

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

NEA-PSHSS-14-001

Weekly Report 23 – January 12, 2015

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Key Points

- News agencies operating in Aleppo posted photos showing extensive damage from a December 30, 2014 tunnel bomb in the Old City. The photos indicate a modern structure on the south side of Mutannabi Street near Sabaa Bahrat Square was completely destroyed. ASOR CHI has determined the blast also apparently destroyed the adjacent **Khan at-Tutun** (18th Century AD) and **As-Sinjir Mosque** (1921 AD rebuild of an early 15th Century mosque). See [Updated SHI Incident Report SHI14-104](#).
- International news media covered the destruction of the **Mausoleum of Imam Nawawi** in Nawa (Deraa Governorate), reported as dating to the 13th Century AD. ASOR CHI has determined the structure is in fact **modern** and probably marks the 13th Century burial site of this famous legal scholar. This high profile deliberate destruction by **Jabhat al-Nusra** may mark a disturbing increase in the organization's use of this tactic. See [SHI Incident Report SHI15-001](#).

Heritage Timeline

January 11, 2015

Institute for the Study of War reported that **ISIL** launched an attack against the Samarra Dam in Iraq that included the “historic area of the Khalifa Palace [Dar al-Khalifa/Jawsaq al-Khaqani] and Ashiq Palace.” No damage was reported and Iraqi forces drove off the attack. <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-UbEqgGyhum0/VLMG8fwHyfl/AAAAAAAAACg0/UEbwW0T1mRU/s1600/2015-1-11%2BSituation%2BReport%2BHigh-01.png>

January 9, 2015

APSA Facebook site posted photos of destruction in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of **Aleppo** reportedly connected to the December 30, 2014 **tunnel bombing** in the area of Sejin Street. [Updated SHI Incident Report SHI14-104](#). <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1157137034393406.1073741892.324869057620212&type=1>

January 7, 2015

Jabhat al-Nusra deliberately destroyed the modern **Mausoleum of Imam Nawawi** in Nawa (Deraa Governorate). [Updated SHI Incident Report SHI15-001](#).

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.

APSA reported on the incident.

<http://apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/daraa/monuments/1080-deraa-al-imam-al-newouy.html>

- APSA posted a report on the state of Tell al-Atarib in Aleppo Governorate. [SHI Incident Report SHI15-002](#).
<http://apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/aleppo/sites/1083-aleppo-al-atarib.html>

January 4, 2015

hmbalshaar Facebook site posted photos of destruction in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of **Aleppo** reportedly connected to the December 30, 2014 **tunnel bombing** in the area of Sabaa Bahrat Square. [Updated SHI Incident Report SHI14-104](#).
<https://www.facebook.com/hbmalshaar3?fref=photo>

Military and Political Context

The main theaters of military operations immediately prior to the reporting period in Syria were²:

- 1) Eastern Ghouta, characterized by infighting among rebel groups operating there;
- 2) Kobani/Ayn al-Arab, where YPG fighters made substantive gains in the city against ISIL;
- 3) Latakia, where rebel fighters fired rockets, striking areas on the outskirts of the city;
- 4) The Jobar suburbs of Damascus, where heavy fighting is ongoing;
- 5) Qalamoun, northwest of Damascus, where combined forces of Jabhat al-Nusra, ISIL, and FSA-affiliated rebels made substantial gains against pro-SARG elements, threatening northern supply lines into Damascus;
- 6) U.S./Coalition airstrikes on Raqqa, Hasakah, Deir ez-Zor, and Ayn al-Arab targeting ISIL.

Overall, the situation in Syria has seen a modest reduction in major military operations attributable to the onset of winter weather. Rebel forces continue to compete for dominance in the Aleppo and Damascus theaters of operation and to form broader alliances, further weakening the autonomy of FSA-affiliated rebel groups and favoring Jabhat al-Nusra and other more hardline Islamist elements. On December 31, 2014, the large Baghara tribal confederation centered on Deir ez-Zor Governorate announced its willingness to fight ISIL in response to ISIL abductions of leading members of the tribe³. ISIL has generally shifted its stance with regard to relations with affiliated jihadist fighters and alliances with tribal groups, taking on a more aggressive posture in relations, a move not dissimilar to Jabhat al-Nusra's increasingly dominant stance with smaller rebel factions and civilian populations in southern, western, and northern Syria.

The main theaters of military operations during the reporting period in Iraq were⁴:

² For a detailed assessment of the current military situation in Syria just prior to the reporting period see Kozak, Christopher and Brian Fisher. 2015. *Syria Update: December 30, 2014–December 6, 2015* (Institute for the Study of War).

³ Williams, Lauren. 2014. "Tribes seek support as tensions rise with ISIS," *Daily Star* December 31, 2014. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2014/Dec-31/282728-tribes-seek-support-as-tensions-rise-with-isis.ashx>.

⁴ For a detailed assessment of the current military situation in Iraq see Sinan, Adnan and Brian Fisher. 2014. *Control of Terrain in Iraq: January 7, 2015*. (Institute for the Study of War); Adnan, Sinan and Brian Fisher.

- 1) The Bashiqa area east of Mosul, where Peshmerga forces and U.S./Coalition airstrikes continued to target ISIL in the area;
- 2) Gwer in western Erbil Province, where Peshmerga and U.S./Coalition airstrikes repelled an ISIL surprise attack;
- 3) Anbar Province, along the main Euphrates highway corridor between Haditha and Baghdad, where ISIL continued to target Iraqi forces and make territorial gains;
- 4) The southern Mosul countryside, where ISIL clashed with Iraqi combined forces;
- 5) Clashes at the Maktab Khalid Tigris River crossing north of Tikrit, where ISIL attempted to prevent cross-river traffic.;
- 6) ISIL attacks on Peshmerga forces southwest of Kirkuk.

Generally, the situation in Iraq was characterized by heavy fighting along the Haditha–Baghdad corridor in Anbar Province and the Baghdad–Mosul corridor. ISIL is attempting to prevent Mosul from being encircled by Iraqi combined forces that threaten to cut off the city and interrupt command and control and logistics between northern Iraq and northern Syria.

Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions

- 1) Satellite imagery of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Aleppo shows many large craters typical of tunnel bombs that have not been connected to documented incidents of tunnel bombing.

*ASOR CHI will continue its investigation of the use of tunnel bombs. Should anyone have street-level photographs of the destruction — especially photos taken from rooftops showing major monuments useful for locational purposes — or information on the use of tunnel bombs not documented by the media, we would greatly appreciate hearing from you.

2015. *Iraq Situation Report: January 4–7, 2015* (ISW); ISW Iraq Team, Sinan Adnan, and Brian Fisher. 2015. *Iraq Situation Report: January 8–9, 2015* (ISW); Adnan, Sinan and Nichole Dicharry. 2015. *Iraq Situation Report: January 9–11, 2015* (ISW). <http://www.understandingwar.org/iraq-blog>

Incident Reports

SHI 15-001

Report Date: January 11, 2015

Site Name: Mausoleum of Imam Nawawi

Date of Incident: January 7, 2015

Location: Nawa, Deraa Governorate

Coordinates: —

Site Description: The structure is a modern building. It is presumably located over the 13th Century gravesite of Imam Nawawi.

Abu Zakaria Mohiuddin Yahya Ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi (1233–1277 AD) was a Sunni Muslim author on *Fiqh* and *Hadith*. On legal matters, Imam Nawawi is regarded as the authoritative viewpoint in the *Shafi'i Madhhab*. As his name implies, Nawa in Syria was his hometown.

The Shafa'i School is the predominant school of Islamic jurisprudence among Sunnis across much of the Muslim world. This school of jurisprudence is not at odds with Salafist beliefs, such as those of Jabhat al-Nusra who destroyed the mausoleum, and in fact Salafis can come from this Sunni *fiqh*. JN's motivation for destroying this mausoleum likely derives from the monument's perceived role as *bid'ah* (innovation, heresy) as a site of *tawassul* (intercession), which Salafis maintain leads to *shirk* (polytheism).

Site Date: The date has erroneously been published in many places as 13th Century (e.g., *Aljazeera* story) although photos of the structure clearly show a modern building with reinforced concrete structural elements. Possibly the modern structure superseded an earlier mausoleum located at the gravesite.

Source of Destruction: Deliberate destruction by Jabhat al-Nusra militants. Various sources report that masked JN militants drove a pickup with a mounted machine gun into the town of Nawa at 4–5 AM to plant explosives in the mausoleum. They then detonated the charges in an enormous blast. The modern mausoleum was totally destroyed. The building lies at the center of the Imam Nawawi Cemetery. Masked gunmen in this same pickup arrested youth in Nawa on January 4, 2015.

Pattern: Such deliberate destructions of heritage places are usually the work of ISIL over the last four months in northern and eastern Syria and northern Iraq, although JN has committed such acts in the past. This may mark the start of a new pattern for JN in

an attempt to compete with ISIL for attention and to promote their Salafist credentials by attacking perceived *bid'ah*.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: —

Sources:

Online Reporting:

APSA Website: 10 photos and one video.

<http://apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/daraa/monuments/1080-deraa-al-imam-al-newouy.html>

Aljazeera

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/syria-rebels-destroy-13th-century-muslim-tomb-2015189829785527.html>

Scholarly:



The modern mausoleum of Imam Nawawi in Nawa (Deraa Governorate) (APSA).



The modern mausoleum of Imam Nawawi in Nawa (Deraa Governorate) destroyed by Jabhat al-Nusra on January 7, 2015 (APSA).



The modern mausoleum of Imam Nawawi in Nawa (Deraa Governorate) destroyed by Jabhat al-Nusra on January 7, 2015 (APSA).



The modern mausoleum of Imam Nawawi in Nawa (Deraa Governorate) destroyed by Jabhat al-Nusra on January 7, 2015 (APSA).



Before-and-after photos of the modern mausoleum of Imam Nawawi in Nawa (Deraa Governorate) destroyed by Jabhat al-Nusra on January 7, 2015 (APSA).



The modern mausoleum of Imam Nawawi in Nawa (Deraa Governorate) (APSA).



The modern mausoleum of Imam Nawawi in Nawa (Deraa Governorate) destroyed by Jabhat al-Nusra on January 7, 2015 (APSA).



The modern mausoleum of Imam Nawawi in Nawa (Deraa Governorate) (APSA).



The modern mausoleum of Imam Nawawi in Nawa (Deraa Governorate) destroyed by Jabhat al-Nusra on January 7, 2015 (APSA).



The modern mausoleum of Imam Nawawi in Nawa (Deraa Governorate) destroyed by Jabhat al-Nusra on January 7, 2015 (APSA).

Incident Reports

SHI 15-002

Report Date: January 11, 2015

Site Name: Tell al-Atarib (probably Early Bronze Age *Darib* of the Ebla Texts/kingdom)

Date of Incident: Video dated December 15, 2014

Location: Aleppo Governorate ca. 50 km north of ancient Ebla (Tell Mardikh).

Coordinates: —

Site Description: The tell probably dates to the Early Bronze Age and later periods as evidenced by the stone-block masonry revetment, blunt pointed arch, and standing architecture on the mound of probably Medieval–Ottoman date. Modern construction is also present.

Site Date: Probably Bronze Age, Medieval, Ottoman, and Modern.

Source of Destruction: No recent destruction is mentioned in the APSA reporting. The site may have been recently disturbed by construction activity based on Digital Globe satellite imagery (see below).

Pattern: —

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: The most recent satellite image of the tell dates to December 23, 2014.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

APSA Website: <http://apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/aleppo/sites/1083-aleppo-al-atarib.html>

Scholarly:

See the bibliography on ancient *Darib* in Ristvet, Lauren. 2011. "Travel and the Making of North Mesopotamian Polities," *BASOR* 361: 1–31.



View of Tell al-Atarib.



Digital Globe screenshot of Tell al-Atarib, Syria dated December 24, 2014 (Digital Globe 2015).



View of Tell al-Atarib (APSA).



View of Tell al-Atarib.



View of Tell al-Atarib (APSA).



View of Tell al-Atarib (APSA).



View of Tell al-Atarib (APSA).



View of Tell al-Atarib (APSA).



View of Tell al-Atarib (APSA).



View of Tell al-Atarib (APSA).



View of Tell al-Atarib (APSA).

SHI 14-107 Updated

Report Date: January 4, 2015; Revised January 11, 2015

Site Name: Khan at-Tatan and As-Sajir Mosque — UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Aleppo

Date of Incident: December 30, 2014

Locations: One or two tunnel bombs were initially reported by various sources as located under the: 1) Dar al-Sharia Court area in the Sabaa Bahrat neighborhood, and 2) the nearby Sweiqa [Suwaiqa] Market northwest of the citadel — UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Aleppo.

Photos of the blast site became available from APSA, HMB, and other media outlets on January 4 and January 9, 2014. ASOR CHI identified the location as the south side of Al-Mutanabbi Street ca. 180m east of Sabaa Bahrat Square. The tunnel bomb seems to have completely destroyed a modern structure and the historic Khan at-Tutun and abutting As-Sajir Mosque (see map included here).

Coordinates: —

Site Description: A tunnel bomb was detonated under a modern building on the south side of Mutannabi Street approximately 180m east of Sabaa Bahrat Square. Two historic structures immediately west of the modern structure appear to have been completely destroyed — the Khan at-Tutun and the As-Sanjir Mosque. ASOR CHI will confirm this when satellite imagery becomes available. Gaube and Wirth⁵ describe the Khan at-Tutun (no. 262) in some detail,

Anlage, die zeitlich nahe an den Hanen Kat. 260 und 264 in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts entstanden sein dürfte.

Sehr hübscher zweigeschossiger osmanischer Han. Boxen unten geschlossen; im Obergeschoß teils offene Arkaden, teils Hauswand mit Fenstern. Obergeschoß erinnert in Einteilung an vornehme Wohnung mit Sommer- und Winter Wohntrakten: Nordseite Hauswand mit Fenstern ohne Galerie; Ostseite Boxen hinter Arkaden; Westseite Boxen mit offenem Umgang ohne Arkaden; Südseite Iwan hinter Arkaden, hinter dem Iwan dann Boxen. Das ganze Untergeschoß voll von Möbeltischlern. Im Obergeschoß lauter Schuhmacher. Nach J. Tate (1981, Nr. 7) gehört der Han zu dem 1763 von Hagg Musa gestifteten Waqf.

With regard to the As-Sinjir Mosque, Gaube and Wirth⁶ provide the following short description, “Anstelle einer älteren Moschee 1926 im Obergeschoß eines Landengebäudes errichtet. Diesen Vorgängerbau erwähnt wahrscheinlich Gazzi II. Er soll eine Bauinschrift von 1407 getragen haben.”

⁵ Gaube, H. and E. Wirth. 1984. *Aleppo*. (Ludwig Reichert), p. 374.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Site Date: The Khan at-Tatun was an Ottoman construction of the second half of the 18th Century AD. The As-Sanjir Mosque was reconstructed in 1926 and replaced a building said to have had a building inscription of 1407 AD.

Source of Destruction: One (DGAM reports two) tunnel bomb(s) was detonated by the newly formed Jabha Shamiya. The DGAM reports, “The explosions caused severe damage to the market and the historical buildings in the area leading to the Sejin Street.”

Pattern: Use of tunnel bombs by rebel/Islamist forces in Old Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria. This bombing marks a critical divergence from previous patterns in which the area south of the citadel was the focus of such bombings. The expansion of publicized tunnel bombing away from the southern purlieu of the citadel is highly troubling and may signal the expansion of this highly destructive tactic, although the Sabaa Bahrat Square area — a highly strategic location — has experienced large detonations in 2014.

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

Sources:

Online Reporting:

DGAM Website:

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1560>

YouTube video posted by Abu Mustafa on Dec. 30:

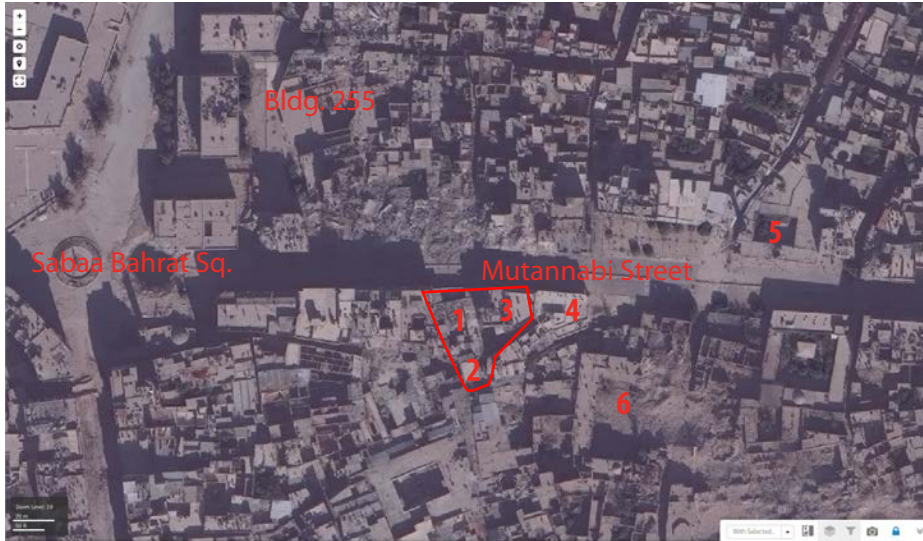
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9K-nP70LV4&feature=youtu.be>

YouTube video posted by Islamic Front

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNNvhwzIJa8&feature=youtu.be&html5=1>

Scholarly:

Gaube, H. and E. Wirth. 1984. *Aleppo*. (Ludwig Reichert), p. 374.



Screenshot of Digital Globe satellite image of Sabaa Bahrat area predating the tunnel bomb destruction.

- 1. Khan at-Tutun 3. Destroyed modern structure 5. Mihmandar Mosque
- 2. As-Sinjir Mosque 4. Modern undamaged structure 6. Khan Qurdbak



- New undamaged structure
- Dec. 30 tunnel bomb destruction

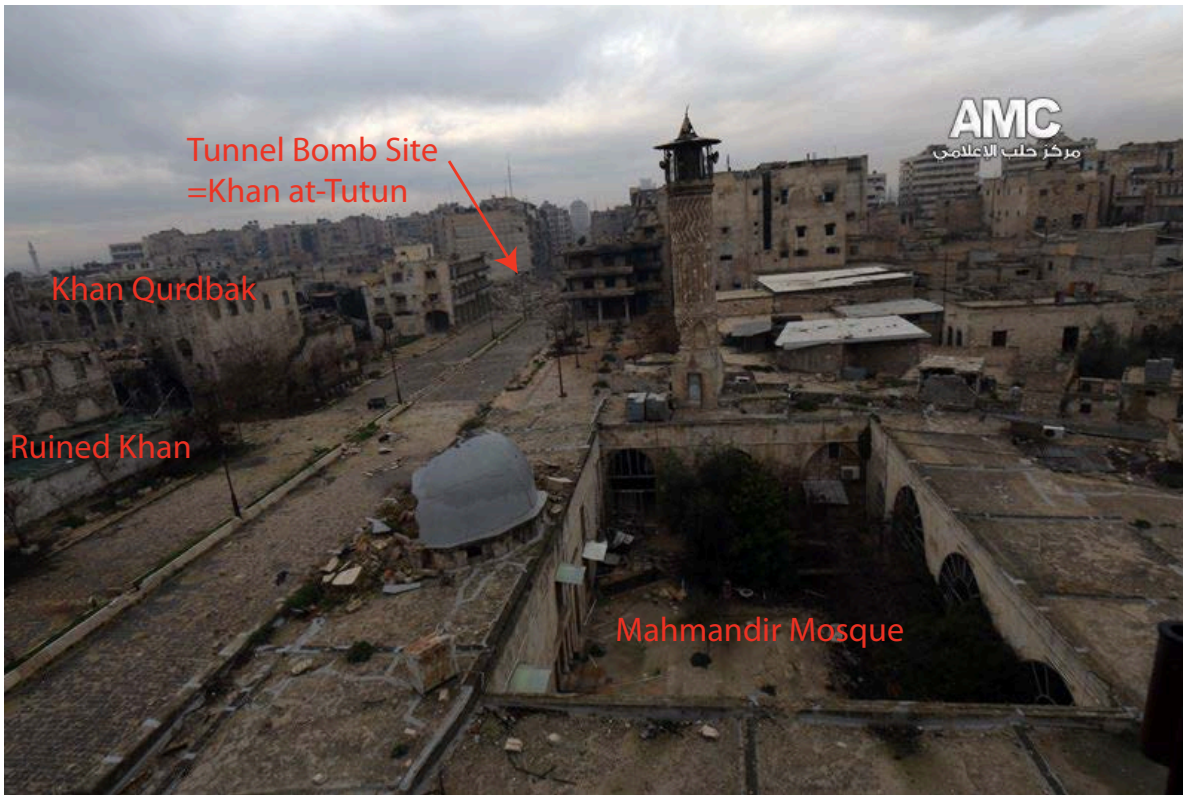
Map showing the area of the Dec. 30, 2014 tunnel bomb destruction with the locations of the destroyed Khan at-Tutun (1) and As-Sinjir Mosque (2) (ASOR CHI, M. Danti, after Gaube and Wirth 1984).



View of the crater left by the Dec. 30, 2014 tunnel bomb detonated by Jabha Shamiya that destroyed the Khan al-Tutun (mid-18th Century AD) and the As-Sinjir Mosque in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Aleppo (HBM).



The December 30, 2014 tunnel bomb detonation in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ancient City of Aleppo northwest of the citadel in the area of Sabah Bahrat Square area (DGAM).



View from Mahmandir Mosque looking west down al-Mutannabi Street (AMC).



View of the new modern structure (No. 4 on the map) beside the modern structure destroyed in the Dec. 30, 2014 tunnel bomb blast (No. 3 on the map) (HBM).



View of the new modern structure (left, No. 4 on the map) beside the modern structure destroyed in the Dec. 30, 2014 tunnel bomb blast (right, No. 3 on the map) (HBM).



View of the new modern structure (left, No. 4 on the map) with the site of the Dec. 30, 2014 tunnel bomb blast as seen from Gaubé and Wirth Building 255 to the northwest — the Aleppo citadel is in the left background (N.F.A.C.).