

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

NEA-PSHSS-14-001

Weekly Report 15 – November 17, 2014

Michael D. Danti, Scott Branting, Cheikhmous Ali, Kurt W. Prescott, Tony Lauricella, and Susan Penacho

Heritage Timeline

- November 16, 2014** **DGAM** posted a short report on its website detailing recent damage to **Bara** in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria. **SHI Incident Report SHI14-081**.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1501>
- November 14, 2014** **ASOR SHI** posted a report on **The ASOR Blog** detailing recent looting to the site of **Mari**. <http://asorblog.org/extensive-recent-looting-revealed/> **SHI Incident Report SHI14-080**.
- **DGAM** posted a report detailing new damage to **Samaan Castle**. **SHI Incident Report SHI14-079**.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1497>
 - **ICOM Netherlands** and **Blue Shield Netherlands** held the symposium *Heritage under Attack* in Doorn.
<https://icomnederland.nl/heritageunderattack>
 - **U.S. Representatives Eliot L. Engel** (D-NY) and **Chris Smith** (R-NJ) introduced *The Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act* (**H.R. 5703**).
<http://chrissmith.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=397716>
- November 13, 2014** **DGAM** posted a condition report on archaeological sites in Deir ez-Zor Governorate, including the sites of Mari, Dura Europus al-Salhiya, Tell Bassira, Halabia, Tell Tabous, Tell Sheikh Hamad, and Qalaat Rahba. **SHI Incident Report SHI14-078**.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1495>
- November 12, 2014** **DGAM** posted a short report on its website describing shell damage to the National Museum of Aleppo. **SHI Incident Report SHI14-077**.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1493>

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.

- **PRI** posted an article titled “ISIS is waging another war – on culture and history,” to its website providing an interview with Richard Stengel, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.
<http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-11-12/isil-waging-another-war-culture-and-history>
- **Stephennie Mulder** published “The blood antiquities funding ISIL” in *Aljazeera*.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/11/blood-antiquities-funding-isil-2014119113948461658.html>

Military and Political Context

The combat kinetics during the reporting period followed previously established patterns in terms of the main combat theatres. The alleged increasing cooperation between Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra (see also previous SHI Weekly Reports) represents a key development of enormous significance². A large-scale truce between the organizations would significantly modify the balance of power and, in particular, threaten SARG and various Kurdish forces. Advances against Islamic State in northern Iraq may potentially degrade IS strength in the eastern combat theater³.

Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions

1) Extremist financing based on cultural property crimes, particularly the looting of archaeological sites by Islamic State, continues to be a major focus in the news media. Various investigative reports are forthcoming by major media outlets investigating the trafficking of so-called “blood antiquities.”

*SHI and many other organizations are gathering additional data on this topic, and SHI team members regularly discuss the situation with the media. Our attention must remain on all belligerents in the current conflict rather than a sole focus on Islamic State, although the rate and magnitude of culture property crimes committed by IS exceeds that of other belligerents. The organization — an extremist quasi-state — has overt policies supporting cultural property crimes and exhibits no inclination to preserve heritage. We must also continue to focus on the intentional destruction of heritage places by Islamic State and other militant extremists and the deleterious impacts of combat damage and diminishing cultural heritage infrastructure.

2) There are continued reports of potential cooperative agreements between Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra. Should the two organizations and their affiliates join forces, the already enormous humanitarian crisis will be exacerbated and the cultural heritage situation will likely deteriorate even more rapidly. A JN/IS alliance may result in the further radicalization of JN and its affiliates.

² Cafarella, Jennifer. 2014. *Peace-talks between the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria*. (Institute for the Study of War). <http://iswsyria.blogspot.com/2014/11/peace-talks-between-islamic-state-and.html>

³ Institute for the Study of War. 2014. “Iraq Situation Report: November 11–13, 2014.” (ISW). Institute for the Study of War. 2014. “Iraq Situation Report: November 14–16, 2014.” (ISW).

*SHI will continue to monitor reports from various think tanks and reliable media outlets to track the political situation. Large areas of JN and IS territory are currently classified as high priority for SHI activities.

Incident Reports

SHI 14-077

Report Date: November 13, 2014

Site Name: National Museum of Aleppo

Date of Incident: November 12, 2014

Location: Central Aleppo, corner of al-Maari and Baron Street, west of old city, Aleppo, Aleppo Governorate

Coordinates: 36.2038 N, 37.1506 E

Site Description: According to Ross Burns,

The museum building is a hollow square with two storeys arranged around a central courtyard. To the right of the entrance to the main building is the administration annexe with a mosaic collection yet to be installed on the ground floor.⁴

Site Date: Modern repository

Source of Destruction: According to the DGAM, the National Museum in Aleppo was targeted by shellfire that hit the electrical transformer room outside the museum building. Shrapnel from the blast injured three people.

Pattern: Combat damage to museums.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: —

Sources:

Online Reporting:

- DGAM Website
 - <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1493>

Scholarly:

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

⁴ See Ross Burns, *Monuments of Syria: A Guide [Revised and Expanded Edition]* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 50.

SHI 14-078

Report Date: November 17, 2014

Site Name: Deir ez-Zor Governorate — Mari, Dura Europos al-Salhiya, Tell Bassira, Halabia, Tell Tabous, Tell Sheikh Hamad, and Qalaat Rahba

Date of Incident: Unspecified, but most fairly recent. Reported November 13, 2014.

Location: Various locations in Deir ez-Zor Governorate

Coordinates: Various

Site Description: —

Site Date: Various

Source of Destruction: The DGAM entitled this report “The Illegal Excavations Continues in Dier ez- Zour Archaeological Sites,,” and provides the following information for each site,

Many of archaeological sites in Dier Ez-Zour have been looted and vandalized. Illegal “excavations” have been carried out and cultural treasures have been stolen and were sold abroad. The recent reports from Dier Ez-Zour antiquities confirmed that the destruction of the cultural heritage in the area continues, as it is evident by the following cases:

Mari (Tell Hariri), which situated in the villages of al-Sial al-Sharqi in Abu Kamal area. Illegal excavations have affected significant buildings such as The Temples, Zimri-Lim palace and the Zaqora, recently armed gangs had occupied the site.

Dura Europos al-Salhiya

The illegal excavations and vandalism stopped in the archaeological site. Knowing that during the previous period the all the site was vandalized heavily by the Antiquities armed thieves.

Tell Bassira: located South Eastern of Dier Ez-Zour, to the left bank of Euphrates. Vandalism and illegal excavations in the Tell, in addition to illegal constructions (Shops) in the Eastern side overlooking at al-Khabur river.

Halabia Site (Zanobia): did not shown any damage recently.

Tell Tabous: Located in al-Shamatia village W of Dier Ez-Zour at the right bank of Wadi Euphrates. The Tell is a Roman-Byzantine fort with a Hellenistic evidences, it is overlooking at the S side to a deep valley containing Byzantine Cemetery. The site has been studied by the Finland mission of the University of Helsinki that working in the Survey in Bishri Mount. It was subject to illegal excavations and looting.

Tell Shiekh Hamad (Dūr-Katlimmu): Located 80 km NE of Dier Ez-Zour, within a Gharbya Sharqya village on the right bank of the Khabur River. The site was excavated by German mission from Berlin's Free University under the direction of Dr. Kühne. Many cuneiform figure were discovered in the site confirmed that the site is Dūr-Katlimmu the Assyrian Kingdom dated to the Middle Assyrian era. The Tell witnessed extensive illegal excavations.

Qalaat Rahba : Located in the city of Mayadin, 50 km far from Dier Ez-Zour. Illegal excavations witnessed in the western area overlooking to the Ghassanian cemeteries in the desert, the illegal excavations extends to the Ayyubid city located below the castle.

Pattern: Looting is occurring across all of Syria, but is particularly intense in areas under Islamic State control.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: SHI will attempt to establish the timing of these incidents and obtain any additional information on the “armed gangs” that DGAM cites as the perpetrators. Islamic State represents the likely perpetrators or is complicit in this looting.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

- DGAM website <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1495>

Scholarly: Various

There is an enormous publication record for Mari. For an introduction to the site see the bibliography available on Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mari,_Syria. A useful introduction to the Palace is provided by Stephanie Dalley.

SHI 14-079

Report Date: November 17, 2014

Site Name: Qal'at Samaan

Date of Incident: Unspecified, presumably 2014

Location: Ca. 30 km northwest of Aleppo

Coordinates: 36.3342 N, 36.8439 E

Site Description: The Church of Saint Simeon is the oldest surviving Byzantine church, dating back to the 5th century. The architectural complex atop the hill consists of a basilica, baptistery, monastery, two hostleries, and a monumental arch. According to Burns⁵,

The cruciform church comprising four separate basilica buildings was probably constructed shortly after the death of the ascete, St. Simeon. Born in the area of Antioch around 389–90, Simeon joined the community of monks at Telanissos (*Der Semaan, at the foot of the present site) around 410–2. He spent the rest of his life in the area, moving only to isolate himself more effectively from the rest of the community. He finally took up residence on a platform atop a column (12 m to 18 m high, 1.5 m to 2 m in diameter) around the remains of which the great building is centred. He died on this spot on 24 July 459, having already become a figure of reverence attracting pilgrims from many part of the Byzantine world — from neighbouring Antioch but from as far afield as Britain and Persia.

Site Date: Byzantine

Source of Destruction: The DGAM report provides the following information,

Olive trees in Samman Castle in the Inside the castle wall, SW of the Triumphal Arch, were subject of serious explosions done by extremist groups that controlled the castle. In addition illegal excavations witnessed in the same area.

According to Aleppo antiquities the extremist groups prevented anyone from approaching the Castle and they prevented also the Land owners from olive harvest in the nearby area, In order to keep them unknown of what is happening inside the castle.

Pattern: Combat damage and looting while the site was militarized, allegedly by extremists, according to the DGAM.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: This area is already a high priority for SHI monitoring.

⁵ See Ross Burns, *Monuments of Syria: A Guide [Revised and Expanded Edition]* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 272–275.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

- DGAM Website <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1497>

Scholarly:

- Butler, Howard. 1929. *Early Churches in Syria*.
- Mango, Cyril. 1976. *Byzantine Architecture*.
- Tchalenko, Georges. 1953. *Villages I*.



Qala'at Samaan Castle and areas affected by explosions while the site was occupied and looted by extremists (DGAM).

SHI 14-080

Report Date: November 17, 2014

Site Name: Mari (Tell Hariri)

Date of Incident: 2014 — noted in Digital Globe satellite image taken November 11, 2014. Previous Digital Globe image from March 25, 2014 shows some looting. September 7, 2012 very little looting evident. No looting apparent in October 11, 2011 image.

Location: Deir ez-Zor Governorate on the western bank of the Euphrates River, 11 km northwest of Abu Kamal.

Coordinates: 34.5494 N, 40.8900 E

Site Description: Mari flourished as a trade center and city-state during the Early and Middle Bronze Ages 2900–1759 BC. The city was destroyed by King Hammurabi of Babylon and is well known for the discoveries made by multiple French expeditions, the most famous of which is the Palace of Zimri-Lim and the archive of clay tablets written in the Old Babylonian language in cuneiform script found therein. Mari is crucial to our understanding of the ancient Near East.

Site Date: Main occupation is Bronze Age. Other periods are present.

Source of Destruction: Looting by extremists. Recent construction near the mound. Looting was noted by ASOR SHI Co-Director Scott Branting and researchers Tony Lauricella, and Susan Penacho.

Pattern: Looting in areas controlled by Islamic State. Acceleration in looting following the capture of an area by Islamic State. Possible militarization of the site and its surroundings.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: Mari already represents a high priority site for SHI activities.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

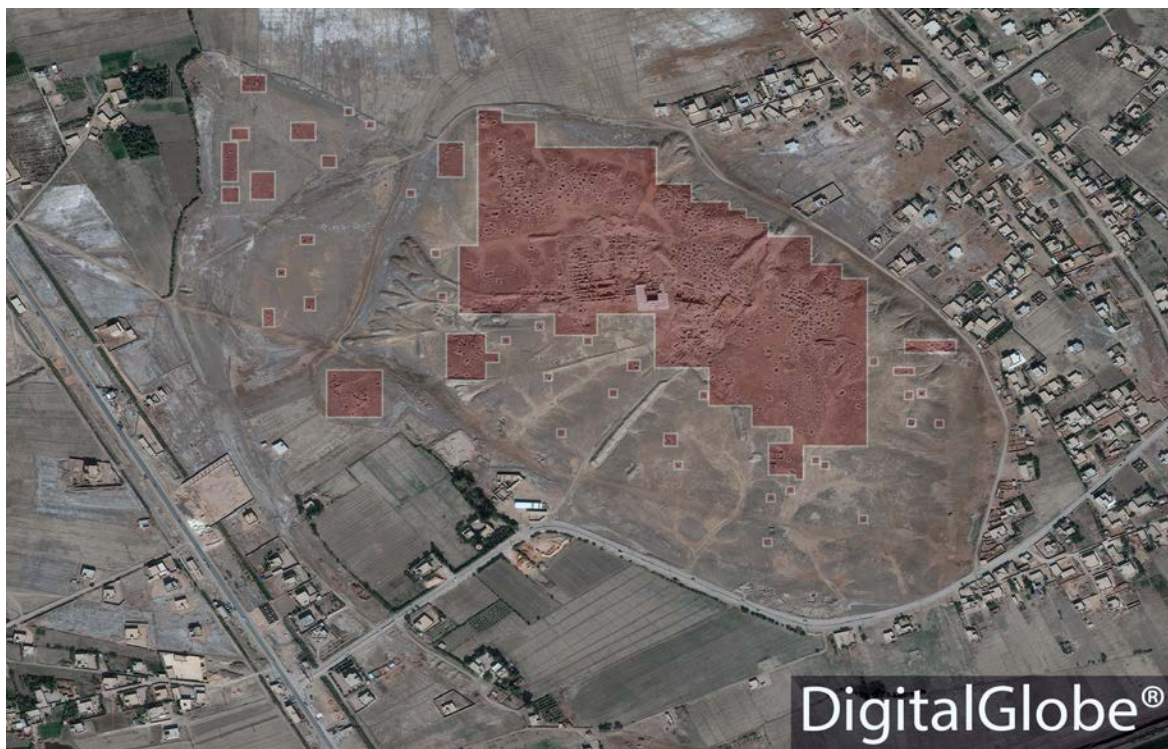
ASOR SHI <http://asorblog.org/extensive-recent-looting-revealed/>

Scholarly:

There is a vast publication record on the site of Mari. For an introductory bibliography see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mari,_Syria.



Satellite image of Mari dating to March 25, 2014 – significant looting evident and recent construction (Digital Globe, ASOR SHI).



Satellite image of Mari dating to November 11, 2014 – massive, and apparently ongoing, additional looting (Digital Globe, ASOR SHI).

SHI 14-081

Report Date: Reported November 16, 2014

Site Name: Al-Bara, UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria

Date of Incident: Unspecified

Location: Al-Bara lies in Idlib Governorate 65 km north of Hama

Coordinates: 35.6830 N, 36.5330 E

Site Description: See also SHI 14-008. Ross Burns writes⁶,

The importance of the settlement resulted from its location between the two major sections of the Jebel al-Zawiyah, the trough in which it is located forming a north-south corridor essential for internal access. Though it expanded rapidly during its boom period in the 5th and 6th centuries, settlement at Bara only began in the 4th century. The site was blessed with a plentiful supply of underground water and the first settlers gathered around a church on the eastern edge of the Wadi al-Goz (west of the modern village, running parallel with the main road). At about the same period, a second development, originally isolated in its own compound (*temenos*), began at the great basilica called al-Husn (north of the main agglomerations).

Site Date: 5th–6th Centuries AD

Source of Destruction: Standing stone walls were spray painted with targets and used for target practice. The DGAM reports illegal digging and the use of a bulldozer to break up masonry for use in modern construction.

Pattern: Destruction of standing architecture in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria. Destruction in this area is highly correlated with the current IDP/refugee crisis.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: The Dead Cities regions has already been identified as a high priority for SHI activities.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

- DGAM Website <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1501>

Scholarly: *Strube, Christine*. 1996. *“Toten Städte”. Stadt und Land in Nordsyrien während der Spätantike*. Verlag Philipp von Zabern, Mainz.

⁶ See Ross Burns, *Monuments of Syria: A Guide [Revised and Expanded Edition]* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 72.

Tchalenko, Georges. 1953–58. *Villages antiques de la Syrie du nord. La massif du Bélus à l'époque romaine*. Three volumes. Paris.



Damage to al-Bara, (DGAM).



Damage to Al-Bara (DGAM).