

# ASOR Syrian Heritage Initiative (SHI): Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria<sup>1</sup>

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Weekly Report 6 – September 15, 2014

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## Heritage Timeline

- September 14, 2014**      **APSA** posted photos showing the destruction of a Sufi Maqam and tombs in Abu Qalqal by Islamic State. SHI Incident Report 14-030  
<http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/aleppo/monuments.html>
- Heritage for Peace posted its newsletter *Damage to Syria's Heritage 14 September 2014*.
- September 11, 2014**      **DGAM** posted a second overview of vandalism at St. Simeon (Samaan Jabal) in the Aleppo countryside, focusing on **Zarzarita, Fadra, Sett Rum, Rafadeh, Taqla, Kafr, Bazid, and Batota** (16 photographs). SHI Incident Report 14-029  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1413>
- September 10, 2014**      **DGAM** posted an overview of damages at St. Simeon (Samaan Jabal) in the Aleppo countryside, detailing destruction at **St. Samaan Castle, St. Simeon Monastery, The Triumphal Arch, and the Public Baths**.  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1411>
- **APSA** posted a video showing excavations via bulldozer at the UNESCO World Heritage Site **Palmyra**. SHI Incident Report SHI14-027  
<http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/homs/palmyra/956-palmyra-excavations-by-bulldozer-in-the-archaeological-area-10-09-2014.html>

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<sup>1</sup> 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 period<sup>2</sup>, the primary theaters of military engagement and insurgent activity in Syria were:

- 1) Northern Aleppo Province, where IS offensives were directed and seizing the strategic town of Azzaz. IS also is reportedly preparing for prolonged attacks on the Kuweiris Airbase near Aleppo and the Deir ez-Zor Military Airport;
- 2) SARG sustained airstrikes against IS targets in the areas of Aleppo, Al-Bab, Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zor inflicting heavy civilian casualties. A successful regime counteroffensive northwest of Hama against Jabhat al-Nusra and other forces reopened a vital supply line and provided relief to the besieged Hama Military Airport;
- 3) Quneitra, where Opposition and JN fighters continued to make territorial gains.
- 4) Clashes in and around Damascus.

The major theater of operation continues to be the Aleppo region, which for the last two months has been divided into three fronts — SARG, Opposition, and IS. The assassination of Hassan Aboud, the leader of the Salafist group Ahrar al-Sham by unknown forces along with other senior AS (HASI) leadership will have consequences for logistical and strategic coordination for rebel forces throughout Syria in coming months. The greatest threats to heritage remain IS territorial gains given the organization's pattern of intentional destructions of cultural heritage and putative engagement in large-scale, systematic looting of archaeological sites and cultural property.

## **Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions**

Islamic State continued its policy of destroying monuments deemed polytheistic as evidenced by the IS-promoted destruction of a Sufi shrine and tombs near Membij in Abu Qalqal/Abu Abrus (see SHI Incident Report SHI14-030).

\*SHI continues to gather and analyze data on intentional IS destructions of cultural heritage in Syria and northern Iraq as well as monitor areas newly captured by IS where risk of such destructions is elevated.

The UNESCO WHS Site of Palmyra in Homs Governate and areas of the UNESCO WHS Ancient Villages of Northern Syria were again subjected to destruction (see SHI Incident Reports SHI14-027-029).

\*SHI has already chosen both regions for intensified monitoring and will investigate the feasibility of conducting mitigation projects in these areas.

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<sup>2</sup> For detailed coverage of weekly events see Institute for the Study of War *Syria Update September 4-12, 2014*.

## Incident Reports

SHI14-027

**Report Date:** September 15, 2014

**Site Name:** UNESCO World Heritage Site, Site of Palmyra

**Date of Incident:** APSA posted a video on September 10, 2014

**Location:** Palmyra

**Coordinates:** N34° 33' 15.012", E38° 16' 0.012"

**Site Description:** From the UNESCO website,

An oasis in the Syrian desert, north-east of Damascus, Palmyra contains the monumental ruins of a great city that was one of the most important cultural centres of the ancient world. From the 1st to the 2nd century, the art and architecture of Palmyra, standing at the crossroads of several civilizations, married Graeco-Roman techniques with local traditions and Persian influences.  
<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/23>

**Site Date:** Primarily Hellenistic (Palmyrene), Roman, and Islamic

**Source of Destruction:** A video posted by APSA shows a bulldozer and numerous trucks in the archaeological area surrounding the Palmyra citadel.

**Pattern:** Palmyra continues to be looted/damaged. The frequency and scale of destruction is linked to the area's strategic importance and the positioning of SARG forces on the archaeological site.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** Palmyra continues to be one of SHI's key foci for monitoring, mitigation, and preservation projects.

**Sources:**

Online Reporting:

- APSA Website
  - <http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/homs/palmyra/956-palmyra-excavations-by-bulldozer-in-the-archaeological-area-10-09-2014.html>

Scholarly: Various



Screenshot of the ASPA video showing a bulldozer in the archaeological section of Palmyra (APSA).

## SHI14-028

**Report Date:** September 15, 2014

**Site Name:** Monastery of St. Simeon (Samaan Jabal, Qalaat Semaan)

**Date of Incident:** June to September 2014

**Location:** Aleppo countryside

**Coordinates:** Lat. 36.33325, Lon. 36.84464

**Site Description:** The church of St. Simeon is a complex of four separate basilicas clustered around a central courtyard.<sup>3</sup> Numerous photos of the site pre-conflict can be found on Ross Burn's website.<sup>4</sup>

**Site Date:** Byzantine

**Source of Destruction:** The DGAM released two summaries regarding digging and illegal building at the Monastery of St. Simeon, where a bulldozer appears to have been involved:

- **St. Simeon Castle** – Clashes caused minor damage to the northern façade.
- **St. Simeon Monastery** – Digging and illegal building are evident at the northern part of the monastery, while illegal construction is also present on the northern wall of the western monastery. Further illegal building is present in the southern shrine of the northeastern part of the monastery, where ancient stones have been mined for building material.
- **The Triumphal Arch** – Evidence of digging and illegal building are also present at the old entrance to the church, which connects the castle with the monastery. Vandals have mined ancient stones for building material, inflicting additional damage on the walls with a bulldozer and drilling, which was used to make space for the illegal shops.
- **The Public Baths** – Located on the western slope outside the castle, the mosaic floor of the public baths has been damaged, while large ancient stones of the bathhouse have been broken.

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<sup>3</sup> See Burns, 272-275.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://monumentsofsyria.com/places/st-simeons-church-ان-س-م-ع-ان/>

**Pattern:** Archaeological sites throughout the area west of Idlib and Aleppo continue to be subjected to damage from looters and the use of sites as shelters or as building material by IDPs.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** SHI has already prioritized St. Simeon and this region for monitoring and evaluation.

**Sources:**

Online Reporting:

- DGAM Website
  - “Damages at Samaan Jabal in Aleppo Countryside – First Overview”
    - <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1413>
  - “Damages at Samaan Jabal in Aleppo Countryside – Second Overview”
    - <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1411>

Scholarly:

Burns, Ross. *Monuments of Syria*. London: Tauris, 2009.

Hajjār, Abd. *The Church of St. Simeon and the Stylite and other archaeological sites in the mountains of Simeon and Halaqa*. Damascus: Sidawi Printing House, 1991.

Ḥajjar, Abd Allah and Ibrahim, Yuḥanna. *Kanīsat al-Qiddīs Sam‘ān al-‘Amūdī wa-āthār jabalī Sam‘ān wa-Ḥalaqah [The Church of Saint Simeon Stylites and the antiquities of Mounts Simon and Halaqah]*. Aleppo: Dār Mārdīn, 1995.

Kurdy, M., Jean-Luc Biscop, L. de Luca, and M. Florenzano, “3D Virtual Anastylis and the Reconstruction of Several Buildings in the Site of Saint-Simeon, Syria.” *International Archives of Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing* 38.5: 2-4.

Saouaf, Soubhi. *Qal'at Sem'an: St. Simeon's Monastery and its Environments*. Aleppo: École Georges Salem, 1956.



Photograph of the St. Samaan Monastery showing ancient stones broken by bulldozer (DGAM).



Photograph showing large ancient stones at St. Simeon Castle that have been broken for building material (DGAM).



Photograph showing large ancient stones at St. Simeon Castle that have been broken for building material (DGAM).



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Photograph showing large ancient stones at St. Simeon Castle that have been broken for building material (DGAM).

## SHI14-029

**Report Date:** September 15, 2014

**Site Name:** Structures in the area surrounding the Monastery of St. Simeon

**Date of Incident:** June to September 2014

**Location:** Aleppo countryside

**Coordinates:** Lat. 36.33325, Lon. 36.84464

**Site Description:** The church of St. Simeon is a complex of four separate basilicas clustered around a central courtyard.<sup>5</sup> Numerous photos of the site pre-conflict can be found on Ross Burn's website.<sup>6</sup>

**Site Date:** Byzantine

**Source of Destruction:** The DGAM a summary regarding vandalism to the structures in the area surrounding the Monastery of St. Simeon:

- **Zarzarita** – Stones from the western wall have been mined for building material.
- **Fadra** – The western wall has been destroyed and the stones have been mined for building material.
- **Sett Rum** – Illegal building is present in the western area, while some of the church stones have been destroyed.
- **Rafadeh** – Ten residential constructions have been built on the south side of the protected area. Quarrying was established in the eastern area (currently out of work), while illegal excavations are also present.
- **Taqla** – Large ancient stones have been broken for building material. Illegal excavations are also present, as is quarrying on the eastern area of the site (currently out of work).
- **Kafr** – Large ancient stones have been broken for building material, while construction roads have been built on the site to facilitate the transportation of stones for sale.
- **Bazid** – Ancient building measures have been destroyed to use the resulting stones for building material.

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<sup>5</sup> See Burns, 272-275.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://monumentsofsyria.com/places/st-simeons-church-ان-س-م-ع-ان-ق-ل-ع-ة>

- **Batota** –Large ancient stones have been broken for building material inside and around the church in the western part of the site.

**Pattern:** Archaeological sites throughout the area west of Idlib and Aleppo continue to be subjected to damage from looters and the use of sites as shelters or as building material by IDPs.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** SHI has already prioritized St. Simeon and this region for monitoring and evaluation.

### Sources:

#### Online Reporting:

- DGAM Website
  - “Damages at Samaan Jabal in Aleppo Countryside – Second Overview”
    - <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1411>

#### Scholarly:

Burns, Ross. *Monuments of Syria*. London: Tauris, 2009.

Hajjār, Abd. *The Church of St. Simeon and the Stylite and other archaeological sites in the mountains of Simeon and Halaqa*. Damascus: Sidawi Printing House, 1991.

Ḥajjar, Abd Allah and Ibrahim, Yuḥanna. *Kanīsat al-Qiddīs Sam ‘ān al- ‘Amūdī wa-āthār jabalī Sam ‘ān wa-Ḥalaqah [The Church of Saint Simeon Stylites and the antiquities of Mounts Simon and Halaqah]*. Aleppo: Dār Mārdīn, 1995.

Kurdy, M., Jean-Luc Biscop, L. de Luca, and M. Florenzano, “3D Virtual Anastylis and the Reconstruction of Several Buildings in the Site of Saint-Simeon, Syria.” *International Archives of Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing* 38.5: 2-4.

Saouaf, Soubhi. *Qal'at Sem'an: St. Simeon's Monastery and its Environments*. Aleppo: École Georges Salem, 1956.



Stones at Batota that have been broken for building material (DGAM).





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Stones at Batota that have been broken for building material (DGAM).

## SHI14-030

**Report Date:** September 15, 2014

**Site Name:** Abu Qalqal [Abu Abrus], Aleppo Governate

**Date of Incident:** Unknown

**Location:** Abu Qalqal near Membij

**Coordinates:** —

**Site Description:** As yet undetermined.

**Site Date:** Islamic

**Source of Destruction:** IS intentionally destroyed a Sufi Meqam and tombs. A photo posted by APSA shows the use of an axe. The original source appears to be an IS-linked site promoting this as an intentional destruction —

<http://www.hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=382535> — the “removal of manifestations of polytheism from the area of Abu Abrus near the city of Manbej.”

**Pattern:** This is a well documented pattern of IS destructions of Sufi shrines.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** SHI is compiling lists of IS intentional destructions of cultural heritage carried out and promoted by IS.

### Sources:

#### Online Reporting:

- APSA Website
  - “Alep-Manbij, Abou Qalqal: Destruction d’un Mausolée soufi et des dombes par EIIL”
    - <http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/fr/provinces/alep/monuments/960-aleppo-manbij-2.html>
- Islamic State linked site <http://www.hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=382535>
- Post on Aleppo Archaeology Facebook page (Arabic)
  - <http://www.3ayn-almadina.com/عن-الباحثين-أنواع-كل-مهبّ-في-منبج-أثار/>

#### Scholarly:





The Sufi Maqam in Abu Qalqal/Abu Abrus (APSA)



The alleged destruction of the tombs in Abu Qalqal/Abu Abrus (APSA)