

ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives (CHI): Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq¹

NEA-PSHSS-14-001

Weekly Report 20 – December 22, 2014

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Key Points

- New information is available on the **militarization** of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of **Palmyra** and related damage.
- New information is available on **combat damage** in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of **Aleppo**.
- According to **APSA**, the famous Ayyubid **Madrassa Firdows** dating to ca. 1236 AD in Aleppo is in poor condition and at risk for further deterioration due to damage sustained from alleged SARG airstrikes in March 2014 as well as other combat-related damage.
- **DGAM** intends to implement inventory projects and remediation projects in areas under its control with specified foci including an inventory of Christian icons as well as heritage places and cultural repositories in western **Homs Governorate**.
- New details continue to surface on the **ISIL destruction of Sufi shrines** in Aleppo Governorate.

Heritage Timeline

December 21, 2014

APSA posted video showing heavy weapons emplacements at the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of **Palmyra** dating December 17, 2014. [SHI Incident Report SHI 14-103](#).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-N1LssEEA&feature=youtu.be>

- **APSA** submitted a condition report to ASOR CHI on the current status of the **Madrassa Firdows** in the Old City of Aleppo. [SHI Incident Report SHI 14-102](#). <http://apsa2011.com/index.php/fr/>
- **DGAM** announced the implementation of an inventory project to document Christian icons in Syria.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1545>

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.

- **Heritage for Peace** posted its newsletter entitled *Damage to Syria's Heritage 21 December 2014*.
- December 19, 2014** **DGAM** announced the renewed activities of the Homs Department of Antiquities, including remediation efforts in western Homs Governorate. <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1543>
- **DGAM** posted a brief status report on heritage sites in **Idlib Governorate**. **SHI Incident Report SHI 14-101**. <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1541>
- December 17, 2014** **AAAS** posted a report entitled *Ancient History, Modern Destruction: Assessing the Status of Syria's Tentative World Heritage Sites Using High-Resolution Satellite Imagery*. <http://www.aaas.org/page/ancient-history-modern-destruction-assessing-status-syria-s-tentative-world-heritage-sites-7>
- December 15, 2014** **APSA** posted a report on the **ISIL** deliberate destruction of an as yet unidentified Sufi mausoleum in **Al-Safirah** (a village west of Lake Jabbul) in **Aleppo Governorate**. **SHI Incident Report SHI 14-100**.
- **APSA** posted a report on the status of the **Khan Abo al-Messri [Khan 'Abdalmisri]** in **Aleppo**. **SHI Incident Report SHI 14-099**. <http://apsa2011.com/index.php/fr/provinces/alep/monuments/1058-aleppo-1452.html>

Military and Political Context

There is no update on the military and political context this week due to time constraints.

Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions

1) The site of Palmyra has been substantially damaged by militarization.

*The ASOR CHI geospatial team will complete a thorough assessment to document all disturbance to the site.

Incident Reports

SHI 14-099

Report Date: December 21, 2014

Site Name: Khan al-Messri/Khan 'Abdalmisri/ Khan Abdo al-Masri or al-Messri, UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Aleppo

Date of Incident: Video footage recorded December 13, 2014

Location: Aleppo Governorate

Coordinates: —

Site Description: The “Khan al-Messri” shown in the APSA video is the “Han ‘Abdalmisri” I and II structures of Gaube and Wirth (nos. 361 and 362) located south of the citadel based on the similarity in names, courtyard size and entrance locations, Ottoman architectural style, and the direction and proximity of the damaged minaret of the al-Otrush Mosque shown in the background of the video². The two khans are described as “Über Portal 1884 datiert,” “Färberei mit Bleicherei” in the case of building I, and “Lager und Seifenfabrik” in the case of building II (see ma below)³. The 15th century dating originally provided by the APSA website and location the near the Bab Qinassrin stem from an incorrect identification of this khan complex with the Khan al-Qadi based on information provided by the Aleppo data source/photographer.

Site Date: Ottoman, ca. 1884 AD.

Source of Destruction: Urban warfare — the structure’s modern concrete roof has been hit by small ordinance. Walls and roof may also have been broken through to make protected routes through the building for ground forces operating in the area.

Pattern: Intense combat in the area immediately south of the Aleppo Citadel for control of the citadel entrance.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI has already designated the UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of Aleppo a high priority for monitoring and remediation efforts.

² Gaube and Wirth 1984: 384.

³ Ibid.

Sources:

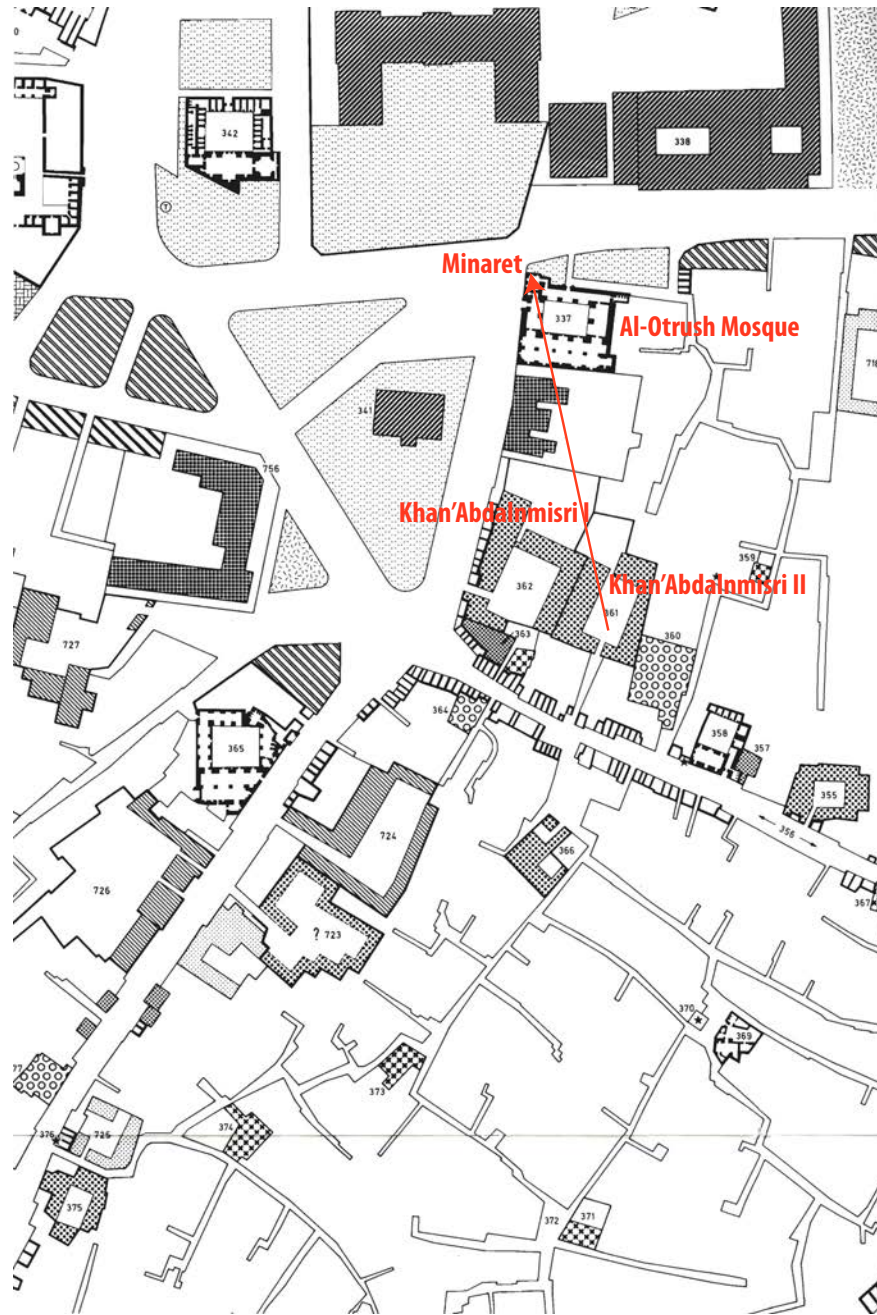
Online Reporting:

APSA Website

<http://apsa2011.com/index.php/fr/provinces/alep/monuments/1058-aleppo-1452.html>

Scholarly:

Gaube, Heinz and Eugen Wirth. 1984. *Aleppo*. (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag).



**Location of the “Khan al-Messri” in the UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of Aleppo.
(Gaube and Wirth 1984, M. Danti 2014)**

SHI 14-100

Report Date: December 21, 2014

Site Name: Safirah Sufi Shrine (Name Unknown)

Date of Incident: Probably November 2014

Location: In or near the town of Safirah, Aleppo Governorate

Coordinates: —

Site Description: Based on the photos and accompanying information from Islamic State postings on their websites and on Twitter, a small Sufi shrine in Safirah was destroyed using an improvised explosive device sometime in November 2014 resulting in the destruction of the modern building and the tomb within.

Site Date: Modern construction

Source of Destruction: Islamic State intentional destruction

Pattern: Islamic State deliberate destruction of Sufi built heritage

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI has implemented a special project to track IS deliberate destructions of cultural heritage.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

APSA Website:

Scholarly:

APSA website:

<http://apsa2011.com/index.php/fr/provinces/alep/monuments/1054-aleppo-al-sefira-2.html>



The Sufi mausoleum in Safirah before the Islamic State deliberate destruction (APSA).



The Sufi mausoleum in Safirah with explosive device planted and after the Islamic State deliberate destruction (APSA).

SHI 14-101

Report Date: December 21, 2014

Site Name: Various sites in Idlib Governorate

Date of Incident: 2014

Location: Al-Bara, Ebla, Kafr Aqab, and Maarat al-Numan Museum

Coordinates: —

Site Description: According to the DGAM,

The Idlib Antiquities report said that the pace of looting and vandals by illegal excavation and breaking stones in various archeological sites has been stopped lately including in **al Bara**. Also, in **Ebla** where the number of foreign arrivals from the neighboring villages has declined and limited excavations witnessed in **Kafr Aqab** in al-Wastani Mountain.

It said that **Maarat al-Numan Museum** is protect by local community efforts. The guards did not reported any illegal buildings within the archaeological sites there.

Idlib Antiquities is still communicating with the local community there to spread awareness in order to reduce damages to archaeological sites.

See also SHI Incident Reports SHI 14-008, 016, 041, 067, 081, 083, 094

Site Date: Various

Source of Destruction: Looting and vandalism. The specified threats to the Maarat al-Numan Museum (and its surrounding area?) — “illegal building” — are unclear.

Pattern: While the town of Idlib remains under the control of SARG, Idlib Governorate is largely under the control of Jabhat al-Nusra and this DGAM report is both difficult to verify and sounds overly optimistic.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI has already designated the Dead Cities region as a high priority for monitoring and remediation. Other foreign NGOs have focused on assisting the Maarat al-Numan Museum in 2014.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

DGAM Website: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1541>

SHI 14-102

Report Date: December 21, 2014

Site Name: Madrasa Firdows/Madrasa Firdous

Date of Incident: March 2, 2014 and probably other incidents

Location: Old City of Aleppo

Coordinates: —

Site Description: According to Gaube and Wirth⁴, “Gut erhaltene aiyübidische Anlage, um 1236 errichtet.” According to Burns⁵,

...the Madrasa Firdows or School of Paradise, truly the most beautiful of the mosques of Aleppo. The religious school was built by Daifa Khatun, the widow of Sultan al-Zaher Ghazi in 1234–7. She was regent at the time for her grandson, al-Nasr Yusuf II (r 1242–60) and had taken a particular interest in encouraging Sufi mysticism. This certainly comes through in the superb architecture, a masterpiece of simplicity and balance. A long inscription band, carried on the rear walls of the *riwaqs*, underlines the Sufi affiliations of the community. An *iwan* at one end looks out on an octagonal pool in a courtyard framed by arcading of simple broken arches supported by fine ancient or imitation columns. The capitals are particularly well proportioned, based on a honeycombed pattern. The prayer hall is covered by three honeycombed domes supported on twelve-sided bases. The central *mihrab* is a restrained but assured masterpiece, decorated in simple interlaced straps and arabesques. Unusually a separate *iwan* lies on the northern side of the madrasa.

Site Date: Ayyubid. Built ca. 1236. According to Tabba,

The Firdaws is dated to 633/1235 by an inscriptional cartouche above a window in the middle of its eastern facade. This date is problematic since it contradicts the information provided by the two historical texts in the building. Both of these texts mention that Dayfa Khatun founded this building (*hadha ma-ansha'athu*) during the reign (*fi ayyami*) of al-Nasir Salah al-Din II, who came to power in 634/1236 immediately after the death of his father al Aziz Muhammad. Herzfeld . . . resolves this inconsistency by proposing that the building was begun in 633 but completed after 634, when Dayfa Khatun reigned on behalf of her infant grandson until her death in 640/1242.

Source of Destruction: Urban Warfare

Pattern: Combat in the Old City of Aleppo.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: —

⁴ Gaube and Wirth 1984: 411.

⁵ Burns 2009: 49–50.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

APSA Website:

<http://apsa2011.com/index.php/fr/provinces/alep/monuments.html>

Scholarly:

Burns, Ross. 2009. *The Monuments of Syria. A Guide*. (I.B. Tauris), pp. 49–50.

Gaube, Heinz and Eugen Wirth. 1984. *Aleppo*. (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag), no. 662, pp. 87, 98, 150, 411.

Herzfeld, Ernst. 1955. *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicarum. Deuxième partie: Syrie du Nord. Inscriptions et monuments d'Alep*. (Cairo), 297–302, Inscriptions no. 160–62, Pl. CXXVIII.

Sauvaget, J. 1931. "Inventaire des monuments musulmans de la ville d'Alep." *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 5: 59–114, No. 31.

_____. 1941. *Alep. Essai sur le développement d'une grande ville syrienne des origines au milieu du XIX siècle*. 2 Volumes. Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique 34 (Paris), Fig. 36.

Tabbaa, Yasser. 1997. *Constructions of Power and Piety in Medieval Aleppo*. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University), pp. 7, 142, 168–81, figs. 191–212.



The Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).



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The Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).



The Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo showing damage to the inscriptions (APSA).



The Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo — the structure has 11 domes (APSA).



The Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).



The Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).



Interior of the Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).



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Interior of the Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).



Protection the Mihrab 15.02.2012
Mihrab of the Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).



Interior of the Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).

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The Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).



Minaret of the Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).



Iwan of the Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).



The Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).



The Madrasa Firdows in Aleppo (APSA).

SHI 14-103

Report Date: December 21, 2014

Site Name: Palmyra — Diocletian Camp area

Date of Incident: YouTube video footage dated December 17, 2014

Location: Homs Governorate

Coordinates: —

Site Description: —

Site Date: Various, mainly 1st and 2nd centuries CE

Source of Destruction: SARG militarization of the site

Pattern: Militarization of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Palmyra with simultaneous vandalism, looting, and substantial and destructive site modification.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI has already designated the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Palmyra a high priority for monitoring and remediation efforts.

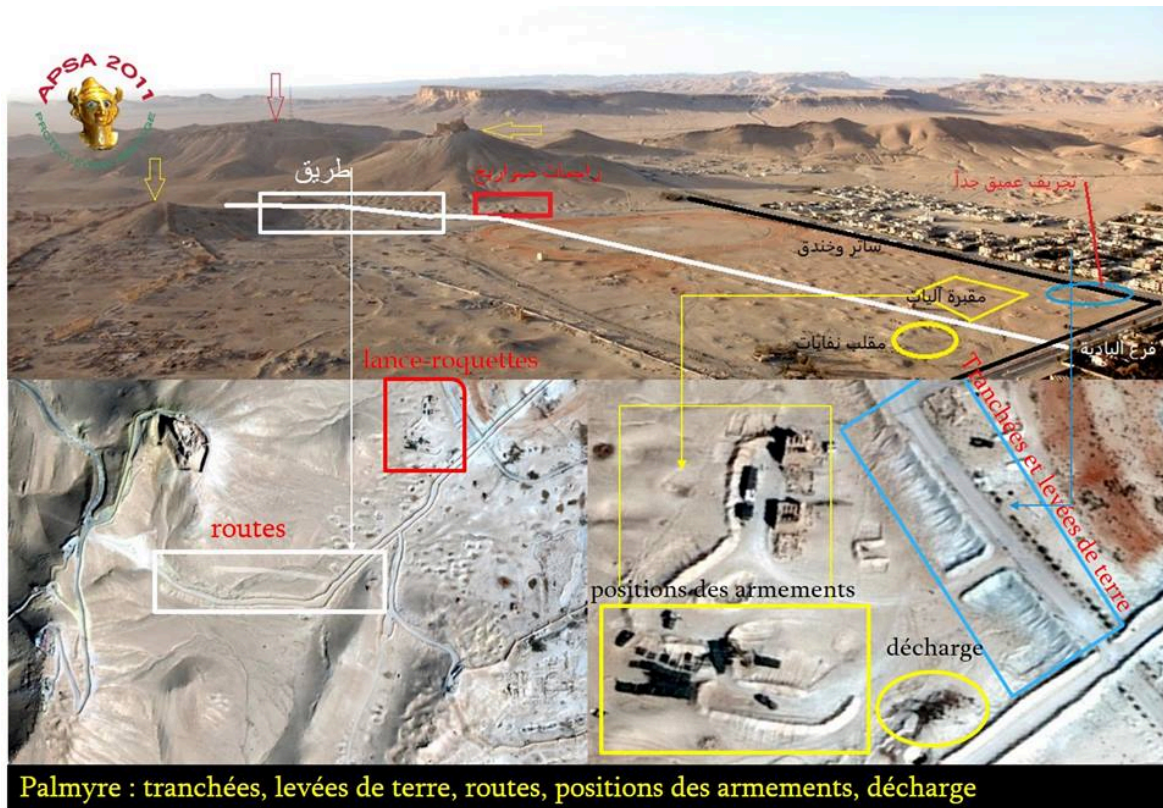
Sources:

Online Reporting:

APSA Website <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-N1LssEEA&feature=youtu.be>

Scholarly:

See ASOR CHI bibliography



Areas of disturbance at Palmyra as documented by APSA (APSA).



Digital Globe image from December 19, 2014 showing one of the military installations at Palmyra near the Camp of Diocletian (Digital Globe 2014).