

ASOR Syrian Heritage Initiative (SHI): Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria¹

NEA-PSHSS-14-001

Weekly Report 5 — September 8, 2014

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Heritage Timeline

- September 6** APSA shared links to photos and video detailing damage to the **Haddadin Mosque** in the UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of Aleppo. The damage occurred prior to August 1, 2014. [SHI Incident Report SHI14-025](#)
- September 3** Publication of Andrew Curry “Archaeologists Train ‘Monuments Men’ to Save Syria’s Past,” *National Geographic News*.
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/09/140903-syria-antiquities-looting-culture-heritage-archaeology/>
- APSA publicized link to photos showing vandalism at **Tell Beydar**. [SHI Incident Report SHI14-026](#)
 - Journalist Shady Hulwe shared photos and video footage of the destruction caused by tunnel bombs and combat in the area of the **Serail** of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of **Aleppo**
<https://www.facebook.com/Shady.Hulwe.Reporter.page3>
- September 2** Unidentified forces detonated two **tunnel bombs** in the UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of **Aleppo** destroying the west wing of the **Serail** and causing damage to neighboring historic structures. [SHI Incident Report SHI14-024](#)
- Publication of Amr Al-Azm, Salam Al-Kuntar, and Brian I. Daniels “ISIS Antiquities Sideline,” *New York Times* op-ed article.
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/opinion/isis-antiquities-sideline.html?_r=0

¹ This report is based on research conducted by the “Syria Preservation Initiative: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria.” 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.

Military and Political Context

During the reporting period², the primary theaters of military engagement and insurgent activity in Syria were:

- 1) The Quneitra area where cross border clashes occurred between SARG and Israeli Defense Forces; a coalition of forces opposed to SARG seized additional territory;
- 2) The Hama area where Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) continued to make territorial gains by seizing checkpoints northwest of the city while Islamic Front (IF) continued its attacks on the Hama Military Airport;
- 3) The Old City of Aleppo, where unidentified forces detonated two tunnel bombs;
- 4) The northern countryside of Aleppo Governate where there were clashes between JN, IF, Kurdish Front, and other groups are fighting Islamic State (IS) forces;
- 5) Deir ez-Zor where SARG allegedly evacuated large numbers of troops and IS forces stepped up shelling on the Deir ez-Zor Military Airport;
- 6) Raqqa, where SARG conducted air raids on several government buildings used by IS, a highway checkpoint, and an IS training camp;
- 7) SARG continued air raids, shelling, and ground assaults on the Jobar section of Damascus after Jaysh al-Islam detonated a tunnel bomb there.

The Quneitra area witnessed the most military activity, whereas other theaters of operation experienced tactical lulls relative to recent weeks, especially the Aleppo area. SARG continues to utilize airpower to strike at IS control-and-command infrastructure, logistical support, and security in Raqqa and areas surrounding the city. Conflicting information obscures the current situation at the Deir ez-Zor Military Airport. Opposition sources claimed the regime evacuated 400 officers of the 104th Division of the Republican Guard along with Brigadier General Issam Zahreddine — if true this appears indicative of a highly negative situational assessment by SARG. On September 5, SARG-aligned media countered with an English news story that the general had left the base to attend a funeral in Sweida Governate but had returned to Deir ez-Zor with substantial reinforcements. Regardless of the rumors of evacuations or reinforcements, most media sources agree that IS seems to be preparing for a major assault on the base.

Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions

1) Militant groups continue to use highly destructive tunnel bombs in urban environments. This practice is spreading.

*SHI is producing a Special Report on the use of tunnel bombs and their effects on cultural heritage.

2) Islamic State forces engage in intentional destructions of cultural heritage in northern Iraq and publicize these atrocities through social media and in printed media. A practice of producing falsified reports claiming IS destruction of cultural heritage has also emerged. Recent events suggest a similar pattern will obtain in Syria with IS territorial gains (see SHI *Weekly Report 4*).

² For detailed coverage of weekly events see Institute for the Study of War *Syria Update August 30–September 4, 2014*.

- **Extreme caution** must be used when consulting online reporting concerning Islamic State (IS) intentional destructions of heritage (as discerned from intentional and collateral combat damage and looting) — **even mainstream, assiduous media outlets regularly fall victim to deliberately falsified reports. Patterns are emerging** in the timing, origins, evolution, and methods underlying deliberately falsified reports.
- **IS generally claims responsibility soon after** its intentional cultural heritage crimes and actively promotes them on YouTube, Twitter, and other social media sites as well as in its publication *Dabiq*.
- **More troubling are deliberately falsified reports followed by IS intentional destructions.** The main example is the Nebi Yunus Mosque/Tomb complex in Mosul. Other examples remain unverified, but the pattern is evocative of the Taliban destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas.
- By far, **the most falsified group of online reporting** concerning IS intentional destructions of heritage pertains to **Christian** heritage³. Any quantification of this number would be overkill, and I have only focused on major stories with demonstrable impact in social media.
- **IS systematically targets Shia cultural heritage for intentional destruction (currently 46% of verified incidents).**

Preliminary Descriptive Statistics

Total No. of alleged IS Intentional Destructions of Cultural Heritage in Iraq and Syria: **41** (Nebi Yunus counted twice) — actual number is definitely higher.

Verified Reports: 85% (n=35)

[Incidents Claimed/Promoted by Islamic State: **41%** (n=17 including Nebi Yunus)]

- Against Shia Heritage: **46%** (n=19 number certainly higher)
- Against Sufi Heritage: **10%** (n=4, number certainly higher)
- Against Yezidi Heritage: **10%** (n=4, number certainly higher)
- Against Muslim/Christian Heritage: **7.5%** (n=3)
- Against Sunni Heritage: **5%** (n=2)
- Against Ancient Heritage: **5%** (n=2, sometimes replicas!)
- Against Christian/Muslim/Yezidi: **2.5%** (n=1)
- Against (Solely) Christian Heritage: **0%**

Deliberately Falsified Reports: 15% (n=6)

- Deliberately Falsified, Debunked: **10%** (n=4)
- Deliberately Falsified, Debunked, Subsequently IS Destroyed: **2.5%** (n=1)
- Deliberately Falsified, Debunked, Prob. Subsequently IS Destroyed: **2.5%** (n=1)

Falsified Against Christian Heritage: **5%** (n=2, in fact far more in blanket statements online)

Falsified Against Ancient Heritage: **2.5%** (n=1, Mosul Museum)

Deliberate Destruction Speciously Attributed to IS: **5%** (n=2, all in Syria)

Incident Reports

SHI 14-024

Report Date: September 7, 2014

Site Name: Serail, Hammam Yalbougha, and Madrasa Sultaniyeh — UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of Aleppo

Date of Incident: September 2, 2014

Location: Aleppo Governate

Coordinates: Serail (Lat: 36.1974, Lon: 37.16255), Hammam Yalbougha (Lat: 36.19767, Lon: 37.16396), Madrasa Sultaniyeh (Lat: 36.19713, Lon: 37.16183)

Site Description: See SHI14-004

Site Date: Various

Source of Destruction: Allegedly two tunnel bombs were detonated on September 2, 2014 — the blast(s) destroyed the west wing of the Serail (see Map 1). Sources vary on the perpetrators, although previous tunnel bombings in this same theater of operations and against this same target (Serail) were claimed by the Islamic Front, as reported in SHI14-004. SARG forces were allegedly using the building at the time of (or just prior to) the bombing and in the months leading up to it. The neighboring Hammam Yalbougha was also damaged. This historic bathhouse was not the intended target, but as in the case of the July 27, 2014 tunnel bombing suffered extensive collateral damage due to its proximity. The blast(s) must surely have also caused collateral damage to the neighboring Madrasa Sultaniye — it too was previously damaged in the July 27 tunnel bombing.

Pattern: Use of tunnel bombs by Islamic Front in the Ancient City of Aleppo. As noted in SHI14-004, sources indicate Islamic Front has prepared several tunnels in this area to dislodge SARG forces, and IF and other groups have used tunnel bombs in other theaters in Syria. Damage to the Serail has been extensively covered in online reporting. The intentional bombing of the Madrasa Khusruwiyeh on July 27, 2014 has received little reporting relative to its historical and cultural significance.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: SHI is currently producing a special report on the use of tunnel bombs in the conflict and the implications of this tactic for cultural heritage.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Aleppo Archaeology — September 3, 2014 Facebook post with two photos of damage from Shady Hulwe.

“Shady Hulwe Reporter page3” Facebook site (the professional site of Reporter Shady Hulwe) posted numerous photos and video footage from a September 3, 2014 press visit to the Aleppo Citadel area. Syrian state television ran the story.

<https://www.facebook.com/Shady.Hulwe.Reporter.page3>

DGAM Website — short online report entitled “Two Large Explosions at Aleppo old city.” with one photo posted September 4, 2014.

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1405>



The remains of the Serail in the UNESCO World Heritage Site Old City of Aleppo following the two tunnel bombing of July 29 and two tunnel bombings on September 2, 2014. The neighboring Hammam Yalbougha was also reportedly damaged in the blasts (Shady Hulwe).



The remains of the Serail in Aleppo on September 3, 2014 (Shady Hulwe).



The remains of the Serail in Aleppo on September 3, 2014 (Shady Hulwe).



The remains of the Serail in Aleppo on September 3, 2014 (Shady Hulwe).



The entrance to the Aleppo Citadel on September 3, 2014 (Shady Hulwe).



The entrance to the Aleppo Citadel on September 3, 2014 (Shady Hulwe).

SHI 14-025

Report Date: September 7, 2014

Site Name: Haddadin Mosque, UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of Aleppo

Date of Incident: Unspecified

Location: Aleppo Governate

Coordinates: Lat: 36.20423, Lon: 37.16766

Site Description: See *SHI Weekly Report 1* and Incident Report SHI14-004

Site Date: Mid-14th Century AD, extensive 19th century renovations

Source of Destruction: Presumably combat damage. The building has been extensively damaged and its main dome has collapsed.

Pattern: Destruction of historic architecture in Old Aleppo through direct/intentional and collateral combat damage.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: The oncoming inclement weather of the cold/rainy season in Syria will cause additional damage to buildings with damaged roofs or those otherwise open to the elements through water intrusion and marked diurnal temperature variations. Efforts should be made to seal these buildings with tarps and plastic sheeting to divert rainwater from interiors.

Sources:

Scholarly Sources:

Gaube, Heinz and Eugen Wirth. 1984. *Aleppo: historische und geographische Beiträge zur baulichen Gestaltung, zur sozialen Organisation und zur wirtschaftlichen Dynamik einer vorderasiatischen Fernhandelsmetropole*. (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert), no, 526, p. 400.

Online Reporting:

On September 6, APSA shared links to 22 photos and a video detailing damage to the Haddadin Mosque accompanied by a short description of the site in Arabic. Although the information is not new, this represents the most comprehensive coverage available.
<http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/aleppo/monuments/901-aleppo-state-of-the-al-hadadin-mosque-14th-century.html>



Damage to the Haddadin Mosque in the UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of Aleppo (APSA).

SHI 14-026

Report Date: September 7, 2014

Site Name: Tell Beydar (ancient *Nabada*), Al-Hasakah Governate

Date of Incident: Unspecified

Location: Al-Hasakah Governate

Coordinates: Lat: 36.7379, Lon: 40.5868

Site Description: Tell Beydar is a multi-period archaeological mound divisible into a high mound (25 HA) and low mound (50 HA). The low mounded area dates to the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age. The European Centre for Upper Mesopotamian Studies and the DGAM started work in 1992, and to date 16 seasons have been completed. The site is best known for its Early Bronze Age architectural complex in the area of the high mound and an archive of pre-Sargonic cuneiform tablets.

Site Date: Early Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, early Iron Age, Hellenistic

Source of Destruction: Vandals have removed brick paving and have destroyed signage.

Pattern: Vandalism of archaeological sites during the conflict.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: I note that there is currently no recent satellite imagery available for Tell Beydar — we will be requesting new images. I suspect the vandalism documented at Tell Beydar is typical of most archaeological sites with open excavation areas.

Sources:

Scholarly Reporting:

See reports by Marc Lebeau and Antoine Suleiman and bibliography therein.

Online Reporting:

APSA Website — links to two photos were shared on September 3, 2014.

<http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/al-hasakah/sites.html>



Vandalism at Tell Beydar.