

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

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Weekly Report 8 – September 29, 2014

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Heritage Timeline

- September 28, 2014** Heritage for Peace posted *Damage to Syria's Heritage 28 September 2014*.
- September 24, 2014** Vice News released thirteen-minute video entitled, "Ghosts of Aleppo (Part 2)."
- The DGAM posted an initial damage assessment of the ancient city of **Bosra** and in nearby towns on their website (including 12 photos), highlighting damage to the **Kalybe**, "**Cradle of the King's Daughter**," the **Monastery of Monk Bahira**, the **Bosra Castle**, the **Mabrak Mosque**, the **Shmis Monastery**, the **Abou al Feda Mosque**, the wall of the ancient city, the **al-Omri Mosque**, the **Fatima Mosque**, **Manjak Hamam**, **Tell Sheikh Hussein**, and the **al-Hajar Mosque**.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1427>
 - Various reports indicate that ISIL destroyed the **Armenian Genocide Church** in **Der Zor**.
 - PBS Newshour aired *Protecting Ancient Treasures from Becoming casualties in Iraq and Syria*.
<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/ancient-treasures-casualties-in-iraq-and-syria/>
- September 22, 2014** US Department of State event *Heritage in Peril* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York
<http://translations.state.gov/st/english/texttrans/2014/09/20140923308758.html#axzz3EetYSIns>
<http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/09/231992.htm>

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.

Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions

1) The UNESCO WHS Ancient City of Bosra shows evidence for extensive damage due to urban combat, vandalism, looting, and neglect.

*SHI has already designated Bosra as a high priority site for monitoring and assessment. New satellite imagery is needed for much of the site. In the most recent image, dated August 4, 2014, much of the site is obscured by cloud cover.

2) Islamic State intentional destructions of historic buildings and modern places of worship continue in Syria and northern Iraq.

* AS mentioned in previous Weekly Reports, SHI will continue to monitor and assess intentional destructions by Islamic State and all other combatants in Syria and Iraq.

Incident Reports

SHI14-036

Report Date: September 25, 2014

Site Name: Sheikh Ibrahim Mosque, Aleppo

Date of Incident: Unspecified

Location: Aleppo

Coordinates: —

Site Description: —

Site Date: —

Source of Destruction: Photo shows damage to the outer walls of the Sheikh Ibrahim Mosque, where large stones have spilled out into the street.

Pattern: Urban warfare.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: Aleppo is already a high priority for SHI for monitoring and assessment. This mosque has yet to be located.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

- Vice News Website
 - <https://news.vice.com/video/ghosts-of-aleppo-part-2>

Scholarly:

SHI14-037

Report Date: September 25, 2014

Site Name: Bosra, Daraa Governate

Date of Incidents: Unspecified

Location: UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Bosra as well as other locations including the town of Ma'arbeh

Coordinates: Lat. 32.518406°, Lon. 36.482017°

Site Description: See individual entries. For a general introduction consult the UNESCO WHS website <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/22>.

- **The so-called Kalybe “Cradle of the King’s Daughter” or Nymphaeum, Bosra** (Lat. 32.51966, Lon. 36.48301)

According to Ross Burns²,

On the opposite (right) side of the north-south *cardo* stood a structure once identified as a *kalybe* but which appears to have been a *nymphaeum*, probably dating from the late second century. Two tall handsome columns towering 14 m above the street level and a piece of the magnificent entablature connecting the southern column with its *anta* survive.

The DGAM reports that most of the architectural elements and the carved friezes have collapsed.

- **Monastery of Monk Bahira/ The Basilica, Bosra** (Lat. 32.52123, Lon. 36.48484)
Ross Burns writes³,

... originally an administrative building probably constructed in the third century AD, later converted to serve as a Christian church. It is a large rectangular building with a semi-circular apse on the eastern end. The church came to be associated with the monk Bahira, the Nestorian holy man who, according to tradition, was consulted by the Prophet Mohammad during his visit to Bosra.

The upper parts of the building have been damaged.

- **Bosra Castle/The Ayyubid Citadel** (Lat. 32.51815, Lon. 36.48175)
Ross Burns provides the following description⁴,

In plan, the Ayyubid fortifications fit like a jacket around the half-circle of the Roman building [theatre], with major towers at the northeast and northwest corners, a central bastion along the diameter (north) and five subsidiary towers around the arc of the semi-circle. The first use of the theatre as a fortification dates back to the Umayyad and Fatimid eras and the first three towers (east and west of

² Burns 2010: 83.

³ Burns 2010: 85.

⁴ Burns 2010: 82.

the stage and on the southeast rim of the theatre) were constructed under the Seljuk governors, Gumushtakin (1089) and Altuntash (mid 12th century). However, the major work, including the encircling ditch, dates from the Ayyubid response to the Crusader threat after 1200, particularly under al-Adil (sultan in Damascus 1196–1218) and his son, al-Salih Imad al-Din, who alternated as governor of Bosra and sultan of Damascus between 1218 and 1238.

The DGAM reports that artillery hit the castle and caused minor damage to the trench.

- **Mabrak Mosque, Bosra** (Lat. 32.52285, Lon. 36.48697)
According to Ross Burns⁵,
...another important early mosque... restored by the Syrian Antiquities Department and the German Archaeological Institute between 1986 and 1989. According to legend, the first copy of the Koran brought to Syria rested here, carried on a camel. An important centre of learning grew on this spot... The building falls into three segments. The earliest is to the west and used the Roman city wall as its western limit... The northern and central courtyards were added a little later. The larger eastern part of the building was constructed on a more monumental scale, dated by inscription to 1136...The minaret was probably added around 1221.

The DGAM reports that stones have collapsed on the eastern side of the mosque.

- **Shmis Monastery (Probably Kafr Shams Monastery?), Kafr Shams**
The DGAM is presumably referring to the Kafr Shams Monastery in the town of the same name in Daraa Governate. The town contains a monophysite monastery of the Ghassanid Dynasty (Byzantine period) and dating to ca. 570 AD. Some parts of the monastery were bulldozed, which caused damage to the southern wall of the Archbishop Palace and the Nabatieh pool.
- **Abou al Feda Mosque, Bosra** (Lat. 32.51772, Lon. 36.4829)
The DGAM reports damage to the mosque's interior walls and ceiling, including several collapsed masonry courses in the upper walls south of the minaret.
- **Ancient City Wall of Bosra**
According to the DGAM, the southern part of the wall was bulldozed, whereupon locals built houses on the site.
- **Al-Omari Mosque, Bosra** (Lat. 32.52156, Lon. 36.4829)
According to Ross Burns⁶,
...once considered to be one of the oldest surviving mosques. Though attributed to the great Caliph Umar (caliph 634–44), responsible for the conquest of Syria in 636, the first mosque on this spot was the work of a later caliph, Yazid II (r 720–4) according to a foundation stone later re-used in the north wall. The first mosque was rebuilt or heavily reconstructed by the Seljuk ruler of Damascus, , Abu Mansar Gumushtakin, in 1112–3. In 1221–2 under the Ayyubid al-Salih Ismael the courtyard was enlarged to the north and a new northern *riwaq* added. Carefully restored between

⁵ Burns 2010: 85.

⁶ Burns 2010: 84.

1938 and 1965, it [is] one of the few surviving mosques from the earliest days of Islam which may to some extent preserve its original plan.

The mosque's minarets were damaged, while minor damage also appeared in the artificial zinc roof, walls, and floors. Several stones in the arch of the eastern area were also destroyed.

- **Fatima Mosque, Bosra** (position difficult to establish)

According to Ross Burns⁷,

...a reference to the daughter of the Prophet. The northern half of the prayer hall was constructed in the Ayyubid period. The three southern arches are 19th century while the 19 m minaret dates from 1306, again following the mosque of Umar.

The DGAM reports that the southwestern ceiling and the small columns that decorated the minarets were damaged. Several stones over the north arches have collapsed.

- **Hammam Manjak, Bosra** (Lat. 32.52178, Lon. 36.48327)

According to Ross Burns⁸,

...a Mamluk baths complex in Damascene style built in 1372 by the governor of Damascus, Manjak al-Yusufi, and the last major Islamic addition to the city before its steady decline set in. Described in a recent survey as 'a masterpiece of medieval architectural engineering' (Meinecke) it dates from the heyday of the city's role in servicing the Hajj traffic to Mecca.

The brick that previously covered the water fountain in the reception room has been removed.

- **Tell Sheikh Hussein (Khalif Hills)**

The DGAM vaguely reports that, "the pumice stone has been removed from the site." SHI has yet to locate this tell.

- **Al-Hajar Mosque, Ma'arbeh** (prob. Lat. 32.54714, Lon. 36.42521)

The DGAM reports that, "the ceiling of the mosque, which is located in Maraba, was completely destroyed." Maraba or Ma'arbeh is situated northwest of Bosra on highway 109. I believe the mosque to which this reports refers is located at Lat. 32.54714, Lon. 36.42521.

Site Date: Bosra dates to primarily to the Nabataean, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic Periods

Source of Destruction: According to the DGAM, illegal excavations are present in certain parts of the old city of Bosra, while other areas have been burned or destroyed. There has been intense combat in the region for over two years. The DGAM's initial damage assessment also highlighted numerous other sites in the ancient city.

Pattern: Urban warfare.

⁷ Burns 2010: 85.

⁸ Burns 2010: 84–85.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: Fighting in the south of Syria has been particularly heavy and well documented in international media, much like Aleppo in the north. SHI has prioritized ancient Bosra for monitoring and evaluation.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

- DGAM Website
 - <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1427>

Scholarly: Numerous. See especially the basic bibliography provided in Ross Burns 2010.

Burns, Ross. 2010. *The Monuments of Syria. A Guide.* (I.B. Tauris), pp. 78–87.



The Kalybe, “Cradle of the King’s Daughter”, or Nymphaeum at Bosra (DGAM)



The Kalybe, "Cradle of the King's Daughter" or Nymphaeum at Bosra (DGAM)

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The Kalybe, "Cradle of the King's Daughter," or Nymphaeum at Bosra (DGAM)



Abou al Feda Mosque, Bosra (DGAM)



Abou al Feda Mosque, Bosra (DGAM)



Fatima Mosque, Bosra (DGAM)



Fatima Mosque, Bosra (DGAM)



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Fatima Mosque, Bosra (DGAM)



Fatima Mosque, Bosra (DGAM)



Fatima Mosque, Bosra (DGAM)



Manjak Hamam, Bosra (DGAM)



Manjak Hamam, Bosra (DGAM)

SHI14-038

Report Date: September 25, 2014

Site Name: The Armenian Holy Martyrs Church, Deir ez-Zor Governate

Date of Incident: September 24, 2014

Location: Deir ez-Zor

Coordinates: Lat. 35.3387, Lon. 40.1417

Site Description: Armenian Apostolic church constructed in memory of the victims of the 20th century Armenian genocide. Large numbers of Armenians perished in Deir ez-Zor in early 20th century (esp. 1916). The church contains a memorial as well as a genocide museum.

Site Date: Built 1989–90

Source of Destruction: Verified intentional destruction by Islamic State militants. Various news agencies reported that IS destroyed the church by packing it with explosives. Islamic State has carried out similar intentional destructions in northern Iraq and northern Syria on historic and modern monuments and buildings as well as ancient artifacts.

Pattern: IS intentional destruction for propagandistic purposes. IS frequently choreographs these destructions, records them, and then publicizes them online and in print media to promote their Salafist/jihadist ideology. Many sources have noted that the initial reports of the destruction coincided with Armenia's celebrations of its independence on September 21.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: SHI has been carefully monitoring IS intentional destructions (as well as those of other extremist groups) and gathering data to verify the identity of the perpetrators. Occasionally, intentionally falsified stories of such destructions have been generated and publicized by various groups, necessitating caution when such stories are first released on social networking websites and online news reporting. In a few incidents, damage to cultural heritage (not verifiably cases of intentional destructions) has been blamed on extremist groups on the basis of little or no substantiating evidence or falsified evidence.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

- Armenian Weekly Website
 - <http://www.armenianweekly.com/2014/09/21/der-zor/>

Scholarly:



Destruction of the Armenian Genocide Church in Deir ez-Zor (Armenian Weekly)