

# ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives (CHI): Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq<sup>1</sup>

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Weekly Report 18 – December 8, 2014

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## Heritage Timeline

- December 7, 2014**      **DGAM** and other news media reported that the **Madrassa Sultaniyeh in Aleppo** was severely damaged in a tunnel bombing — allegedly by “rebel” forces. **SHI Incident Report SHI 14-097**  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1531>
- December 6, 2014**      *The World Post* posted the article *Congressional Monuments Men? The Role of Congress in Fighting Terrorist Financing, While Preserving Our Cultural Heritage* by **Mark Vlasic**.  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-v-vlasic/congressional-monuments-m\\_b\\_6281664.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-v-vlasic/congressional-monuments-m_b_6281664.html)
- December 5, 2014**      *Science* 346/6214 featured an article by **Andrew Lawler** entitled *Satellites track heritage loss across Syria and Iraq* featuring the work of **ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives**.  
[http://www.sciencemagazinedigital.org/sciencemagazine/05\\_december\\_2014?pg=14#pg14](http://www.sciencemagazinedigital.org/sciencemagazine/05_december_2014?pg=14#pg14)
- December 3, 2014**      **UNESCO** held the international conference *Protection of Cultural Heritage & Respect of Cultural Diversity in Iraq and Syria* in Paris featuring talks by UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, Staffan de Mistura (UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Syria), and Maamoun Abdulkarim (DGAM Director-General).  
[http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/unesco\\_conference\\_calls\\_for\\_protected\\_cultural\\_zones\\_to\\_be\\_established\\_syria\\_and\\_iraq/#.VISVXr4RnAt](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/unesco_conference_calls_for_protected_cultural_zones_to_be_established_syria_and_iraq/#.VISVXr4RnAt)
- December 2, 2014**      **DGAM** reported damage caused by a large explosion to several structures in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of **Bosra**.  
**SHI Incident Report SHI 14-096**  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1526>
- **Heritage for Peace** published its newsletter *Damage to Syria’s Heritage 02 December 2014*.

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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.

- November 30, 2014**      **Syrian Rebels** bombed the **Aleppo Citadel**.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0Yebq7B\\_lk&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0Yebq7B_lk&feature=youtu.be)
- **APSA** posted a short report on the state of the **Bab al-Nasr and the Maidani Mosque** in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of **Aleppo**. **SHI Incident Report SHI 14-095**  
<http://apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/aleppo/monuments/1044-aleppo-al-mydani.html>
- November 29, 2014**      **DGAM** reported damage (vandalism and looting) to several sites within the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria, **Jebel Zawiye**h (Zawia) Park, including **Al-Bara**. **SHI Incident Report SHI 14-094** <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1522>

## Military and Political Context

Military operations in Syria and Iraq followed patterns established over the last two to three months with some intensified offensives in Syria by Islamic State in Kobani and Deir ez-Zor. The main theaters of operation in Iraq were<sup>2</sup>:

- 1) The area north of Baghdad, where Islamic State continued on the offensive;
- 2) Ramadi, where Islamic State and forces trying to oppose IS (mainly Iraqi Defense Forces and anti-IS tribal groups) repeatedly clashed;
- 3) Nineveh and Kirkuk Provinces, where there were continued, dispersed clashes between Islamic State forces and Peshmerga backed by U.S./Coalition Airstrikes.

Overall, the current military situation in Iraq has little direct short-term impact on the cultural heritage situation — cultural repositories in Mosul continues to be a primary concern. The same cannot be said for Syria, where military and political events continue to place heritage at high risk. In Syria, the main theaters of operation were<sup>3</sup>:

- 1) The **Jebel Zawiye**h, where **Jabhat al-Nusra** continued to make gains at the expense of the Syrian Opposition;
- 2) **Yabroud**, where there were low-level clashes;
- 3) The eastern **Sheikh Miskin District** south of Damascus, where the regime received significant assistance from Iranian and Iraqi Shia forces;
- 4) **Kobani**, where Islamic State intensified its attempts to take the city but were met by stiff YPG resistance backed by U.S./Coalition airstrikes;
- 5) **Deir ez-Zor**, where Islamic State pushed hard to take the regime military airbase, but met stiff resistance.

On November 29, Syrian Opposition forces established the new Syrian Revolutionary Command Council to unify the efforts of 72 groups including Islamist hardliners. This coalition likely represents

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<sup>2</sup> For detailed coverage of the recent situation in Iraq see Ali, Ahmed and Brian Fisher. 2014. *Iraq Situation Report: December 2–3, 2014*. (Institute for the Study of War).

<sup>3</sup> For recent detailed coverage of the military situation in Syria see Cafarella, Jennifer and Christopher Kozak. 2014. *Syria Update November 25–December 02, 2014*. (Institute for the Study of War).

a response to the growing power of Jabhat al-Nusra in northwest Syria. Urban combat in Aleppo and in the south of Syria (esp. Bosra) continues to take a heavy toll on heritage places (this includes two UNESCO World Heritage Sites), while the volatile situation in the northwest of Syria exacerbates the already bleak humanitarian crisis — the UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient Cities of Northern Syria is especially threatened.

## **Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions**

1) Additional heritage information is needed from in-country sources in Iraq.

\* ASOR CHI will contact SBAH Iraq and other stakeholders to facilitate information sharing and better track the cultural heritage situation in Iraq.

## Incident Reports

### SHI 14-094

**Report Date:** December 7, 2014

**Site Name:** Al-Bara and other sites in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria, Jebel Zawia Park

**Date of Incident:** Unspecified

**Location:** Idlib Governorate in the Jebel Zawiah 65 km north of Hama.

**Coordinates:** —

**Site Description:** See SHI Incident Report SHI 14-008 and 14-081

**Site Date:** Byzantine

**Source of Destruction:** According to the DGAM (and other independent reports as well), locals are breaking up the stone masonry of many standing structures within the Jebel Zawiah Archaeological Park using heavy machinery and selling the stone for new construction. The DGAM also reports looting at the site,

Metal and other types of detectors are used in archaeological site and the unearthed ancient coins were taken by locals. the digs there revealed a tomb which was vandals [robbed] completely.

**Pattern:** Sustained destruction (esp. vandalism and looting) to the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria — the root cause of the destruction is the current IDP crisis in northwestern Syria.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** ASOR CHI has already designated the Dead Cities region of northwestern Syria as a high priority of monitoring and remediation efforts.

**Sources:**

Online Reporting:

DGAM Website <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1522>

Scholarly:

UNESCO Website <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1348>



Smashing of ancient stone masonry at the Byzantine site of Al-Bara (DGAM).



Smashing of ancient stone masonry at the Byzantine site of Al-Bara (DGAM).



The site of Al-Bara in the UNESCO WHS, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria (DGAM).



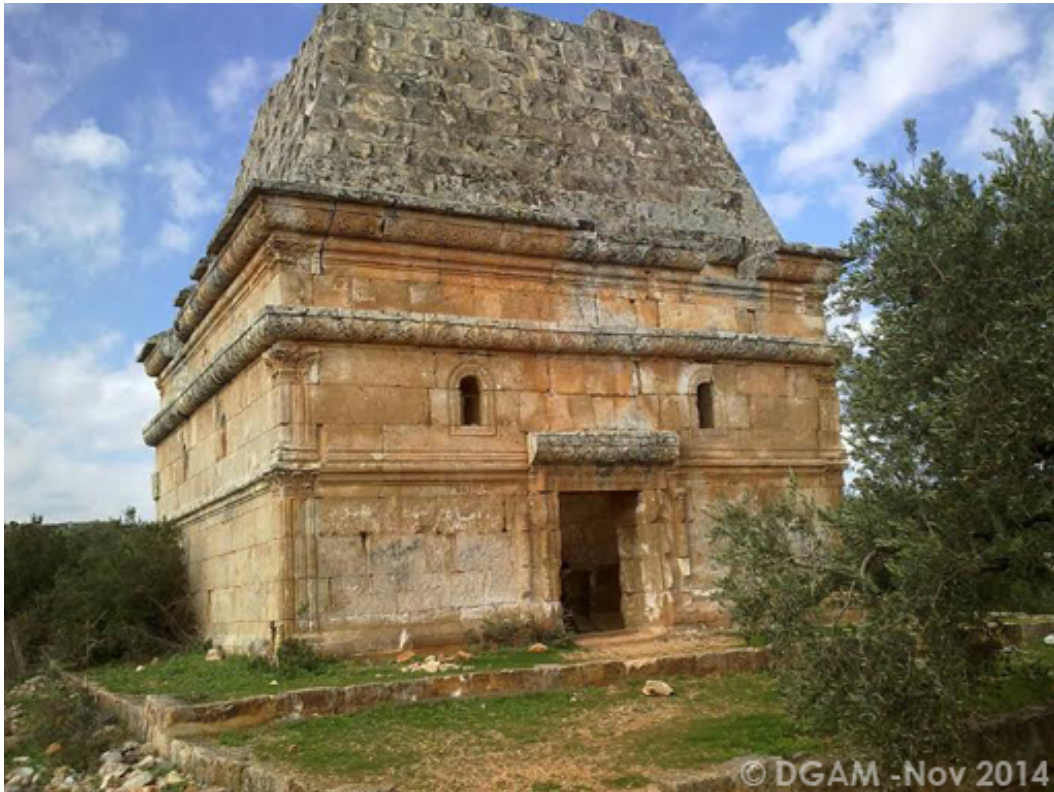
Smashing of ancient stone masonry at the Byzantine site of Al-Bara (DGAM).



Recently looted tomb at the Byzantine site of Al-Bara (DGAM).



Recently looted tomb at the site of Al-Bara (DGAM).



The famous pyramidal-roofed tomb at Al-Bara (DGAM).





Damage caused by smashing ancient masonry with heavy machinery for building material near the pyramidal-roofed tomb of Al-Bara (DGAM).



Coins recently looted at the site of Al-Bara (DGAM).

## SHI 14-095

**Report Date:** December 7, 2014

**Site Name:** Bab al-Nasr (Bab al-Yahud) and Maidani Mosque, UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Aleppo

**Date of Incident:** Unspecified

**Location:** Aleppo

**Coordinates:** —

**Site Description:** According to Burns<sup>4</sup>, the Bab al-Nasr (Gate of Victory),

...is buried amid shops 10m along a narrow lane on the right (south) side of the road [and] is largely Ayyubid in origin. It was reconstructed by al-Zaher Ghazi [1212 AD] — an inscription to that effect on the gate. The wall between the two bastions has been dismantled to give direct access through the gateway whose original design required two right-angle turns through the left bastion.

The Bab al-Nasr was the north gate of the Old City and was previously known as the Bab al-Yahud. According to Gaube and Wirth<sup>5</sup>, the Maidani Mosque,

Mit altem Minarett und sekundär eingesetzten alten Fenstergittern, der Gründer Husain b. Muhhammad al-Galabi ist 1536 gestorben (Gazzi, II, 414). Über dem Portal findet sich eine Inschrift von 1722.

**Site Date:** Bab al-Nasr — Ayyubid [1212 AD]; Maidani Mosque probably built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD and restored/modified around 1722 AD.

**Source of Destruction:** Combat damage

**Pattern:** Urban warfare in the Old City of Aleppo

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** ASOR CHI has already designated the Old City of Aleppo as a high priority for monitoring and remediation efforts.

**Sources:**

Online Reporting:

APSA Website

<http://apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/aleppo/monuments/1044-aleppo-al-mydani.html>

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<sup>4</sup> Burns 2009: 54.

<sup>5</sup> Gaube and Wirth 1984: 396.

Scholarly:

Burns, Ross. 2009. *The Monuments of Syria. A Guide*. (I. B. Tauris).

Gaube, Heinz an Eugen Wirth. 1984. *Aleppo*. (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert), Bab al-Nasr, No. 277, pp. 162–168; Mosque al-Maidani, no. 486, pp. 114, 186, 396.



Before and after photos of the damage to the Maidani Mosque, UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Aleppo (APSA).



Damage to the Al-Maidani Mosque in Aleppo (APSA).



Damage to the Al-Maidani Mosque in Aleppo (APSA).



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Damage to the Al-Maidani Mosque in Aleppo (APSA).



Damage to the Al-Maidani Mosque in Aleppo (APSA).



Damage to the Bab al-Nasr area in Aleppo (APSA).





Damage to the Bab al-Nasr in Aleppo (APSA).



Damage to the Bab al-Nasr in Aleppo (APSA).



Damage to the Maidani Mosque area in Aleppo (APSA).



Damage to the Maidani Mosque area in Aleppo (APSA).



Combat damage to the Maidani Mosque in Aleppo (APSA).



The Maidani Mosque prior to severe combat damage (APSA).

## SHI 14-096

**Report Date:** December 7, 2014

**Site Name:** The UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Bosra

**Date of Incident:** December 1, 2014

**Location:** Daraa Governorate

**Coordinates:** —

**Site Description:** See SHI Incident Report SHI14-037 and SHI14-042

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

**Source of Destruction:** Combat — DGAM cites a massive explosion

Yesterday, a massive blast in Bosra, caused by clashes, had taken place at al-Omari Mosque area between Khidr mosque and the underground souq.

Bosra resources [SIC, sources] reported that many traditional houses in the archaeological area seriously damaged in the explosion.

Till now, Antiquities of Bosra have not been able to asses[s] the damage because of the clashes.

**Pattern:** Bosra has seen sustained damage due to combat in recent weeks.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** ASOR CHI has already designated Bosra as a high priority for monitoring and remediation efforts.

### **Sources:**

#### Online Reporting:

DGAM Website: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1526>

#### Scholarly:

Numerous. See especially the basic bibliography provided in Ross Burns 2009.

## SHI 14-097

**Report Date:** December 7, 2014

**Site Name:** The Madrasa Sultaniyeh, UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Aleppo

**Date of Incident:** December 7, 2014

**Location:** UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Aleppo

**Coordinates:**—

**Site Description:** See SHI Incident Reports SHI14-004, SHI14-024.

This madrasa and mosque (1225 CE) lies immediately south of the citadel's main entrance and was badly damaged in previous tunnel bomb detonations. It contains the tomb of Sultan Malik al-Zaher. Gaube and Wirth provide the following dating details, "Von Gazi begonnen und im Jahre 1225 vollendet."<sup>6</sup> According to Ross Burns,

Across the road and a little to the left as you look from the entrance of the citadel lies the Madrasa Sultaniye completed in 1223–1225 by Governor (Sultan) al-Aziz, a son of Sultan al-Zaher Ghazi, the project having begun under his father. The *mihrab* of the prayer room is particularly commended. To the left lies a modest room which contained the cenotaphs of Sultan al-Zaher Ghazi and his family.<sup>7</sup>

**Site Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> Century AD

**Source of Destruction:** Probable tunnel bomb

**Pattern:** The use of tunnel bombs at the southern side of the Aleppo citadel — four previous episodes were linked to Islamic Front.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** ASOR SHI has already designated the Old City of Aleppo as a high priority for monitoring and remediation efforts.

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<sup>6</sup> Gaube and Wirth 1984: No. 342, p. 382.

<sup>7</sup> Burns 2009: 38–39.

**Sources:**

Online Reporting:

DGAM Website: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1531>

Scholarly:

Burns, Ross. 2009. *The Monuments of Syria. A Guide*. (I. B. Tauris).

Gaube, Heinz and Eugen Wirth. 1984. *Aleppo: historische und geographische Beiträge zur baulichen Gestaltung, zur sozialen Organisation und zur wirtschaftlichen Dynamik einer vorderasiatischen Fernhandelsmetropole*. Two Volumes. (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert).