

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

NEA-PSHSS-14-001

Weekly Report 12 – October 27, 2014

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## Heritage Timeline

- October 25, 2014** In a press statement **Turkish Minister of Culture and Tourism, Omer Celik** announced Turkey would continue a policy of **preventing Syrian cultural heritage from entering Turkey**. Celik verified that the smuggling of Syrian heritage across the border had markedly increased. This story was accessed via **Worldbulletin News**.  
<http://www.worldbulletin.net/news/147033/turkey-says-prevents-smuggling-of-syrian-heritage-into-country>
- **DGAM** posted a short report on the severe looting of the Seleucid site of **Jebel Khalid**. **SHI Incident Report SHI14-069**/.  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1468>
  - **SHI Co-Investigator Cheikhmous Ali** submitted a report to SHI on the looting of the Bronze Age site of **Tell Meleh**. Nine images and a video were also posted to the **APSA** website. The video documents the bulldozing of the top of the mound by SARG forces to construct a military base. **SHI Incident Report SHI14-068**.  
<http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/hama/sites/1008-hama-tell-meleh.html>
  - **Syrian Director General of Antiquities and Museums Maamoun Abdulkarim** was awarded the new **Cultural Heritage Rescue Prize** for the protection of cultural heritage in Syria.  
[http://www.prioritacultura.it/?id=17&I=Premiare\\_i\\_coraggiosi\\_che\\_si\\_battono\\_per\\_salvare\\_l%27arte](http://www.prioritacultura.it/?id=17&I=Premiare_i_coraggiosi_che_si_battono_per_salvare_l%27arte)  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=177&id=1470>
- October 24, 2014** **BBC News** ran a story entitled “Ancient **Babylon** ‘under threat’ from Islamic State” by Sally Nabil. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29754196>
- October 23, 2014** **U.S. Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David S. Cohen** presented “**Attacking ISIL’s Financial**

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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.

**Foundation” at the Carnegie Endowment For International Peace.**  
<http://nblo.gs/10RDao>

- **APSA** posted 10 photos on its Facebook page showing the state of **Kafr Akab in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria. SHI Incident Report SHI14-067.**  
<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1050142238426220.1073741888.324869057620212&type=1>
  - **DGAM** posted a report entitled “Vandalism in Archaeological Sites at Idlib Countryside” documenting damage at **Serjabla, Kafr Hwar, Kafr Aqab, and Fasouq in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria. SHI Incident Report SHI14-067.**  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1466>
  - **Dam Press** published an interview in Arabic with **Syrian Director General of Antiquities and Museums Maamoun Abdulkarim.**  
[http://www.dampress.net/index.php?page=show\\_det&category\\_id=51&id=50663](http://www.dampress.net/index.php?page=show_det&category_id=51&id=50663)
  - **Al Akhbar** published “Mafia plundering the effects of Neighboring Syria” in Arabic by Hossam Zidane. The article features an interview with **Syrian Director General of Antiquities and Museums Maamoun Abdulkarim** on looting and cooperation between SARG and neighboring countries for the return of stolen heritage.
- October 22, 2014**
- **Mirko Novák** published an article titled “Zerstörung des kulturellen Erbes” in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.  
<http://www.nzz.ch/meinung/debatte/zerstoerung-des-kulturellen-erbes-1.18408447>
  - **Shannon News** posted a video to Youtube that addresses ISIS’s threat to Syrian cultural heritage.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9G5539eAl44>
  - **Gülsah Dark** published “Loss of Culture Through Destruction” in **Daily Sabah** providing an overview of the situation in Syria and Iraq.  
<http://www.dailysabah.com/features/2014/10/22/loss-of-culture-through-destruction>
  - **CNN** aired “*ISIS threatens Iraq’s priceless cultural heritage*” by CNN's Ben Wedeman Laura Smith-Spark.  
<http://www.wptv.com/news/world/isis-threatens-iraqs-priceless-cultural-heritage>
- October 21, 2014**
- The **DGAM** posted a report on the **Ain Dara Area** in the Aleppo countryside, along with one photo. **The New Church in Brad** and **Al-Didria Cave** were the only sites with documented damage. Other sites are in a good state of preservation. The excavations of two **Roman**

**tombs** by “the local community” in **Jindires** is also reported — the antiquities were “transported... to safe places.”

<http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1462>

**October 20, 2014**

The **European Union’s European External Action Service (EEAS)** published a Fact Sheet (131018/01) entitled ***The European Union and Syria*** listing the “**Restrictive Measures on Syria**” in force as of October 21, 2014. These measures include the “Ban on trade in goods belonging to Syria’s **cultural heritage** which have been illegally removed from Syria with the objective of facilitating the safe return of those goods.”

[http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131018\\_01\\_en.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131018_01_en.pdf)

**October 18, 2014**

**Islamic State** issued Circular 6 “**Circular to Teachers, Administrators and Employees of the University of Mosul and its Affiliated Institutions.**” The Islamic State “*Diwan*” (Bureau) of Education required faculty and staff of Mosul University to return to work with the exception of non-*Shari’a* compliant colleges, departments, and subjects, which IS **cancelled**, including:

College of Law, Political Science, and Fine Arts;  
**Colleges of Archaeology**, Physical Education, and the Department of Philosophy;  
Department of Tourism and Hotel Management;  
Democracy, Culture, Freedoms, and Rights;  
Novel and Drama in the Departments of English, French, and Translation;

IS also disallows “questions of usurious interests, principles of nationalism or ethnicity, false historical facts, or geographical divisions that violate the *Shari’a*.” This decree also requires the segregation of males and females, deleting the phrase “The Republic of Iraq” and replacing it with “The Islamic State,” and deleting the phrase “The Ministry of Higher Education” and replacing it with “*Diwan* of Education.”

(U.S. Department of State, Office of Language Services, Translating Division, LS No. O-2015-000193).

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***Al Hayat*** published the article “Syria is the Victim of Effects of War” in Arabic by Khaled Azab detailing recent cultural heritage damage and cultural property crimes in Syria.

<http://alhayat.com/Articles/5126343/%D8%A2%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B6%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8>

**October 16, 2014**

**Information Office of the Forces of the Syrian Revolution** posted a video to YouTube about the Old City of Aleppo. They emphasize that the Free Syrian Army takes measures to protect heritage.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D\\_tp4xadyw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_tp4xadyw)

**October 3, 2014**

**SRF** posted a video titled, “IS betreibt Handel mit Kulturgütern,” which highlights the damage done to the UNESCO World Heritage sites in Syria (German).  
<http://www.srf.ch/player/tv/tagesschau/video/is-betreibt-handel-mit-kulturguetern?id=f58c030e-7799-441b-8e41-7937a7594f4b>

## **Military and Political Context**

During the reporting period, the primary theaters of military engagement and insurgent activity in Syria were Kobani, Aleppo, Morek, and Damascus. SARG forces advanced into Morek after prolonged fighting for the area. SARG’s offensive and capture of territory in the areas north and northwest of Hama has coincided with the construction by SARG forces of military installations on archaeological mounds. A recent DGAM report on damage in Kobani posted on October 25, 2014 will be included in Weekly Report 13.

The *Washington Post* reported on the August 2014 massacre of an estimated 700 members of the Shaitat tribe in eastern Deir ez-Zor Governorate<sup>2</sup>. The formation of a tribal confederation in the area east of Aleppo — the “Alliance of Sunni Clans” — was previously reported in Weekly Report 10. Such tribal movements may radically alter the course of events in Syria, but are less likely to impact tactics and strategy in Iraq. The article discusses the Al-Furqan and Al-Itisam media groups: the former produces the magazine *Dabiq*, which contains frequent coverage of intentional destructions of cultural heritage in northern Iraq and Syria by Islamic State.

Numerous U.S./Coalition precision airstrikes were carried out in Syria and Iraq, particularly in Kobani, Zumar, Fallujah, west of Hit, Baiji, eastern Mosul, Hawijah, Tikrit, and near the Mosul Dam. In-country Iraqi sources continue to report Islamic State looting and intentional destructions of heritage, but specific information is lacking, although the archaeological sites of Nimrud, Nineveh, and Hatra are frequently mentioned.

## **Islamic State Media, Financing, and Cultural Heritage**

Islamic State’s use of media<sup>3</sup> and abuse of heritage for propagandistic purposes has been a frequent topic in the press and in SHI reporting. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s media strategists choice of the Great Mosque of al-Nouri (built 1172) in Mosul for his July 4, 2014 speech provides an interesting example. A recent article by Ali Hashem in *Al Monitor* also discusses the IS adherence to the harsh Hanbali school of jurisprudence and the use of fear against IS targets as a tactic to avoid battle. Terror tactics, including brutal murders, torture, enslavement, and the intentional destruction of cultural heritage (viz. mosques, shrines, and tombs), feed panic and refugee crises, creating logistical difficulties for Islamic State’s enemies in neighboring countries. Moreover, as detailed in

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<sup>2</sup> Sly, Liz. 2014. “Syria tribal revolt against Islamic State ignored, fueling resentment.” *The Washington Post* October 20, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Hashem, Ali. 2014. “The Islamic State’s media warfare.” *Al Monitor* October 22, 2014.

*Dabiq* 4, Islamic State fighters opportunistically follow up on panic-inspired abandonments of settlements to loot *fay* (literally “shade” but here connoting property abandoned in the advancing shadow of an oncoming force) and *ghanima* (war spoils), including cultural property and antiquities. In this same vein, a number of media outlets carried stories on Islamic State’s finances during the reporting period, although details are often lacking.

*Foreign Policy* features an interview with Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen of the U.S. Treasury Department and lists revenue streams from “oil proceeds, ransoms from kidnappings, cash from looted antiquities, and donations from rich sympathizers in the region.”<sup>4</sup> The article notes that the diversity of IS revenue streams makes the organization “less vulnerable to the Treasury Department’s typical anti-terrorism finance measures, including targeting banks, insurers, and shipping companies.”

Islamic State will likely face financial shortfalls as U.S./Coalition airstrikes continue to target IS-seized oil facilities. Oil revenue reductions will likely be exacerbated as IS comes under increasing pressure to curtail kidnapping and extortion rackets and petty theft and bribery in Sunni Arab strongholds (e.g., Raqqa and Mosul) as the organization attempts to take on the trappings of a state and to reduce the risks of sparking tribal and popular uprisings. Cohen also notes that Islamic State “has also taken on vast commitments in Iraq and Syria that severely strain its budget.” We predict these factors may combine to place cultural heritage at heightened risks as the organization increases the looting of archaeological sites, museums, and the cultural property of ethnic and religious minorities to compensate for revenue shortfalls.

## **Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions**

1) The refugee crisis in northwestern Syria in the Dead Cities region continues to be a source of heritage destruction as built heritage is occupied by IDPs or used as a source of building materials. Widespread opportunistic looting has been documented.

\*SHI has already prioritized this area for monitoring and assessment. Future mitigation projects in this area will be complicated by the presence of large numbers of IDPs in need of humanitarian assistance.

2) Recent looting at Jebel Khalid matches a pattern of targeting Seleucid, Roman, and Byzantine sites in regions controlled by SARG and Islamist extremist forces, especially Islamic State (viz. Apamea, Dura Europos). Islamic State may increase large-scale looting in the territories it controls to compensate for revenue shortfalls.

\* SHI will obtain new satellite imagery of Jebel Khalid to determine whether the looting is as extensive as that documented elsewhere. Such looting may become pervasive in the area given that Islamic State controls the region, necessitating heightened monitoring.

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, Keith and Jamila Trindle. 2014. “Treasury’s War on the Islamic State.” *Foreign Policy* October 23, 2014.  
[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/10/23/treasurys\\_war\\_on\\_the\\_islamic\\_state\\_oil\\_kuwait\\_qatar](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/10/23/treasurys_war_on_the_islamic_state_oil_kuwait_qatar)

## Incident Reports

**SHI 14-067**

**Report Date:** October 26, 2014

**Site Name:** Serjabla, Kafr Hwar, Kafr Aqab, and Fasouq in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria

**Date of Incident:** Prior to October 26, 2014

**Location:** Idlib Governorate

**Coordinates:** To be determined.

**Site Descriptions:** More information is needed.

**Site Date:** Byzantine period.

**Source of Destruction:** Vandalism and looting.

**Pattern:** Destruction of sites in the Dead Cities region of Syria. The use of built heritage for building materials. Looting.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** SHI will accurately locate these sites and obtain recent satellite imagery.

### Sources:

#### Online Reporting:

APSA Website

<http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/idlib/sites/1005-idlib-kafr-akab.html>

DGAM Website

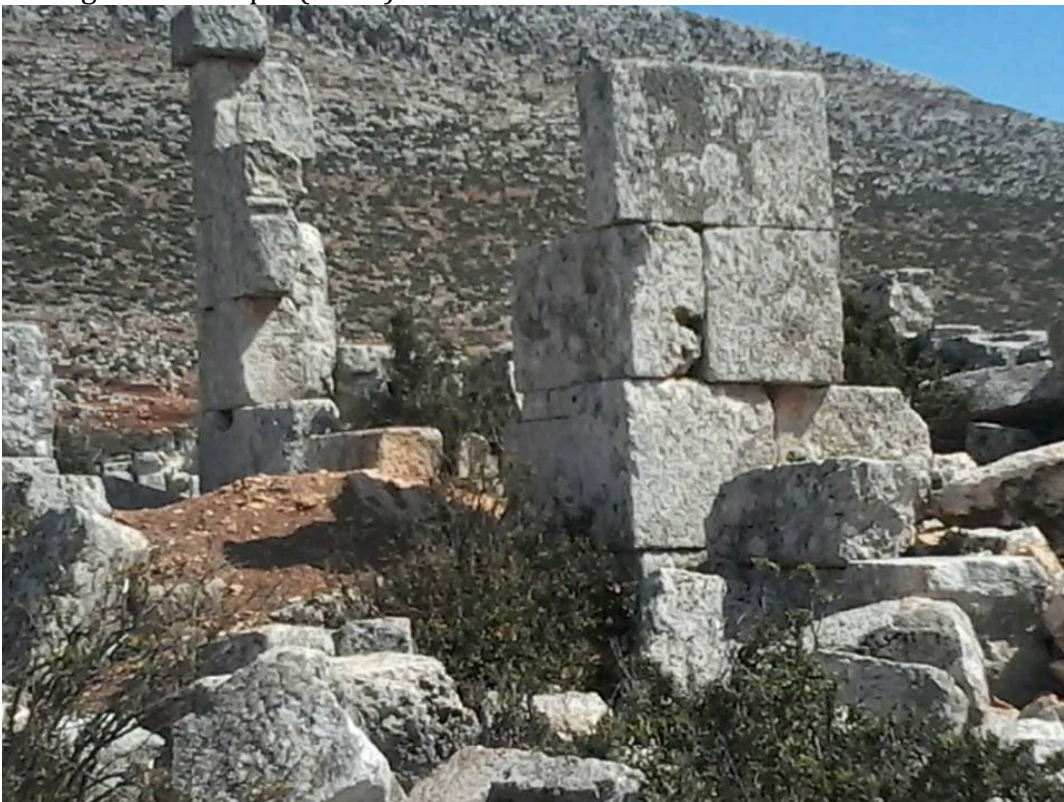
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1466>

#### Scholarly:





Damage to Kafr Aqab (APSA).



Damage to Kafr Aqab (APSA).





Damage to Kafr Aqab (APSA).



Damage to Kafr Aqab (APSA).





Damage to Kafr Aqab (APSA).





Damage to Kafr Aqab (APSA).



Damage to Kafr Aqab (APSA).





Damage to Kafr Aqab (APSA).



Damage to Kafr Aqab (APSA).



## SHI14-068

**Report Date:** October 26, 2014

**Site Name:** Tell Meleh

**Date of Incident:** On or before October 17, 2014

**Location:** Hama Governorate — northwest of Hama, north of Halfaya and Muhradah. on the northern outskirts of the village of Tell Meleh.

**Coordinates:** 35.307199 N, 36.521843 E

**Site Description:** Large flat-topped tell.

**Site Date:** Bronze Age.

**Source of Destruction:** Construction of a SARG military base on the top of the mound with a bulldozer.

**Pattern:** The use of mounds for military installations and damage caused by the construction of military earthworks.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** SHI will monitor satellite imagery to verify the APSA claims when new imagery is available and request information from in-country sources.

### Sources:

#### Online Reporting:

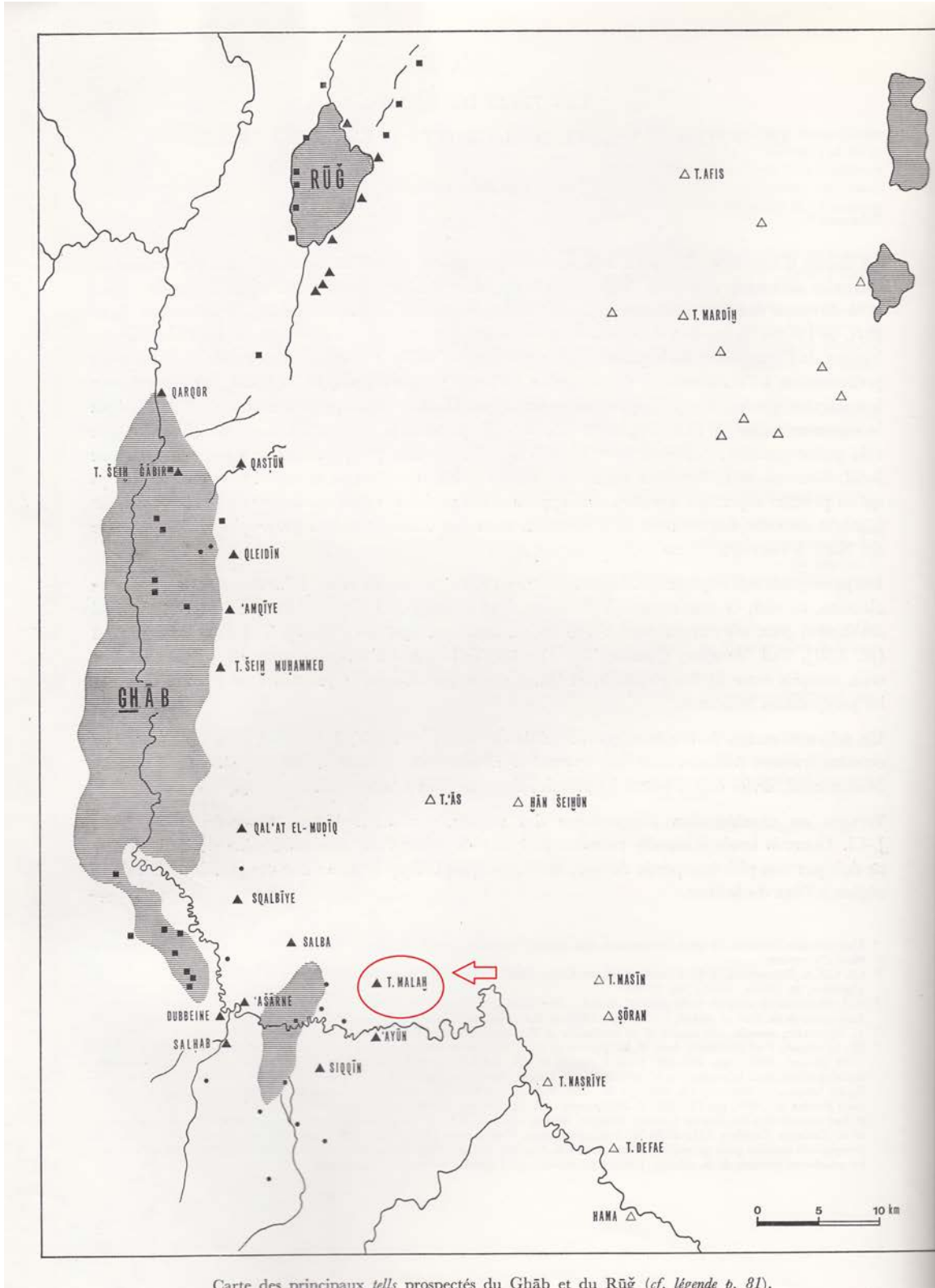
APSA Website <http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/hama/sites/1008-hama-tell-meleh.html>

#### Scholarly:

Courtois, (J. Cl.)

1972 “Les Tells du Ghab. La moyenne vallée de l’Oronte à l’âge du Bronze,” In J. and J. Ch. Balty (eds.) *Apamée de Syrie*. (Brussels: Bilan des recherches archéologique 1969–1971), pp. 79–84.

1973 “Prospection archéologique dans la moyenne vallée de l’Oronte (El Ghab et Er Rouj – Syrie du nord-ouest,” *Syria* 50: 53–99.



The location of Tell Meleh.



Tell Meleh before the damage caused by SARG forces (Digital Globe ®).



Tell Meleh (APSA).





Some of the recent damage to Tell Meleh (APSA).



SARG earthworks on Tell Meleh (APSA).



SARG earthworks on Tell Meleh (APSA).

## SHI14-069

**Report Date:** October 26, 2014

**Site Name:** Jebel Khalid

**Date of Incident:** Reported October 25, 2014

**Location:** Along the Euphrates River three km downstream from the Tishreen Dam in Aleppo Governorate.

**Coordinates:** 36°22' N, 38° 10' E

**Site Description:** The Seleucid citadel Jebel Khalid has been excavated by an Australian expedition. According to Burns<sup>5</sup>,

Excavated since 1986 by an Australian team, this fortress site has proved to be a rare example of a Greek military settlement not later overbuilt or disturbed by Roman occupation. It therefore gives us an important insight into the type of military colony established by the Macedonian rulers of Syria in the third century BC. Probably established by Seleucus I Nicator, the fortress was abandoned with the breakup of Seleucid control in Syria around 70 BC.

**Site Date:** Seleucid

**Source of Destruction:** Looting

**Pattern:** The targeted looting of Seleucid, Roman, and Byzantine period sites.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** SHI will monitor satellite imagery to verify the DGAM claims when new imagery is available and request information from in-country sources.

### Sources:

#### Online Reporting:

DGAM <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1468>

#### Scholarly:

Burns, Ross. 2008. *The Monuments of Syria. A Guide*. (I.B. Tauris), p. 177.

Clarke (ed.) 2001.

Clarke and Jackson AAAS 2002–2003

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<sup>5</sup> Burns 2009: 177.



Cohen 2006: 178–180.

Wright, Nicholas L. "The Last Days of a Seleucid City: Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates and its Temple." [Available Online]



صورة جوية لتل جبل خالد الأثري على ضفة الفرات  
ومناطق التّحدي والتّخريب

Damaged areas of Jebel Khalid (DGAM).