

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

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Weekly Report 10 – October 13, 2014

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Heritage Timeline

October 12–13, 2014

Aleppo Archaeology posted two photos on its Facebook site showing damage to historic buildings on the south side of the **Aleppo Citadel** in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Aleppo caused by tunnel bombs and urban warfare. One image is from an *As-Safir* newspaper article dated September 5, 2014. See SHI Weekly Reports 1, 2, 5, and 9 for more details on the damage.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Aleppo-Archaeology/459668177425042>

<http://www.assafir.com/Article/1/349759>

October 12, 2014

Aleppo Archaeology posted a photo on its Facebook site showing damage to the **Umayyad Mosque** in Aleppo.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Aleppo-Archaeology/459668177425042?fref=photo>

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Islamic State released *Dabiq* 4. The current issue lays out the organization's views on the taking of war booty, enslavement of Yazidi women and children, and other topics. The IS intentional destruction of heritage is not featured, as has been the case in previous issues.

October 10, 2014

DGAM posted a short report "New Confiscations in Hama" on its website detailing the confiscation of a Roman/Byzantine mosaic and a Roman (?) sculptural fragment by authorities in Hama.

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1445>

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.

- October 8–10, 2014** The *New York Times* published “Protecting Syria’s Heritage” on *The Opinion Pages, Room for Debate* asking the question “What is the most effective way to stop looting and preserve the ancient heritage of Syria?”
<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/10/08/protecting-syrias-heritage>. Debaters included Dr. Zainab Bahrani and **ASOR SHI Co-Directors Dr. Abdal-Razzaq Moaz and Dr. Jesse Casana**.
<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/10/08/protecting-syrias-heritage/only-an-end-to-the-civil-war-in-syria-will-solve-the-problem>
- October 8–10, 2014** *Zaman al-Wasl* reporter George Hadad and writer Yusra Ahmed published an article entitled “Gang loyal to Assad smuggles Syrian heritage: Leaked document” alleging Syrian officials facilitated the smuggling of antiquities in Hama Governorate “from the Archaeological hill in the al-Sathiat area [a village in southern Hama Governate].” <https://www.zamanalwsl.net/en/news/6949.html>
- September 25, 2014** Hundreds of scholars have signed an open letter coordinated by **Dr. Amr al-Azm** calling on the United Nations Security Council to ban trade in Syrian antiquities.
<https://diary.thesyriacampaign.org/un-ban-the-trade-in-syrian-antiquities/>

Military and Political Context

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

- 1) Ayn al-Arab/Kobani, where Islamic State has seized large parts of the city and Kurdish YPG forces continue to resist;
- 2) Handarat, north of Aleppo, where SARG forces temporarily severed an important Opposition supply line, which Opposition and Jabhat al-Nusra recaptured shortly thereafter;
- 3) Ahrar al-Sham (HASI) forces launched an offensive southeast of Aleppo to cutoff regime supply lines into the city and to capture SARG facilities linked to SARG barrel bombing in the area of Safira;
- 4) U.S./Coalition airstrikes in the region of Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, Hasaka, and Aleppo Governorates aimed at degrading IS tactical and logistical capabilities, command and control, and revenues from petroleum refineries.

² For coverage of weekly events see Cafarella, Jennifer and Theodore Bell. *Syria Update: October 02 – October 10, 2014* (Institute for the Study of War).

5) Deraa, where a rebel offensive captured the town of Tell al-Hara and SARG airstrikes hit the town of Inkhil;

6) Hasakah, where clashes continued between unknown insurgents (likely IS/IS-linked) and YPG forces.

Politically, current events strongly suggest Sunni tribal groups in northern Syria favor establishing broad alliances to oppose SARG forces³. The newly formed “Alliance of Sunni Clans” may signal a new trend in northern Syria with the formation/expansion of tribal confederations for mutual defense — not unlike the Sahwa movements of Iraq or the tribal confederations that typified pre-Mandate times. The ASC does not appear to be aligned to insurgent Islamist groups. ASC has allegedly denounced U.S./Coalition airstrikes.

The HASI offensive southeast of Aleppo likely involves JN forces and could evolve into a joint operation with Islamic State as well, paving the way to broader extremist alliances and a potential accelerated IS move on Aleppo.

In addition to reporting on Syria, ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives continues to monitor events in northern Iraq and provide DOS with regular updates on the heritage situation there.

Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions

1) Urban warfare in Kobani and in the surrounding countryside threatens a number of archaeological sites and historic structures.

*SHI Co-Director Dr. Jesse Casana has already identified damage to Tell Shair (the village of Tell Shair, west of Kobani, was recently captured by Islamic State and then recaptured by YPG forces). SHI continues to monitor the situation in and around Kobani: several modern mosques have been damaged in the fighting, but as yet we are unaware of damage to historic structures.

Incident Reports

There are no new Incident Reports for this period.

³ *The Syrian Observer*. “Syrian Sunni Tribes Unite: Statement.” October 3, 2014. The story cites reports from the *Zaman al-Wasl* Opposition website.