

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

NEA-PSHSS-14-001

Weekly Report 11 – October 20, 2014

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## Heritage Timeline

- October 19, 2014**      **APSA** posted a video entitled “Idlib — The Limestone Massif: illicit diggings at Kafr Lusein” a Byzantine archaeological site. **SHI Incident Report SHI14-066**.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZOehcp1NnE&feature=youtu.be>
- October 18, 2014**      **APSA** posted three indexed photos showing damage to the **Khan al-Shouneh** and the remnants of the largely destroyed **Madrassa Khusruwiye** in the UNESCO WHS, Ancient City of Aleppo. See **SHI Incident Reports SHI 14-004, 054**.  
<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1047350108705433.1073741885.324869057620212&type=1>
- October 17, 2014**      **APSA** posted two photos showing earthen dikes on the summit of **Meshta Nour Tal** and three photos of **Tell Sha’ir** in Kobani/Ain al-Arab, Aleppo Governorate. For Tell Sha’ir see **SHI Incident Report SHI 14-051** in Weekly Report 9 (updated here). Newer imagery of Tell Sha’ir was acquired by **Digital Globe on Oct. 15, 2014 (see Incident Report herein)** that shows military trenches in the site. Photos of **YPG soldiers sheltering in these same trenches were posted on the Blog Today in Syria on Oct. 14, 2014**.  
<http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/aleppo/sites/990-aleppo-meshta-nour-tell-sha-ir.html>  
<http://malcolmxxtreme.wordpress.com/2014/10/14/10142014/>
- **APSA** posted video showing damage to the **Khan al-Shouneh** and the remnants of the largely destroyed **Madrassa Khusruwiye**, UNESCO WHS, Ancient City of Aleppo. See also **SHI Incident Reports SHI 14-004, 054**.  
<http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/aleppo/monuments/994-alep-khan-al-shouneh-2.html>
  - **Gates of Nineveh** posted “The Future of War in the Middle East and the Future of Archaeology” by **Christopher Jones**.

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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.

<http://gatesofnineveh.wordpress.com/2014/10/17/the-future-of-war-in-the-middle-east-and-the-future-of-archaeology/#comments>

- **Foreign Policy** published “The Black-Market Underground.” The article examines Islamic State involvement in looting in Syria and Iraq. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/10/17/the\\_black\\_market\\_et\\_battleground\\_syria\\_iraq\\_isis](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/10/17/the_black_market_et_battleground_syria_iraq_isis)
- October 16, 2014** **Al-Rudaw’s Facebook page** posted a story in on conditions in Mosul.
- October 15, 2014** **DGAM** posted a photo and a short status report on **Qalaat Najm** in Aleppo Governorate and mentioned alleged illegal excavations in an unidentified church near **Qalaat Najm. SHI Incident Report SHI14-065.**  
<http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1452>
- First reports on Twitter (substantiated by multiple sources October 15–17) of the Islamic State intentional destruction of the **Yazidi Shrine Mezela Nasridin** in the north part of **Bashiqa, Iraq** (ca. Lat. 36.463315, Lon. 43.334190).
- October 14, 2014** Heritage for Peace released its weekly report *Damage to Syria’s Heritage 14 October 2014.*
- October 13, 2014** **Iraqi in-country sources** provided new information on the heritage situation in northern Iraq.
- October 12, 2014** **RTS** broadcast “Irak/Syrie: le patrimoine culturel est également menacé par l’État islamique.” <https://www.rts.ch/video/info/journal-19h30/6216749-irak-syrie-le-patrimoine-culturel-est-egalement-menace-par-l-etat-islamique.html>
- **APSA** posted an assessment of **Tell Beydar** and the associated archaeological facilities entitled “Hassakah: Report on the actual state in Tell Beydar” with 17 photos. Cheikhmous Ali reports,  
  
Despite the destruction of information panels, the site of Tell Beydar, controlled by YPG Kurdish forces, has not been submitted to illegal excavations. Due to the lack of yearly maintenance, the architectural restoration of the Upper City suffered from the rainfall and requires urgent consolidation. The excavation house, built in mud bricks, does not seem affected by the conflict but suffers as well from a general lack of maintenance.  
  
See also **SHI Incident Report SHI 14-026** in **Weekly Report 5.**  
<http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/al-hasakah/sites/941-hassakah-tell-beydar-2.html>

- **Iraqi in-country sources** provided new information on the heritage situation in northern Iraq.

**October 9, 2014** *Al-Sharqiya News* reports looting at **Tell Mohammad** in Baghdad al-Jadida, Iraq near Al-Rasheed Airport (Lat. 33.293632, Lon. 44.482892).

## **Military and Political Context**

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

- 1) Ayn al-Arab/Kobani, where U.S./Coalition airstrikes and YPG ground units forced most IS forces out of the city by October 16;
- 2) Southeast of Aleppo, where a successful SARG counteroffensive against Ahrar al-Sham (HASI) retook territory in areas where HASI aims to cut off SARG supply lines and capture the Safina area;
- 3) Damascus, where SARG continues to attack mixed forces in the Eastern Ghouta district of Jobar;
- 4) Handarat, north of Aleppo, where recent SARG territorial gains aimed at cutting off supply lines to Aleppo were reversed;
- 5) Morek, near Hama, where there has been heavy fighting between SARG and a coalition of Opposition and JN forces for control of the Tank Battalion Base and a rebel supply line;
- 6) Continued clashes in and around Dera'a for control of checkpoints and the M5 highway;
- 7) U.S./Coalition airstrikes against Kabiba, Deir ez-Zor, and Tabqa Airbase.

Reports of regime conscription and anti-SARG protests in Homs and Tartous suggest growing discontent and eroding support for regime policies and the protracted conflict. Conscription has also been reported in YPG-controlled areas of northern Syria. SARG forces in the Handarin tactical theater are reportedly supplemented by foreign Shi'a fighters from Iran and Afghanistan. Airstrikes on Raqqa have allegedly degraded urban infrastructure, sparking protests over the lack of electricity in the main market and inflation in the prices of basic commodities. Overall, all sides in the conflict seem hard pressed for manpower and resources following the heavy fighting of this summer.

ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives will soon begin to summarize military and political events in northern Iraq in its *Weekly Reports* series.

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<sup>2</sup> For coverage of weekly events see Cafarella, Jennifer and Theodore Bell. *Syria Update October 10–October 17, 2014* (Institute for the Study of War).

## **Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions**

1) SHI continues to investigate the importance of looting in extremist finances in Syria and Iraq. While in-country sources are providing general information on archaeological looting and cultural property theft, more detailed information is needed.

\*SHI is stepping up its search for financial data linked to looting by extremist organizations and information on the smuggling of antiquities by expanding its in-country contacts and issuing specific information requests.

## Incident Reports

**SHI14-065**

**Report Date:** October 16, 2014

**Site Name:** Qalaat Najm (Najm Castle)

**Date of Incident:** Unspecified

**Location:** Manbij, Aleppo Governorate

**Coordinates:** Lat. 36.555133, Lon. 38.261767

**Site Description:** According to Ross Burns,

The existing remains largely date from the 13<sup>th</sup> century rebuilding of the fortress erected earlier by Nur al-Din (r 1146-74) who in turn had reconstructed an earlier fortress. The plan largely reflects the concepts of Arab military architecture realized from 1208 to 1215 by al-Zaher Ghazi...The castle takes full advantage of the existing highpoint in the terrain. The rocky crag is in itself a natural defense, towering steeply above the river plain. On the river side, a cladding of dressed stone provides an effective glacis and two towers further discourage scaling of the heights and defend the entrance gateway. Above the entrance, an Arabic inscription pays tribute to the work of Ghazi.

A great vaulted central passage leads up from the gateway with chambers on either side. The castle spreads over a series of these underground rooms and passageways (some reputedly giving secret access to the river) and two upper floors. Some pattern to the chambers and battlements on top of the mound is gradually emerging from the reconstruction. Remains include a small palace with a central courtyard with *iwans* and a mosque.<sup>3</sup>

**Site Date:** Primarily 13<sup>th</sup> century C.E.

**Source of Destruction:** The DGAM reports that the Qalaat Najm is in good condition and remains undamaged. They did report, however, illegal excavations conducted at night in the church near the castle. The location and other specifics on this church are currently unknown.

**Pattern:** Looting

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** —

**Sources:**

Online Reporting:

- DGAM Website

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<sup>3</sup> See Ross Burns, *Monuments of Syria: A Guide [Revised and Expanded Edition]* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009) 237.

- <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1452>

Scholarly:

Burns, Ross. 2009. *Monuments of Syria: A Guide (Revised and Expanded Edition)*. London; New York: I.B. Tauris.



Image of Qalaat Najm (DGAM)

## SHI14-066

**Report Date:** October 19, 2014

**Site Name:** Kafr Lusein

**Date of Incident:** 2014

**Location:** In modern Kafaldin, northwest of Al-Atarib and Ad-Dana

**Coordinates:** Lat. 36.256223, Lon. 36.714754

**Site Description:** Kafr Lusein is located in the Dead Cities region of northwestern Syria. The site's main standing remains include a monastic tower, church, and villa, as well as other built heritage.

**Site Date:** Byzantine

**Source of Destruction:** Alleged looting. Damage to built heritage is visible in the video as well as some excavation.

**Pattern:** Looting in the Dead Cities region

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** SHI is monitoring this area as a high priority.

### **Sources:**

Online Reporting:

APSA Facebook page and Youtube post:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZOehcp1NnE&feature=youtu.be>



Illicit excavations at Kafr Lusein (APSA).



## **SHI 14-051 (update)**

**Report Date:** September 30, 2014

**Site Name:** Tell Sha'ir

**Date of Incident:** February 2013 to April 2014

**Location:** On Turkish border in Aleppo Governate, just south of Yumurtalik, Turkey and immediately west of Ayn al-Arab/Kobani

**Coordinates:** Lat. 36.902422, Lon. 38.302092

**Site Description:** Large unexcavated circular/conical mound.

**Site Date:** ?

**Source of Destruction:** Evidence of construction

**Pattern:** Damage during conflict. Possible opportunistic looting.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:**

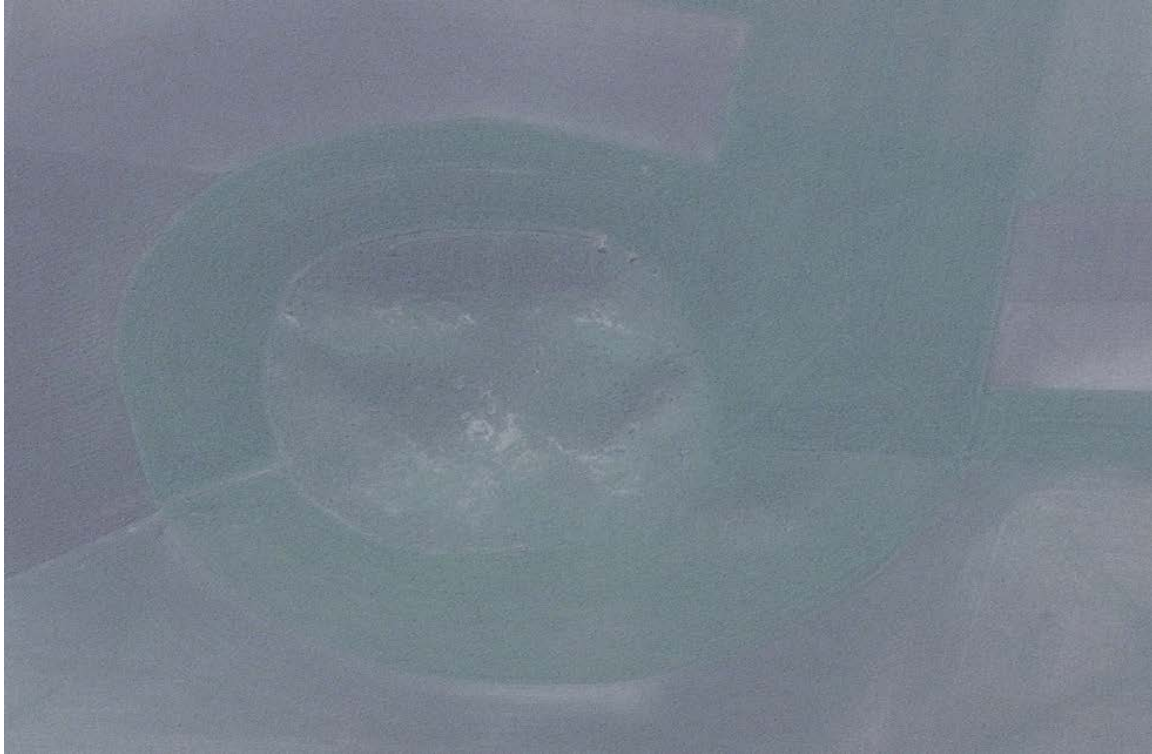
### **Sources:**

#### Scholarly:

- Casana Satellite Imagery

#### Online Reporting:

- APSA Facebook site  
<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1047405992033178.1073741887.324869057620212&type=1>



Satellite image of Tell Shair taken in February 2013 (Casana)



Satellite image of Tell Shair (April 2014) showing construction (Casana)



Tell Sha'ir (APSA).



Tell Sha'ir (APSA).





Tell Sha'ir (APSA).



Military trenches in Tell Sha'ir (Digital Globe, Oct. 15, 2014).



YPG fighters on Tell Sha'ir Oct. 14, 2014 (Today in Syria).



YPG fighters in trenches on Tell Sha'ir Oct. 14, 2014 (Today in Syria).





YPG fighters in trenches on Tell Sha'ir Oct. 14, 2014 (Today in Syria).