardian* published an article titled “**From Timbuktu to Grimsby, heritage deserves to be restored and revered**” (by Simon Jenkins). The author argues that historic buildings damaged in wartime must be repaired in order to preserve cultural memory.
<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/commentisfree/2016/aug/25/timbuktu-grimsby-heritage-restored-revered>

- *The Scotsman* published an article titled “**Scottish heritage experts to help rebuild war-torn Syria**” (by Alistair Grant). The Edinburgh World Heritage organization will help restore several of the country’s most historic sites, including the ancient cities of Aleppo, Damascus, and Bosra.
<http://www.scotsman.com/heritage/people-places/scottish-heritage-experts-to-help-rebuild-war-torn-syria-1-4213156>
 - *The Wall Street Journal* published an article titled “**Looted Art Helps Fund Jihadists in Europe**” (by Deborah Lehr & Tess Davis). Deborah Lehr of the Antiquities Coalition argues that Belgium is a “destination of choice for...illegally trafficking antiquities,” and that authorities there must crack down on illicit trade and strengthen laws against peddling in antiquities stolen from conflict zones.
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/looted-art-helps-fund-jihadists-in-europe-1472164857>
- August 24, 2016
- Almada Press* published an article titled “كنائس تاريخية في بغداد تتحول لمحال تجارية ونواقيسها تشكو الإهمال (Historic churches converted to shops and bells complaining of neglect).” Four historic churches in Baghdad have been converted to shops despite being allocated restoration funds by the Iraqi Ministry of Culture.
<https://www.almadapress.com/ar/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsID=75458>
- *RTBF* produced a documentary titled “**Trafic d'arts, le grand marchandage (Art traffic, the grand bargain)**.” This documentary explores the illegal antiquities market and how artifacts looted from countries like Syria and Iraq end up in galleries in New York, Paris, and Dubai.
http://www.rtb.be/tv/thematique/documentaire/detail_trafic-d-arts-le-grand-marchandage?id=9387046
 - *The Scotsman* published an article titled “**Edinburgh International Cultural guest Syria’s Maamoun Abdulkarim**” (by Tim Cornwell). Maamoun Abdulkarim was a guest at this year’s International Cultural Summit in Edinburgh.
<http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/edinburgh-festivals/edinburgh-international-cultural-guest-syria-s-maamoun-abdulkarim-1-4211074>
 - *The Art Newspaper* published an article titled “**Almost 70% of smuggled objects seized in Syria and Lebanon are fakes, antiquities chief says**” (by Tim Cornwell). DGAM chief Maamoun Abdulkarim discussed the illegal antiquities trafficking, restoration efforts in Palmyra, and his concerns over destruction in Aleppo.
<http://theartnewspaper.com/news/news/almost-70-of-smuggled-objects-seized-in-syria-and-lebanon-are-fakes-antiquities-chief-says/>

- The Diane Rehm Show* on NPR aired a program titled “**The Big Business of Looted Antiquities.**” Amr al-Azm is among those interviewed about the illegal antiquities trade.
<http://thedianerehmshow.org/shows/2016-08-24/the-big-business-of-looted-antiquities>
- August 23, 2016

Reuters published an article titled “**World’s largest cemetery grows bigger as Shi’ite militias bury their dead**” (by Alaa al-Marjani & Saif Hameed). Wadi al-Salam Cemetery in Najaf is expanding at double its usual rate as Iraq’s death rate increases with the war against ISIL.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-cemetery-idUSKCN10Y18G>
- August 22, 2016

Several media outlets published articles discussing the trial of Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi, a member of the militant group Ansar Dine, at the International Criminal Court at The Hague. Al-Mahdi will plead guilty to leading the destruction of religious and cultural sites in Timbuktu in 2012. It is hoped that his prosecution will deter other extremist groups from committing similar acts of intentional cultural destruction.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/08/trial-destruction-history-conflict-160821080521445.html>

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/un-islamic-cultural-heritage-jihadists-crosshairs-034700097.html>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37152191>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/cultural-war-crime_us_57bb2058e4b0b51733a4a34b

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/08/24/jailing-jihadis-for-destroying-treasures.html>

<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/weltkulturerbe-ein-mausoleum-blutet-nicht-1.3128505>

<https://www.wired.com/2016/08/hague-convicts-tomb-destroying-terrorist-smart-design/>
- ABNA* published an article titled “**Photos: Rebuilding Askariya Shrine.**” ABNA published a series of photographs showing ongoing efforts to rebuild and restore the Askariyya Shrine in Samarra.
<http://en.abna24.com/service/pictorial/archive/2016/08/22/773645/story.html>

- **Heritage for Peace** published its bi-weekly newsletter titled “**Damage to Syria's Heritage: 22 August 2016.**”
<http://www.heritageforpeace.org/syria-culture-and-heritage/damage-to-cultural-heritage/previous-damage-newsletters/damage-to-syrias-heritage-22-august-2016/>

August 20, 2016

DGAM published an article titled “**The Antiquities Directorate of Aleppo inspected the damage at both Beit Ghazaleh & Beit Ashiqbash.**” Representatives of the DGAM visited and took photographs of severe damage to Beit Ghazaleh and Beit Ashiqbash.
ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0135.
<http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=2039>
- **APSA** published a post titled “**Aleppo: The actual state of the Citadel 20.08.2016.**” APSA published a series of photographs and a video showing damage to various sections of the fortification walls on the Citadel of Aleppo.
<http://apsa2011.com/apsanew/aleppo-08-2016/>

August 19, 2016

The Express Tribune published an article titled “**Terrorists target ‘un-Islamic’ cultural heritage**” (by AFP). On August 22, 2016 the International Criminal Court will open the trial of a militant on a charge of war crimes for the destruction of shrines at the World Heritage site of Timbuktu in Mali, hoping to set a precedent for the destruction of heritage sites in other war-torn countries.
<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1165729/terrorists-target-un-islamic-cultural-heritage/>
- **SNHR** published a post titled “**Government forces targeted Salah Al Din Mosque in Salah Al Din neighborhood in Aleppo city in August 19.**” A mosque in Aleppo was allegedly damaged by a barrel bomb. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0134.**
<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/08/19/alleged-russian-forces-targeted-salah-al-din-sharia-institution-salah-al-din-neighborhood-aleppo-city-cluster-bombs-august-19/>
- **SNHR** published a post titled “**Alleged Russian forces targeted Salah Al Din Sharia Institution in Salah Al Din neighborhood in Aleppo city by cluster bombs in August 19.**” A religious school connected to a mosque in Aleppo was allegedly damaged by a cluster bomb. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0134.**
<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/08/19/alleged-russian-forces-targeted-salah-al-din-sharia-institution-salah-al-din-neighborhood-aleppo-city-cluster-bombs-august-19/>

- **United Nations Development Project (UNDP)** will hold an event from August 20-21, 2016 in the city of Homs that includes an introduction to UNDP's activities and the launch of an ancient market rehabilitation initiative in Homs' Old City. The event also includes lectures, a photo gallery, painting for children, and live music.
<https://www.facebook.com/UNDP.Syria/photos/a.531278970337780.1073741828.500957343369943/861861847279489/>
 - *JuraForum* published an article titled "**Iraqi-German Expert Forum zum aktiven Schutz des irakischen Architekturbes (Iraqi-German Expert Forum to actively protect Iraqi architectural heritage).**" The Iraqi-German Expert Forum in Cultural Heritage (IGEF-CH) is a partnership between the German Archaeological Institute and the Iraqi Antiquities Department begun in July 2016 that is intended to facilitate the sharing of techniques and methods of documenting, conserving, and restoring heritage sites in Iraq.
<http://www.juraforum.de/wissenschaft/iraqi-german-expert-forum-zum-aktiven-schutz-des-irakischen-architekturbes-565568>
 - *The Washington Post* published an article titled "**Smithsonian, other agencies protect artifacts in Iraq, Syria**" (by Joe Davidson). The efforts of the Smithsonian and other US GOs involved in cultural heritage protection were discussed in the recently released Government Accountability Office report on the "Protection of Iraqi and Syrian Antiquities."
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/08/19/smithsonian-other-agencies-protect-artifacts-in-iraq-syria/>
- August 18, 2016
- *Middle East Eye* published an article titled "**Bombing books and memories: Aleppo air strikes inflict devastating cultural toll.**" The recent bombing of the Waraqa Cultural Center in the Old City of Aleppo is discussed.
<http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/its-terrible-see-your-memories-devastated-aleppo-mourns-loss-bombed-cultural-centre-1290509301>
 - *Al Bawaba* published an article titled "**First shrine of Mary built in Kirkuk, Iraq.**" A Chaldean Catholic shrine to the Virgin Mary was opened in Kirkuk.
<http://www.albawaba.com/loop/first-shrine-mary-built-kirkuk-iraq-874686>

August 17, 2016

ARA News published an article titled “**Syriac Christians revive ancient language despite war.**” A group of Syriac-Assyrians have recently opened a language center known as “Ourhi Centre” in Qamishli, al-Hasakah Governorate to teach the Assyrian language and train potential teachers.

<http://aranews.net/2016/08/syriac-christians-revive-ancient-language-despite-war-2/>

Military and Political Context

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

1. Aleppo Governorate:

- On August 17, the US-backed opposition group known as the Hawar Kilis Operations Room announced that they had recaptured the key border town of al-Rai.²
- On August 18, clashes between the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) and Syrian opposition forces continued in the Aleppo city district of Sheikh Maqsoud.³
- On August 21, forces from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) announced their intention to begin an assault on the ISIL-held town of Djerablus from inside Turkey.⁴
- On August 22, the head of the newly established “Djerablus Military Council” was assassinated. Kurdish officials reported that two “agents of Turkey had been detained over the killing.”⁵
- On August 22, Turkish forces reportedly shelled “Syrian Kurdish targets” in the recently captured city of Manbij. A Turkish official stated that the goal behind the shelling was to “open a corridor for moderate rebels.”⁶
- On August 23, Turkish forces reportedly bombarded both ISIL and SDF forces in and around Djerablus.⁷
- On August 24, Syrian Kurdish YPG forces reportedly began withdrawal operations from the city of Manbij and began moving to the east side of the Euphrates River.⁸

² <http://post.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/syria-situation-report-august-12-18-2016>

³ <http://aranews.net/2016/08/clashes-continue-syrian-opposition-rebels-kurds-aleppo/>

⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-jarablus-idUSKCN10W0DR> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Aug-22/368448-turkey-launches-artillery-strikes-on-isis-kurdish-pyd-in-north-syria-tv.ashx>

⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-kurds-idUSKCN10Y127> ; <http://aranews.net/2016/08/kurds-accuse-turkish-intelligence-assassinating-military-leader-syrias-jarabulus/> ; <http://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/syria-situation-report-august-18-25-2016>

⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-operations-idUSKCN10X1YY>

⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37161538> ; <http://aranews.net/2016/08/turkey-bombs-anti-isis-forces-syria-sdf/> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-kurds-idUSKCN10Y127>

⁸ <http://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/syria-situation-report-august-18-25-2016>

- On August 24, Turkish tanks manned by Turkish special forces and trucks carrying FSA forces crossed the Turkish-Syrian border and advanced towards Djerablus. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that “the operation was aimed against both [ISIL] and Kurdish fighters,” likely in reference to the US-backed SDF. Within 24 hours, FSA fighters recaptured Djerablus, facing little resistance from ISIL militants. The Syrian Foreign Ministry condemned the offensive as a violation of Syria’s sovereignty.⁹
 - On August 25, 20 additional Turkish tanks crossed into Syria and Turkish officials demanded that Kurdish SDF forces “retreat to the east side of the Euphrates River within a week.”¹⁰
 - On August 28, Turkish officials threatened to enter Manbij if Kurdish forces did not retreat to the eastern side of the Euphrates River. On the same day, Syrian Kurds accused Turkish airstrikes of killing at least 40 people in the villages of Jeb al-Kousa and Megher-Sresat, south of the newly recaptured town of Djerablus.¹¹
 - On August 29, Turkish-backed FSA fighters advanced on Manbij following the group’s capture of ten villages. Members of the YPG have cautioned the FSA forces against entering Manbij.¹²
 - On August 30, SDF forces seized three ISIL-held villages north of the city of Aleppo, moving the forces closer to the ISIL-held town of al-Bab.¹³
 - On August 30, the SDF Djerablus Military Council announced a temporary ceasefire with Turkey.¹⁴
2. al-Hasakah Governorate:
- On August 17-18, alleged SARG forces carried out airstrikes against six Syrian Kurdish YPG locations in the city of Hasakah in the first instance of airstrikes in that area since the start of the Syrian conflict.¹⁵

⁹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37171995> ; <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/25/world/europe/turkey-syria-ground-insursion.html> ; <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-joins-turkish-forces-to-launch-push-against-islamic-state-in-syria-1472016805> ; <http://aa.com.tr/en/politics/syrian-operation-is-to-clear-daesh-says-turkish-fm-634440> ; <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/turkish-tanks-enter-syria-clear-isil-jarablus-160824082508482.html> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-kurds-idUSKCN10Z0QH> ; <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21705658-turkish-forces-pour-over-syrian-border-battlefield-syria-just-became> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-idUSKCN10Z07I> ; <http://post.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/turkish-incursion-northern-syria-signals-turning-point-anti-isis-fight>

¹⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-idUSKCN10Z07I>

¹¹ <http://aranews.net/2016/08/ypg-warns-turkey-manbij-invasion/> ; <http://aranews.net/2016/08/dozens-civilian-casualties-reported-turkish-bombardment-north-syria/> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37212256> ; <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/erdogan-syria-operations-continue-160828165705139.html> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN11305C> ; <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/08/29/massacre-due-turkish-forces-shelling-al-sraisat-village-aleppo-governorate-august-28/>

¹² <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/turkish-backed-syrian-rebels-advance-manbij-160829154225197.html>

¹³ <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/syria-situation-report-august-25-september-1-2016>

¹⁴ <http://aranews.net/2016/08/sdf-led-jarablus-council-announces-ceasefire-turkey-backed-rebels/> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-ceasefire-idUSKCN11521Z> ; <http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20160830/news/308309968/> ;

- On August 22, YPG forces began a ‘major assault’ against SARG-held areas located inside the city, gaining “near full control” of Hasakah within 24 hours.¹⁶
 - On August 24, YPG and SARG forces reached a ceasefire agreement in Hasakah, granting the majority of control of the city to YPG and Asayish forces.¹⁷
3. Rif Dimashq Governorate:
- On August 25-27, Syrian opposition forces and civilians began evacuating the town of Daraya following a ceasefire deal with the Syrian regime. Approximately 800 armed opposition forces were allowed to relocate to Idlib Governorate, while another 2,400 civilians were transported to government-sponsored shelters in the Syrian capital of Damascus.¹⁸
 - On August 26, Islamist opposition group Jaish al-Islam released a statement “expressing conditional support for the formation of a Unified Military Operations Room” in the suburbs of Eastern Ghouta, an agreement proposed by the “rival Islamist group” Faylaq al-Rahman.¹⁹
4. Homs Governorate:
- On August 26-31, negotiations took place between Syrian opposition forces and the Syrian regime for a “final deal” to evacuate the district of Al-Wa’er, Homs City. Homs-based opposition groups later rejected the deal.²⁰
 - On August 29, ISIL militants clashed with SARG forces at a Syrian army base in the district of al-Talela, near the ancient site of Palmyra. Casualties among SARG forces were reported; however, ISIL militants were unable to advance in the area.²¹
5. Hama Governorate:
- On August 29- 31, Syrian opposition forces from Jund al-Aqsa and FSA-affiliated groups captured the SARG-held towns of Halfaya, Taybat al-Imam, Sawran, and Ma’ardas in northern Hama governorate.²²
6. Deir ez-Zor Governorate:
- On August 18, ISIL militants shelled the SARG-held districts of al-Joura, Hawiqa, and Sinaa causing casualties among civilians.²³

¹⁵ <http://post.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/syria-situation-report-august-12-18-2016> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-hasaka-idUSKCN10T11T>

¹⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-hasaka-idUSKCN10X090> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-kurds-idUSKCN10Y127> ; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/22/kurdish-militias-fight-syrian-forces-hasaka> ; <http://aranews.net/2016/08/kurds-triumph-in-battle-against-syrian-regime/>

¹⁷ <http://aranews.net/2016/08/hasakah-truce-reached-syrian-regime-kurds-russian-mediation/> ; <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/syria-situation-report-august-18-25-2016> ; <http://aranews.net/2016/08/kurdish-fighters-expel-regime-forces-major-parts-syrian-city/>

¹⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37197933> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/37191087> ; <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/syria-situation-report-august-18-25-2016> ; <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/syrias-suffering-families/four-year-siege-syrian-city-daraya-ends-3-200-evacuated-n638776> ; <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/syria-situation-report-august-25-september-1-2016>

¹⁹ <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/syria-situation-report-august-25-september-1-2016>

²⁰ <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/syria-situation-report-august-25-september-1-2016>

²¹ <http://aranews.net/2016/08/clashes-resume-syrias-palmyra-isis-tries-regain-positions/>

²² <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-rebels-idUSKCN115025> ; <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/syria-situation-report-august-25-september-1-2016>

²³ <http://aranews.net/2016/08/islamic-state-bombs-regime-held-districts-syrias-deir-ez-zor/>

7. Raqqa Governorate:

- On August 25, unidentified militants from Sunni Arab tribes in northern Raqqa Governorate announced the formation of 'Sarayya al-Qadisiya,' in order to target members of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) as a response to the ongoing "arrests and deportations of local civilians."²⁴

Other Key Points:

- During the reporting period, the US-led coalition conducted airstrikes in the areas of Abu Kamal, Deir ez Zor, Manbij, Mara, Palmyra, Raqqa, Shadadi, Tal Abyad, and Tamakh.²⁵
- During the reporting period, the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) reported frequent Russian airstrikes over Aleppo, Homs, and Idlib governorates, with infrequent airstrikes in Daraa, Deir ez Zor, and Hama governorates.²⁶
- On August 22, Iran announced that Russia would, temporarily, no longer be authorized to use its airbase to conduct airstrikes in Syria, following Russia's use of the base last week.²⁷
- On August 24, the UN and Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) released a report accusing SARG forces of using chlorine gas in aerial attacks over Idlib Governorate that occurred on April 21, 2014 and March 16, 2015. Russian officials have disputed the validity of the report.²⁸
- On August 25, Chinese Defense Minister Wu Qian announced that the Chinese military will provide training for SARG forces. According to Qian, the training will focus on medical and nursing skills, and will take place in China.²⁹
- On August 31, a German official called for the placement of US sanctions against Syria following the UN and OPCW report that accused SARG forces of using chlorine gas in attacks against civilians.³⁰

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

1. Ninawa Governorate:

- On August 23, Iraqi security forces entered the center of the city of Qayyarah, facing little resistance from ISIL militants.³¹
- On August 25, Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced that the Iraqi Army had pushed out ISIL from the "oil producing region" of Qayyarah.³²

²⁴ <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/syria-situation-report-august-25-september-1-2016>

²⁵ See: "US DOD News Release Military Strikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq". *Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve*. News Release No: [918408](#), [919876](#), [920785](#), [920863](#), [924442](#), [922558](#), [925591](#), [927522](#), [928336](#), [928385](#), [928623](#), [930278](#), [932470](#)

²⁶ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-august-10.html>

²⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2016/08/22/world/middleeast/ap-syria.html> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37154043>

²⁸ <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/syria-situation-report-august-18-25-2016> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37229659>

²⁹ <https://au.news.yahoo.com/world/a/32445726/chinese-military-will-train-syrian-troops-govt/>

³⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-germany-idUSKCN1173H9>

³¹ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/08/23/Iraq-begins-efforts-to-recapture-ISIS-held-Qayyarah.html> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37164630> ; <http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/23/middleeast/iraq-nineveh-mosul-scene/index.html>

³² <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-mosul-idUSKCN1101C4> ; <http://post.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq-control-terrain-map-august-25-2016>

- On August 30, the Associate Press reported that ISIL militants had destroyed approximately 95% of Qayyarah airbase, possibly hindering upcoming operations to retake Mosul. ISIL militants also set fire to the area's oil refineries as they retreated.³³
- 2. Al Anbar Governorate:
 - On August 27, Iraqi Joint Operations Command (JOC) announced that Iraqi security forces and Iraqi air support cleared the Khalidiyah desert area between Fallujah and Ramadi.³⁴
- 3. Kirkuk Governorate:
 - On August 22, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated an explosive vest outside a Shia mosque in the city of Kirkuk, injuring four people. Approximately one hour later, police apprehended another suicide bomber: a young boy found to be wearing a suicide vest intended for an attack against a Shia shrine.³⁵
- 4. Karbala Governorate:
 - On August 28, "five attackers armed with suicide vests, rifles and grenades" attacked a wedding party in the town of Ain al-Tamer, killing at least 15 people. ISIL later claimed responsibility for the attack.³⁶
- 5. Salah ad Din Governorate:
 - On August 18, ISIL militants "launched a rocket attack on a refugee center" near the city of Tikrit, killing at least 13 people.³⁷
- 6. Baghdad Governorate:
 - On August 25, several bombings and shooting attacks across Baghdad killed at least 13 people and wounded 24 more.³⁸
- 7. Diyala Governorate:
 - On August 26, clashes lasting two days broke out between tribal groups in the town of Abu Saida leading to an intervention by joint Iraqi security forces.³⁹

Other Key Points:

- During the reporting period, the US-led coalition conducted airstrikes in the areas of Albu Hayat, Ayn Isa, Baghdadi, Bashir, Beiji, Haditha, Hit, Kisik, Mosul, Qayyarah, Ramadi, Sinjar, Sultan Abdallah, and Tal Afar.⁴⁰

³³ <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/10853f2511e2462fbef22c5064b63364/destruction-iraqi-base-could-hinder-mosul-operation> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-oil-idUSKCN1150UR>

³⁴ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/iraq-situation-report-august-23-30.html>

³⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/iraqi-police-apprehend-boy-suicide-bomber-in-city-of-kirkuk/2016/08/22/4167a040-684e-11e6-91cb-ecb5418830e9_story.html ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/iraq-situation-report-august-16-22-2016.html>

³⁶ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/attack-kills-18-people-karbala-iraq-160829081600334.html> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/iraq-situation-report-august-23-30.html>

³⁷ http://www.preemptivelove.org/isis_attacks_refugee_camp_in_iraq_mosul_corridor

³⁸ <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/986d80de54d247fab0978eb985ee662f/iraqi-officials-say-attacks-across-baghdad-have-killed-13>

³⁹ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/iraq-situation-report-august-23-30.html>

⁴⁰ See: "US DOD News Release Military Strikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq". *Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve*. News Release No: [918408](#), [919876](#), [920785](#), [920863](#), [921218](#), [924442](#), [922558](#), [925591](#), [927522](#), [928336](#), [928385](#), [928623](#), [930278](#), [932470](#)

- On August 18, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) released a report containing the testimony of “Yezidi survivors of ISIL atrocities in Iraq.” The report contains the testimony of some of the over 300,000 residents of Sinjar, mainly Yezidis, who fled Sinjar district in 2014.⁴¹
- On August 21, 36 men convicted by an Iraqi court of participating in the ISIL massacre of approximately 1,700 Shia military personnel at Camp Speicher Airbase in 2014 were executed in Baghdad.⁴²
- On August 23, Reuters reported that “more than 700 Sunni men and boys” remain missing following Shia militia members’ operations to recapture Fallujah. The report stated that Shia militia members killed “at least 66 Sunni males and abused at least 1,500 others.”⁴³
- On August 25, the Iraqi parliament submitted a ‘no-confidence vote’ against Iraq’s Minister of Defense Khaled al-Obeidi, leading to the defense minister’s resignation.⁴⁴
- On August 30, Human Rights Watch released a report accusing Iraqi “tribal militias” of recruiting children from refugee camps for use in upcoming operations to retake the ISIL-held city of Mosul.⁴⁵

Other significant political and military events during the reporting period:

- During the reporting period, it was reported that the militant extremist Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi, a member of Ansar Dine, will plead guilty to having led the destruction of religious and cultural sites in Timbuktu in 2012 during his trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC). This trial dealing with the destruction of cultural heritage is a first for the ICC and has major implications for international cultural property protection efforts. The case marks one of the most significant developments since the prosecutions of Pavle Strugar and Miodrag Jokic for the 1991 shelling of Dubrovnik at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.
- On August 20, a suicide bomber targeted a Kurdish wedding party in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, killing at least 54 people. President Erdogan blamed ISIL for the attack.⁴⁶
- On August 21, Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend assumed command of the US-led Operation Inherent Resolve.⁴⁷
- On August 29, an ISIL car bombing attack at a military facility in the Yemeni city of Aden killed at least 60 people.⁴⁸

⁴¹ http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=6002:un-report-details-testimony-of-yezidi-survivors-of-isil-atrocities-in-iraq&Itemid=636&lang=en

⁴² <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/22/world/middleeast/iraq-executes-isis-2014-massacre-speicher.html> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37148060> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-rights-idUSKCN10Y1P5>

⁴³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-massacres-falluja-special-report-idUSKCN10Y1VD>

⁴⁴ <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/986d80de54d247fab0978eb985ee662f/iraqi-officials-say-attacks-across-baghdad-have-killed-13> ; <http://www.militarytimes.com/articles/iraq-army-recaptures-key-town-on-road-to-mosul-from-isis> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/iraq-situation-report-august-23-30.html>

⁴⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/08/30/iraq-militias-recruiting-children> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-children-idUSKCN1162A5>

⁴⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37154294> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37158615>

⁴⁷ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/iraq-situation-report-august-16-22-2016.html> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/920930/townsend-takes-command-of-operation-inherent-resolve/source/GovDelivery>

⁴⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37212473> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-idUSKCN1140HJ>

- On August 30, ISIL-affiliated Amaq News Agency reported the death of prominent ISIL leader Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, stating that al-Adnani was killed in Aleppo Governorate. The Pentagon later confirmed that a “precision strike” had targeted al-Adnani near the town of al-Bab, the town to which ISIL members reportedly fled as Turkish and FSA forces advanced towards Djerablus. Russia also claimed responsibility for the death of al-Adnani, stating that a Russian airstrike had targeted him in the village of Umm Hawsh.⁴⁹

Syrian Network for Human Rights Videos

Beginning March 23, 2016 the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) published back-dated videos on YouTube of combat damage inflicted on schools, bakeries, hospitals, marketplaces, and other types of infrastructure and civilian sites. ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the SNHR YouTube channel and archive videos that document heritage destruction. The following sites have been documented as damaged in the videos released during the current reporting period:

1. St. Takla Church, damaged by alleged SARG shelling in Daraya, Rif Dimashq Governorate on November 26, 2012.⁵⁰
2. St. Takla Church, damaged by alleged SARG barrel bombs in Daraya, Rif Dimashq Governorate on May 13, 2014.⁵¹
3. Hzaqeel Mosque, damaged by alleged SARG airstrikes in Daraya, Rif Dimashq Governorate on November 19, 2012.⁵²
4. al-Kabir Mosque, damaged by alleged SARG barrel bombs in Daraya, Rif Dimashq Governorate on October 30, 2015 (previous damage detailed in **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0072** in **Weekly Report 95-96**).⁵³
5. al-Rahman Mosque, damaged by alleged SARG barrel bombs in Daraya, Rif Dimashq on August 5, 2015 (previous damage detailed in **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0122** in **Weekly Report 105-106**).⁵⁴
6. al-Rahman Mosque, damaged by alleged SARG barrel bombs in Daraya, Rif Dimashq on May 19, 2016 (previous damage detailed in **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0122** in **Weekly Report 105-106**).⁵⁵
7. Omar bin al-Khattab Mosque, damaged by two alleged SARG barrel bombs in Daraya, Rif Dimashq on April 4, 2014.⁵⁶
8. al-Rahman Mosque, damaged by alleged SARG barrel bombs in Daraya, Rif Dimashq on January 1, 2014 (previous damage detailed in **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0122** in **Weekly Report 105-106**).⁵⁷

⁴⁹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37224570> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-islamic-state-an-idUSKCN1161HK> ; <http://post.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/turkish-incursion-northern-syria-signals-turning-point-anti-isis-fight> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37234207>

⁵⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWNjAO7SkTc>

⁵¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJxoOSDX9rA>

⁵² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwnz6jN43k0> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9h5vVQ-ZZys>

⁵³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhqZZQIkZyI>

⁵⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ixm6p5BNp8g>

⁵⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DNNlrTLCRw>

⁵⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55UVL98YHJQ>

⁵⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXrnQfC3zIQ> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11oXuZxzOnk>

Incident Reports: Syria

SHI 16-0132

Report Date: August 18, 2016

Site Name: Arbin Cemetery

Date of Incident: August 18, 2016

Location: Arbin, Rif Dimashq Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Cemetery

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Video footage shows extensive damage to cemetery.

Incident Source and Description: On August 18, 2016 Qasioun News Agency released video footage of damage caused by an alleged SARG airstrikes at a cemetery in Arbin. It is unclear from the footage if the damage occurred on that day or on a previous occasion. SARG airstrikes have allegedly been frequent over the area as pro-regime forces attempt to advance into opposition-held areas. Areas within Rif Dimashq Governorate have been under heavy bombardment since the collapse of the ceasefire in May 2016. For previous information on damage to other cultural heritage sites in Rif Dimashq Governorate, see **SHI 16-0045** in **Weekly Report 87-88**, **SHI 16-0045 Update** in **Weekly Report 91-92**, **SHI 16-0072** in **Weekly Report 95-96**, **SHI 16-0086** in **Weekly Report 97-98**.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor damage to Arbin cemetery, as well as the condition of other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns and intense military activity.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Qasioun News Agency: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koplynZ80xU>



Video still of damage to Arbin Cemetery (Qasioun News Agency; August 18, 2016)



Video still of damage to Arbin Cemetery (Qasioun News Agency; August 18, 2016)



Video still of damage to Arbin Cemetery (Qasioun News Agency; August 18, 2016)

SHI 16-0133

Report Date: August 18, 2016

Site Name: al-Huda Mosque (مسجد الهدى)

Date of Incident: August 18, 2016

Location: Khan al-Shieh, Rif Dimashq Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Mosque

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: A SARG airstrike allegedly damages a mosque.

Incident Source and Description: On August 18, 2016 Shahba Press Agency reported that a SARG airstrike destroyed al-Huda Mosque, located in the Palestinian refugee camp of Khan al-Shieh.⁵⁸ The extent of the damage to the mosque is unknown. The airstrike injured at least 11 civilian bystanders. No photographs were available at the time of publication.

Al-Huda Mosque has been damaged by airstrikes and shelling on at least two prior occasions in 2015 and 2016. For more information on previous damage to the mosque, see **ASOR CHI Incident Reports SHI 16-0046** in **Weekly Report 87-88** and **SHI 16-0072** in **Weekly Report 95-96**.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

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

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Shahba Press: <https://twitter.com/ShahbaPress/status/766191727866773504>

⁵⁸ <https://twitter.com/ShahbaPress/status/766191727866773504>

SHI 16-0134

Report Date: August 20, 2016

Site Name: Salah ad-Din Mosque (مسجد صلاح الدين); Salah ad-Din Sharia School (صلاح الدين الثانوية الشرعية)

Date of Incident: August 19, 2016

Location: Aleppo, Aleppo Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Mosque and religious school in Aleppo.

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: A SARG helicopter and Russian warplane allegedly bomb a mosque and religious school in Aleppo.

Incident Source and Description: On August 19, 2016 the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) reported that a SARG helicopter dropped a barrel bomb near Salah ad-Din Mosque in Aleppo, causing damage.⁵⁹ No photographs of the damage were available at the time of publication.

On August 19, 2016 SNHR reported that a Russian warplane dropped a cluster bomb on Salah ad-Din Sharia School, a religious secondary school apparently affiliated with Salah ad-Din Mosque.⁶⁰ The cluster bomb caused a fire to occur inside the school.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor damage to Salah ad-Din Mosque and Sharia School, as well as the condition of other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns and intense military activity.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

SNHR:

August 19, 2016: <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/08/19/alleged-russian-forces-targeted-salah-al-din-sharia-institution-salah-al-din-neighborhood-aleppo-city-cluster-bombs-august-19/>; <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/08/19/government-forces-targeted-salah-al-din-mosque-salah-al-din-neighborhood-aleppo-city-august-19/>

⁵⁹ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/08/19/government-forces-targeted-salah-al-din-mosque-salah-al-din-neighborhood-aleppo-city-august-19/>

⁶⁰ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/08/19/alleged-russian-forces-targeted-salah-al-din-sharia-institution-salah-al-din-neighborhood-aleppo-city-cluster-bombs-august-19/>



A fire in Salah ad-Din Sharia School after it was allegedly struck by a Russian cluster bomb (SNHR; August 19, 2016)

SHI 16-0135

Report Date: August 20, 2016

Site Name: Beit Ashiqbash (Beit Ajibash; بيت أجفباش); Beit Ghazaleh (بيت غزالة)

Date of Incident: April 2015

Location: Aleppo, Aleppo Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Beit Ashiqbash - Located on Ibshir Pasha Street on a historically significant corner in the Jdeideh Quarter, Beit Ashiqbash was built in 1757 CE by Qarah Ali, a wealthy Christian merchant. A Turk named Ashiqbash later bought the house.⁶¹ It is famous for its courtyard, which is extravagantly decorated in a Mamluk-Rococo style. The building was turned into a museum in 1973 and was restored beginning in the 1980s. The collection contains heritage and folk artifacts.⁶²

Beit Ghazaleh - Built in the 1691 CE by Khajadur ibn Murad Bali, Beit Ghazaleh was later inhabited by the Saba 'Aida family and then the Ghazaleh family in 1834 CE. It contains a large courtyard overlooking an intricate stone facade to the north, a large vaulted hall (iwan) to the south, and a gilded wooden reception room (qa'a) to the west.⁶³ The house also contains a private bathhouse. Many of the ceilings are decorated with wooden panels with geometric and plant designs.⁶⁴ At the beginning of the 20th-century the building was used as a German school, and later as an Armenian school.⁶⁵

Site Date: Beit Ashiqbash - 1757 CE
Beit Ghazaleh - 1691 CE

Incident Summary: The DGAM inspects recent damage to two historic buildings in Old Aleppo.

Incident Source and Description: On August 20, 2016 DGAM representatives conducted site assessment and published photographs of Beit Ashiqbash and Beit Ghazaleh.⁶⁶ ASOR CHI has previously reported on damage to these and nearby heritage sites in the Jdeideh neighborhood of Aleppo, but these are the first photographs of the damage to these particular buildings. The DGAM reported on May 10, 2015 that Beit Ashiqbash had been damaged as a result of a series of tunnel bombings in the area on April 26, 2015, but stated that only the southern facade of the building had suffered damage and that this was minor.⁶⁷ According to the DGAM, from 2011 to 2012 Beit Ashiqbash was extensively looted. Objects stolen included wooden doors and windows overlooking the courtyard, the courtyard fountain, and woodwork from the walls, including panels, ornamented cornices, and built-in cabinets. An extensive description of the stolen features can be found in the

⁶¹ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/damages/eplace.php?placeid=151#>

⁶² Burns 2009: 53

⁶³ Hadjar 52.

⁶⁴ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/damages/eplace.php?placeid=281#>

⁶⁵ Hadjar 52.

⁶⁶ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=2039>

⁶⁷ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1686>

DGAM 2015 State Party Report, alongside images of damage from previous mortar shells.⁶⁸ (ASOR CHI Incident Reports SHI 15-0073 in **Weekly Report 38** and SHI 15-0080 in **Weekly Report 40**; **Weekly Report 69–70** pg. 11ff.)

Based on the photographs provided by the DGAM and DigitalGlobe satellite imagery, Beit Ashiqbash suffered further damage after April 2015. There is a great deal of debris in both the courtyard and interior of the building where sections of the walls have collapsed. Most of the windows and glass object cases in the courtyard appear to have been blown out. Most notably, the large vault at the southern end of the courtyard that was reported damaged in May 2015 has almost completely collapsed.

Beit Ghazaleh has been damaged on multiple occasions. On February 18, 2013 the DGAM reported that an IED exploded near the eastern wall of the building, causing unspecified damage.⁶⁹ In March 2014 the DGAM visited the site and reported that it had been looted and vandalized, with its wooden wall decorations and decorative glass features stolen.⁷⁰ ASOR CHI assessed DigitalGlobe satellite imagery of the area from December 7, 2015 and January 5, 2016, and found that most of the damage to Beit Ghazaleh was concentrated in the interior courtyard and southern section of the building and appeared to be the result of an explosion (possibly the April 26, 2015 tunnel bombings). It is not possible to determine the extent of the damage to Beit Ghazaleh from the photographs provided by the DGAM.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor damage to Beit Ashiqbash and Beit Ghazaleh, as well as the condition of other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns and intense military activity.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

DGAM: August 20, 2016: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=2039>

May 10, 2015: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1686>

May 7, 2015: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1683>

February 18, 2013: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?p=259&id=777>

Undated site descriptions: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/damages/eplace.php?placeid=151#> ;
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/damages/eplace.php?placeid=281#>

Scholarly:

Burns, R. (2009) *Monuments of Syria*. London: I.B. Tauris. 53.

DGAM (Directorate-General of Antiquities and Monuments). 2015. *State Party Report: On the State of Conservation of The Syrian Cultural Heritage Sites*.

⁶⁸ DGAM (Directorate-General of Antiquities and Monuments). 2015. *State Party Report: On the State of Conservation of The Syrian Cultural Heritage Sites*. 22.

⁶⁹ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?p=259&id=777>

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 23.

Hadjar, A. (2003) *Historical Monuments of Aleppo*. trans. Khaled al-Jbaili. Aleppo: Automobile and Touring Club of Syria. pp. 52-3.



Jdeide Quarter prior to major damage due to tunnel bombs (DigitalGlobe; July 22, 2014)



Jdeide Quarter with damage to multiple buildings due to tunnel bombs (DigitalGlobe; August 18, 2015)



Jdeide Quarter with damage to multiple buildings due to tunnel bombs (DigitalGlobe; August 19, 2016)



Severe damage to interior courtyard of Beit Ashiqbash, looking southeast (DGAM; August 20, 2016)



Severe damage to interior courtyard of Beit Ashiqbash, looking south (DGAM; August 20, 2016)



Damage to eastern wall of Beit Ashiqbash courtyard (DGAM; August 20, 2016)



Damage in Beit Ashiqbash courtyard, looking northwest (DGAM; August 20, 2016)



Damage in Beit Ashiqbash courtyard, looking north (DGAM; August 20, 2016)



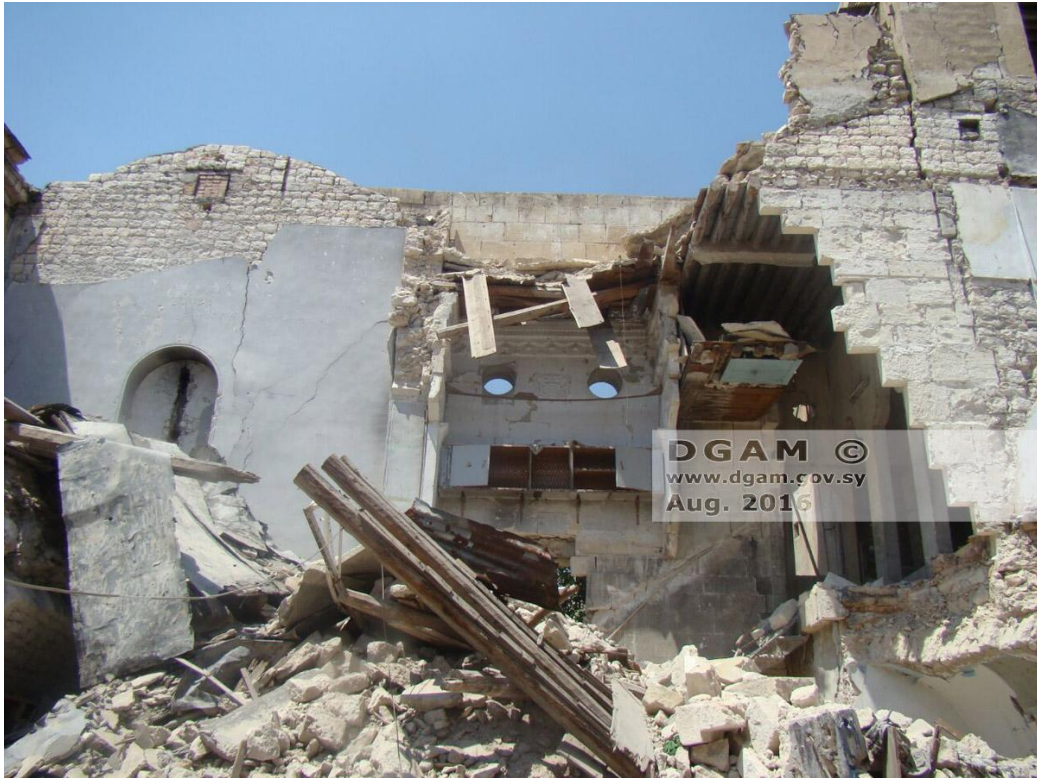
Undated, pre-damage photo of Beit Ashiqbash, looking north from inside vault (DGAM; May 7, 2015)



Severe damage to interior of Beit Ashiqbash (DGAM; August 20, 2016)



Severe damage to Beit Ghazaleh (DGAM; August 20, 2016)



Severe damage to Beit Ghazaleh (DGAM; August 20, 2016)



Severe damage to Beit Ghazaleh (DGAM; August 20, 2016)

SHI 16-0136

Report Date: August 24, 2016

Site Name: al-Sahaba Abu Bakr al-Sedeiq Mosque (جامع الصحابة ابو بكر الصديق)

Date of Incident: August 24, 2016

Location: Qaboun neighborhood, Damascus, Damascus Governorate

Site Description: Mosque

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Video footage shows damage to the dome of a mosque.

Incident Source and Description: On August 24, 2016 SMO Syria released a video of extensive damage to the Qaboun neighborhood, in the city of Damascus.⁷¹ Included in the video was footage of a damaged mosque dome, probably belonging to al-Sahaba Abu Bakr al-Sedeiq Mosque. The damage was reportedly caused by ongoing SARG military activity in the area. Also present in the video is footage of a severely damaged minaret. It is not clear if the minaret belongs to al-Sahaba Abu Bakr al-Sedeiq Mosque or another mosque in Qaboun neighborhood.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor damage to al-Sahaba Abu Bakr al-Sedeiq Mosque, as well as the condition of other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns and intense military activity.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

SMO Syria: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKnYD0SLt98>

⁷¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKnYD0SLt98>



Video still of severe damage to the dome of what is most likely al-Sahaba Abu Bakr al-Sedeiq Mosque (SMO Syria; August 24, 2016)



Video still of the damage to the minaret of an unidentified mosque (SMO Syria; August 24, 2016)

SHI 16-0137

Report Date: August 24, 2016

Site Name: al-Hassan Mosque (مسجد الحسن)

Date of Incident: Unknown

Location: Djerablus, Aleppo Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Mosque

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Vandalism of a mosque in Djerablus.

Incident Source and Description: On August 24, 2016 a Twitter user published a photograph of a mosque in southern Djerablus that they alleged had been retaken from ISIL militants by SFA forces. A low wall surrounding the mosque has been vandalized, likely by ISIL militants, who painted an ISIL flag on the wall.

Pattern: Vandalism.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor reports of damage to al-Hassan Mosque, as well as the condition of other heritage sites located in regions currently or previously occupied by ISIL militants.



Graffiti and an ISIL flag seen painted on a wall surrounding a mosque in Djerablus (August 24, 2016) (The red and yellow boxes are from the source and are not indicative of any damage)

Incident Reports: Iraq

IHI 16-0028

Report Date: August 31, 2016

Site Name: Syriac Catholic Church of King Jesus (كنيسة يسوع الملك)
Virgin Mary Syriac Orthodox Church (كنيسة مريم العذراء)
Mart Maryam Armenian Orthodox Church (Saint Mary; كنيسة مار مريم)

Date of Incident: Between August 2014 - November 2015

Location: Sinjar, Ninawa Governorate, Iraq

Site Description:

- Church of King Jesus King: Syriac Catholic Church
- Virgin Mary Church: Syriac Orthodox Church Built in 1915.⁷² Reported to be the largest and oldest church in the city.⁷³
- Mart Maryam Church: Armenian Orthodox Church

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: New evidence of ISIL destruction of churches in Sinjar.

Incident Source and Description: Recent video footage and eyewitness accounts have detailed damage to churches located in Sinjar. According to an article in *The New Yorker* published in January 2016, there were once three churches in Sinjar: a Syriac Catholic church, an Armenian Orthodox church, and a Syriac Orthodox church.⁷⁴ The article states that during ISIL's occupation of the town, the militants blew up all three churches. However, recent photographs and video footage show that at least one church, the Syriac Catholic Church of King Jesus, remains standing.⁷⁵

In February 2016 journalist Ross Kemp visited the Church of King Jesus. The church, most probably the last one to remain standing in the town, shows signs of intentional destruction including a badly damaged altar.⁷⁶ Graffiti on one of the walls, according to Kemp, claims to have been written in blood. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and booby-traps are also present in the church, where it appears they were either stored or disabled by the entering Kurdish forces who recaptured the town from ISIL in November 2015. According to Kemp, it appeared as though ISIL had damaged whatever they could not steal from the church. In addition, an eyewitness account from representatives of the Iraq-based Preemptive Love Coalition reported that ISIL militants had possibly also lived in the church.⁷⁷ Local Catholic sources in Sinjar reported that ISIL militants

⁷² <http://en.hayernaysor.am/հրսոթի-սիւնջար-քնակալայ ըոււմ-ալեքըվսն-եկ / ; http://www.coptstoday.com/Hot-Issues/Detail.php?Id=134470>

⁷³ <http://www.sotakhr.com/2006/index.php?id=19135 ; http://www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php?topic=144265.0>

⁷⁴ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/18/the-front-lines>

⁷⁵ <http://go.sky.com/catchup/series/content/series/ad2a4f1911fd5510VgnVCM1000000b43150a>

⁷⁶ <http://go.sky.com/catchup/series/content/series/ad2a4f1911fd5510VgnVCM1000000b43150a>

⁷⁷ ASOR CHI interview with Preemptive Love Coalition on August 17, 2016

removed the cross from the Church of King Jesus, burned religious books and parish registers, and converted the church into an office.⁷⁸ The church's use as an office or as lodging by ISIL may explain why ISIL did not destroy the church during their occupation of or retreat from Sinjar. Additional photographs published after the recapture of Sinjar show similar damage as Kemp's video, indicating that no further damage or repair work has been carried out on the church.

An article published in *The New Yorker* on January 18, 2016 reports that the Virgin Mary Syriac Orthodox Church, once reportedly the largest church in Sinjar, is now "a gaping cavity that sloped into a patch of mud."⁷⁹ A photograph taken after the recapture of Sinjar by Peshmerga and Yezidi forces, shows one fighter placing a cross in the place where the church once stood.

The Mart Maryam Armenian Orthodox Church was also completely destroyed by ISIL militants. Photographs shared online by various media sources since the recapturing of the area show extensive destruction of the church and surrounding area.⁸⁰ Human remains, believed to be of the local Yezidi population, were found near the church.⁸¹ A Yezidi fighter installed a cross on the site where the church once stood.

While the exact date of damage to these churches is unknown, on January 7, 2015 a local report stated that explosions had been heard in the morning near a church in Sinjar. From overheard walkie-talkie conversations it appeared that ISIL had blown up one church and had been ordered to blow up another.⁸² Photographic evidence suggests that the two churches that had been 'blown up' were the Virgin Mary Syriac Orthodox Church and the Mart Maryam Armenian Orthodox Church. The exact reason behind the destruction of these churches is unknown; however, ISIL militants have previously carried out similar actions against churches and other religious sites in areas under their control.

Pattern: Intentional destruction; Vandalism; Theft.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor reports of damage to churches in Sinjar, as well as the condition of other heritage sites located in regions currently or previously occupied by ISIL militants.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Ankawa:

November 21, 2007: <http://www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php?topic=144265.0>

November 25, 2011: <http://www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php?topic=797663.0>

⁷⁸ <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Sinjar-Islamic-State-militia-massacre-Yazidis-and-impose-tax-on-Christians--31813.html>

⁷⁹ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/18/the-front-lines>

⁸⁰ <https://er.anca.org/armenian-church-in-sinjar-iraq-completely-destroyed/>

⁸¹ <https://er.anca.org/armenian-church-in-sinjar-iraq-completely-destroyed/>; <http://www.armradio.am/en/2016/03/02/armenian-st-mary-church-in-sinjar-completely-destroyed-photos/>

⁸² <http://www.kurdishinfo.com/isis-destroying-churches-sinjar>

Armenian National Committee of America: <https://er.anca.org/armenian-church-in-sinjar-iraq-completely-destroyed/>

Asia News: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Sinjar,-Islamic-State-militia-massacre-Yazidis-and-impose-tax-on-Christians--31813.html>

Atlas News: <https://twitter.com/atlasnewsblog/status/496964742947561472>

Copts Today: <http://www.coptstoday.com/Hot-Issues/Detail.php?Id=134470>

Endowments of The Christian, Exidian, & Sabian Mandeian Religious Divan: <http://www.cese-iq.net/akhbar/CESE-arch-2014/akh-arch-148-16032014.htm>

Ishtar TV: <http://ishtartv.com/viewarticle,64896.html>

Kafa 24: <http://www.kafa24.net/arabic/?action=print&id=65285>

Kurdish Info/Firat News Agency: <http://www.kurdishinfo.com/isis-destroying-churches-sinjar>

The New Yorker: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/18/the-front-lines>

Panorama: <http://www.panorama.am/en/news/2016/03/02/Armenian-Church/1537821>

Periodical of the RA Ministry of Diaspora:
<http://en.hayernaysor.am/հրաքի-սինջար-բնակավայրում-վախճանված-էկ/>

Public Radio Armenia: <http://www.armradio.am/en/2016/03/02/armenian-st-mary-church-in-sinjar-completely-destroyed-photos/>

Sot al-Akher: <http://www.sotakhr.com/2006/index.php?id=19135>

Sky1:
<http://go.sky.com/catchup/series/content/series/ad2a4f1911fd5510VgnVCM1000000b43150a>

Syriac Catholic Church of King Jesus (كنيسة يسوع الملك)



The exterior of the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



Damage surrounding the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; February 25, 2016)



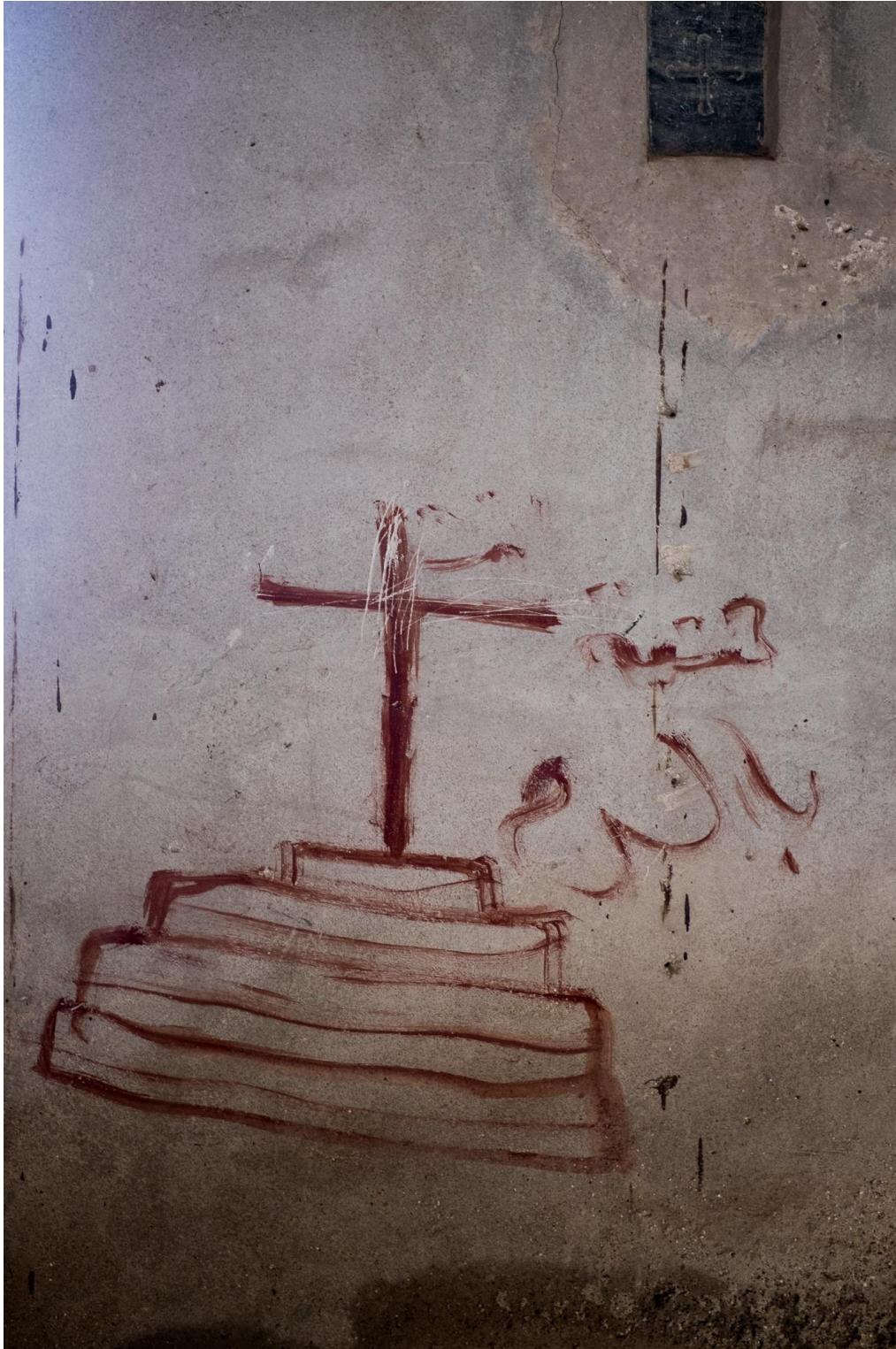
Video still of the bell at the Church of King Jesus (Sky 1; February 2016)



Video still of the entrance to the Church of King Jesus (Sky 1; February 2016)



Graffiti inside the Church of King Jesus Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



Detail of graffiti inside the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



The interior of the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



The CEO of the Preemptive Love Coalition observes the damage to the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



The CEO of the Preemptive Love Coalition observes the damage to the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



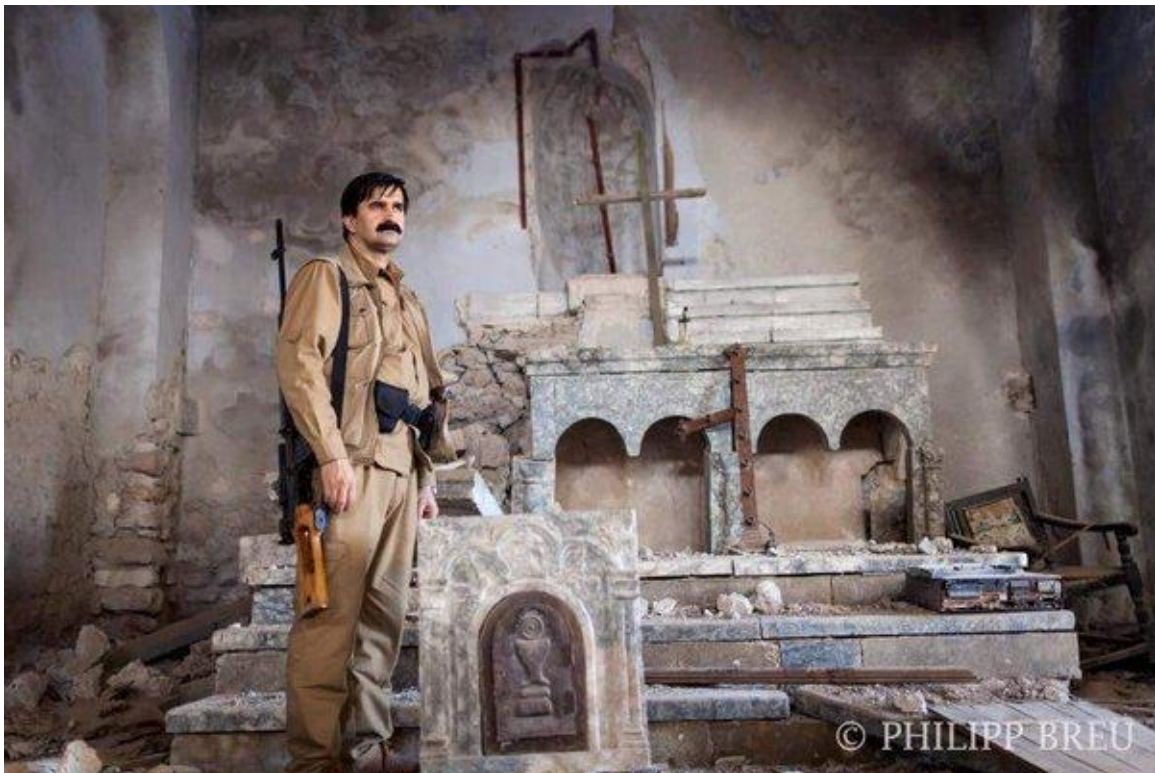
Video still of damage to the altar inside the Church of King Jesus (Sky 1; February 2016)



Video still of damage to the altar inside the Church of King Jesus (Sky 1; February 2016)



Video still of damage to the altar inside the Church of King Jesus (Sky1; February 2016)



A Kurdish fighter stands inside the Church of King Jesus after the recapture of the city from ISIL, the broken cross, detailed below, is visible on the altar (Twitter; May 10, 2016)



Detail of damage to a cross and religious materials inside the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



Detail of the damaged cross bearing the date 1941 (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



Detail of religious material and bullet casings inside the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



Damage to religious material inside the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



Detail of damaged religious material inside the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



Damage to religious material inside the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of Preemptive Love Coalition; March 30, 2016)



Video still of improvised explosives and booby traps left behind by ISIL inside the Church of King Jesus (Sky 1; February 2016)



Video still of improvised explosives and booby traps left behind by ISIL inside the Church of King Jesus (Sky 1; February 2016)



Video still of improvised explosives and booby traps left behind by ISIL in the Church of King Jesus (Sky 1; February 2016)



Bullet casings and fragments littering the floor inside the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of the Preemptive Love Coalition; February 25, 2016)



Damage to a wall in an adjoining chapel of the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of the Preemptive Love Coalition; February 25, 2016)



Damage to a wall in an adjoining chapel at the Church of King Jesus (Courtesy of the Preemptive Love Coalition; February 25, 2016)

Virgin Mary Syriac Orthodox Church (كنيسة مريم العذراء)



ISIL militants hang their flag over the Virgin Mary Syriac Orthodox Church (Atlas News; August 6, 2014)



A fighter replaces a cross on top of the Virgin Mary Syriac Orthodox Church following the recapture of the town from ISIL (Twitter; January 23, 2016)



The remains of the Virgin Mary Syriac Orthodox Church (Twitter; February 29, 2016)



The remains of the Virgin Mary Syriac Orthodox Church (Twitter; December 16, 2016)

Mart Maryam Armenian Orthodox Church (Saint Mary; كنيسة مار مريم)



The remains of Mart Maryam Church (Public Radio of Armenia; March 2, 2016)



The remains of Mart Maryam Church (Public Radio of Armenia; March 2, 2016)



Human remains, likely of Yazidi victims, located near Mart Maryam Church (Public Radio of Armenia; March 2, 2016)



Material remains of former residents near the Mart Maryam Church (Public Radio of Armenia; March 2, 2016)



Damage and debris in the area of the Mart Maryam Church (Panorama; March 2, 2016)



A Yezidi fighter replaces a cross on top of the Mart Maryam Church (Twitter; January 23, 2016)



A Yezidi fighter replaces a cross on top of Mart Maryam Church in Sinjar (Twitter; January 23, 2016)



A cross marks where the Mart Maryam Church once stood (Twitter; January 23, 2016)

IHI 16-0029

Report Date: August 26, 2016

Site Name: Abzakh Village Mosque

Date of Incident: Unknown

Location: Abzakh, Ninawa Governorate, Iraq

Site Description: Mosque

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Video footage shows a mosque previously occupied by ISIL.

Incident Source and Description: On August 21, 2016 Kurdistan 24 reported that after Peshmerga forces liberated the small village of Abzakh (southeast of Mosul) on August 14, 2016, they discovered that ISIL militants had installed showers and dug deep tunnels inside the village mosque.⁸³ Photographs and a video published by Kurdistan 24 show that militants set up a makeshift shower within the mosque. There is also a great deal of displaced dirt piled up inside the building from a large hole and tunnel militants dug.

Pattern: Military activity: occupation/militarization, tunneling; Vandalism.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor reports of damage to the mosque in Abzakh, as well as the condition of other heritage sites located in regions occupied by ISIL militants.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Kurdistan 24: <http://www.kurdistan24.net/ar/newsreader/718e1ebb-5c0a-426a-9734-4f06eb13f3dc/>

⁸³ <http://www.kurdistan24.net/ar/newsreader/718e1ebb-5c0a-426a-9734-4f06eb13f3dc/>



Pulley-system for dirt removal above large tunnel inside mosque (Kurdistan 24; August 21, 2016)



Large hole and tunnel inside mosque (Kurdistan 24; August 21, 2016)



Pile of dirt from tunnel dug inside mosque (Kurdistan 24; August 21, 2016)



Shower constructed by ISIL militants inside mosque (Kurdistan 24; August 21, 2016)



Shower constructed by ISIL militants inside mosque (Kurdistan 24; August 21, 2016)



Shower constructed by ISIL militants inside mosque (Kurdistan 24; August 21, 2016)