

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

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Weekly Report 37 — April 20, 2015

Michael D. Danti, Cheikhmous Ali, Tate Paulette, Kathryn Franklin, Allison Cuneo, LeeAnn Barnes Gordon, and David Elitzer

Executive Summary

During the reporting period, ASOR CHI noted a lull in reported heritage damage in Iraq and Syria relative to the highly elevated levels of recent weeks. As is evident in the Heritage Timeline below, world attention continues to focus on the performative, intentional destruction of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud by ISIL and the illicit antiquities pouring out of the conflict zone, as well as possible solutions to the cultural heritage crisis more generally. The recent quarterly report on heritage damage released by the Syrian Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) shows a sustained magnitude of damage relative to the last DGAM reporting period, as well as consistency in the spatial patterning and sources of damage. Illegal excavation and looting remain the most frequently reported damage incidents in Syria, although it is important to note that, while frequent, these causes of damage do not manifest the same destructive impacts as the intentional destruction of heritage places, tunnel bombs, combat damage, thefts from cultural repositories, and the reuse of ancient building materials. Combat damage is conspicuously absent from the DGAM report and may be subsumed under “Damage to Built Heritage [cause unspecified]” (see below).

Key Points

- The DGAM has posted its Q1 2015 heritage damage report, titled *Initial Damages Assessment for Syrian Cultural Heritage During the Crisis*, which details damage in 8 of 14 governorates,² including 60 heritage places and approximately 117 incidents listed by damage type. A summary produced by ASOR CHI is provided here (Table 1). The DGAM report lists damage by governorate and includes Raqqa (3 incidents), Deir ez-Zor (3 incidents), Hasakah (7 incidents), Idlib (3 incidents), Aleppo (59 incidents), Hama (3 incidents), Rif Dimashq (5 incidents), and Daraa (34 incidents). The exact dates of the reported incidents are generally unknown, as are the perpetrators of the cultural property crimes. Three incidents occurred at UNESCO Tentative List Sites, and thirty-nine incidents impacted UNESCO World Heritage Sites. (p. 2, Table 1)

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.

² The report excludes Damascus city (*Muḥāfazat Dimashq*), Quneitra, As-Suwayda, Homs, Tartus, and Latakia.

Table 1. Causes of heritage damage reported by DGAM Syria for Q1 2015

Cause of Damage	Number of Incidents	Damage Type as % of Total Incidents
Illegal Excavations [for antiquities]	34	29.06%
Illegal Construction	16	13.68%
Looting	14	11.97%
Damage to Built Heritage [cause unspecified]	13	11.11%
Reuse of Ancient Stones for Building Material	11	9.40%
Vandalism	6	5.13%
Tunnel Bomb	5	4.27%
Bulldozing	4	3.42%
Stone Quarrying	4	3.42%
Military Occupation	3	2.56%
Road Construction	3	2.56%
Burning [an ancient church]	1	0.85%
Digging [not specified for antiquities]	1	0.85%
Intentional Destruction of Built Heritage	1	0.85%
Theft from Archaeological Expedition Headquarters	1	0.85%
TOTAL	117	100.00%

Heritage Timeline

April 19, 2015

The Guardian published an article titled “**Art in Iraq: ‘Baghdad is happening! It’s like New York...’**” (by Jare Arraf). Drawing on interviews with a series of artists, the article chronicles the contemporary art scene in Baghdad.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/19/art-in-iraq>

April 18, 2015

APSA posted a series of images showing the destruction of the door of the **Byzantine tomb at Shinshara** (Idlib Governorate, Syria).

ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0068.

<http://apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/idlib/sites/1201-dlibshenshara-2.html>

- *The Guardian* published an article titled “**Peer furious at UK ‘dithering’ over treaty to protect cultural heritage**” (by Dalya Alberge). The article is based on an interview with **Colin Renfrew** (Lord of Kaimsthorn; Senior Fellow, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge University), who expresses frustration at the fact that **Britain has still not ratified the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict**, adopted at The Hague in 1954 and signed by more than 120 countries, including the US.
http://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/apr/18/lord-renfrew-iraq-nimrud-hague-isis-islamic-state?CMP=share_btn_tw
 - The Daily Star (Lebanon) published an article titled “**European authorities on alert for looted Syrian antiquities**” (by Alice Ritchie). The article draws attention to the challenges involved in tracking and recovering objects that have been looted from Syria and Iraq and that have already or will gradually make their way onto the international market for illicit antiquities.
<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Apr-18/294895-european-authorities-on-alert-for-looted-syrian-antiquities.ashx>
 - **The British Institute for the Study of Iraq** (BISI) and **SOAS** (University of London) held a colloquium titled “**Iraq Heritage – The Challenges and Solutions**” that featured four talks and a panel discussion led by experts in Iraqi cultural heritage, including BISI’s President Dr. John Curtis, Dr. Farouk al-Rawi, Dr. Lamia al-Gailani Werr, and Dr. Erica Hunter.
<http://www.bisi.ac.uk/content/iraq-heritage-challenges-and-solutions>
 - The **DGAM** posted a report on ongoing vandalism at a series of archaeological sites on **Jebel Semaan** (Simeon Mountain; Aleppo Governorate, Syria). **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 14-0069**.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1659>
- April 17, 2015
- **Mounir Bouchenaki** (Director of the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage) presented a lecture titled “**How the Arab Region Views World Heritage and the Islamic State’s Destruction of It.**” The talk was presented on the International Day for Monuments and Sites 2015 in Washington, DC.
<http://washingtonconservationguild.org/2015/04/13/lecture-arab-region-views-world-heritage-islamic-states-destruction/>
 - At a meeting held in Doha, Qatar, as part of the **United Nations Crime Conference**, experts urged Member States to implement the existing legal instruments designed to combat the **illicit trade in cultural property** and to help raise awareness about the problem.
<http://www.newkerala.com/news/2015/fullnews-45852.html>

- ***The Globe and Mail*** published an article titled “**Islamic State’s assault on artifacts is more than vandalism**” (by Kate Taylor). The article summarizes the Royal Ontario Museum’s recent public discussion on the topic of vandalism and “cultural genocide” being committed in Iraq and Syria.
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/kate-taylor-islamic-states-assault-on-artifacts-is-more-than-vandalism/article24009806>
- *U-T San Diego* published an article titled “**Americans with illegal Iraq War souvenirs go unprosecuted**” (by Michael Melia). Drawing on commentary by **Patty Gerstenblith** (Professor of Law, DePaul University) and **McGuire Gibson** (Professor of Mesopotamian Archaeology, University of Chicago), the article discusses the many items that were looted from Saddam Hussein’s palaces by US military members, contractors, and others and draws attention to the fact that very few of the people in possession of these items have been prosecuted.
<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2015/apr/17/americans-with-illegal-iraq-war-souvenirs-go/>
- The *BBC* published an article titled “**IS looting provokes call for global response**” (by Jane O’Brien). Drawing on commentary by **Tess Davis** (Antiquities Coalition), **Katharyn Hanson** (Penn Cultural Heritage Center), and **Patty Gerstenblith** (Professor of Law, DePaul University), the article highlights the need for international collaboration in the fight against the looting of archaeological sites in Syria and Iraq.
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32329681>
- *Fox News* published an article titled “**How ISIS created a terrorist art market**” (by Michael Raggi). Citing earlier articles published by *Blouin Art Info* and the *New York Times*, the article argues that many (or most) of the artifacts destroyed by ISIL at the Mosul Museum were fakes. This is part of a broader argument about ISIL’s branding campaign and their efforts to benefit from the international market in illicit antiquities. **ASOR CHI has already published a detailed report on the objects destroyed at the Mosul Museum** (see Weekly Report 31, Incident Report IHI 15-0034 Update), but it is important to reiterate that, contrary to the argument presented in the *Fox News* article and elsewhere, **most of the objects destroyed in the ISIL video were originals; they were not fakes or reproductions.**
<http://www.foxnews.com/science/2015/04/17/isis-terrorist-art-market/>

- *Hyperallergic* published an article titled “**In Battle Against ISIS, Saving Lives or Ancient Artifacts**” (by **Christopher Jones**). The article discusses the ongoing debate over whether or not military intervention is needed in the effort to protect ancient sites and antiquities in Syria and Iraq from destruction. With reference to a brief statement by **Michael Danti** (Co-director, ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives), the author draws particular attention to the moral and political implications of choosing to use deadly force against perpetrators of cultural property crime and of choosing to devote military resources to the protection of cultural heritage, when millions of people are in need of help and protection.
<http://hyperallergic.com/200005/in-battle-against-isis-saving-lives-or-ancient-artifacts/>

April 14, 2015

- *National Geographic* published an article titled “**Why ISIS Hates Archaeology and Blew Up Ancient Iraqi Palace**” (by Kristin Romey). Drawing on interviews with **Christopher Jones** (PhD student, Columbia University) and **Michael Danti** (Co-director, ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives), as well as ISIL’s magazine *Dabiq*, the article highlights some of the key motivations driving ISIL’s deliberate destruction of cultural heritage. These motivations include, 1) establishing themselves as heirs to earlier “destroyers of idols,” 2) stoking sectarian tensions, 3) critiquing archaeology and the effort to portray pre-Islamic heritage as worthy of anything but disgust, 4) angering the global community, and 5) convincing local populations that the global community cares more about ancient artifacts than the people living in the region.
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/04/150414-why-islamic-state-destroyed-assyrian-palace-nimrud-iraq-video-isis-isil-archaeology/>
- **Simone Mühl** posted a report titled “**Nimrud under Attack – A short analysis of recent destructions at Nimrud.**” The report includes comparison of screenshots from the video released by ISIL with photos taken at the site in 2008, 2009, and 2014, as well as a chart documenting the damage done to specific relief slabs.
https://www.academia.edu/11953088/Nimrud_under_attack_A_short_analysis_of_recent_destruction_at_Nimrud
- *CBC News* published an article titled “**As ISIS smashes history, curators battle to save threatened antiquities**” (by Cheryl Brown). Drawing on interviews with **Clemens Reichel** (Associate Curator, Royal Ontario Museum) and **James Cuno** (President, J. Paul Getty Trust), the article discusses the debate surrounding the repatriation of artifacts that were looted from their country of origin and/or acquired under dubious circumstances.
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/as-isis-smashes-history-curators-battle-to-save-threatened-antiquities-1.3032019>

- The **White House** issued a **press release** titled “**FACT SHEET: U.S.-Iraq Cooperation**,” which outlines the strategic partnership between the United States and the Republic of Iraq. In the section devoted to “Education and Culture,” the document mentions efforts to repatriate unlawfully removed cultural heritage, the preservation activities of the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage (IICAH), the renovation of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, and conservation efforts carried out at the site of Babylon. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/14/fact-sheet-us-iraq-cooperation>
 - The **DGAM** posted a series of images and a report on illegal excavations at **al-Mataiya village** in the eastern countryside of Daraa (Daraa Governorate, Syria). **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0067**. <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1656>
- April 13, 2015
- The *BBC* posted an **interview with Stuart Campbell** (Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology, University of Manchester), in which he discusses the recent destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq and the University of Manchester’s ongoing archaeological work in southern Iraq. <https://soundcloud.com/user571998572/2015-04-13-134649a>
- April 12, 2015
- The first four-week **Mosaic Conservation Course** (MCC) 2015–2 began in **Rieti, Italy**, and was **attended by two conservator-restorers from Syria’s DGAM**, in addition to colleagues from other countries. MCC is part of the MOSAIKON initiative to build local capacity for the conservation and management of mosaics in the Mediterranean region. <http://www.cca-roma.org/en/mcc-mosaic-conservation-course---2015-2>
- April 8, 2015
- PRI* published an article titled “**With ISIS destroying priceless artifacts in Iraq, some museums are hesitant to return looted artifacts**” (by Julia Lowrie Henderson). Based on an interview with **James Cuno** (President, J. Paul Getty Trust), the article summarizes Cuno’s position on the purchasing of looted objects by museums so that they can be placed in “protective custody” and his critique of UNESCO’s position on the repatriation of objects held by museums. <http://www.pri.org/stories/2015-04-08/isis-destroying-priceless-artifacts-iraq-some-museums-are-hesitant-return-looted>
- April 7, 2015
- Gates of Nineveh* published a blog post titled “**Assessing the Damage at Hatra**” (by Christopher Jones). The post includes analysis of the video released by ISIL on April 3, 2015, and screenshots of the pieces of sculpture that were shown being vandalized and/or destroyed in the video. <https://gatesofnineveh.wordpress.com/2015/04/07/assessing-the-damage-at-hatra/>

Military and Political Context

The main theaters of military operations during the reporting period in Syria were:

1. Aleppo³
 - Late on April 13, rebels attacked the Syrian government Air Force Intelligence headquarters in Aleppo, with clashes ensuing over the following 24 hours.
 - During the reporting period, Syrian government forces reportedly dropped barrel bombs on rebel-held areas in Aleppo.⁴
2. Yarmouk Refugee Camp, Damascus
 - During the reporting period, Palestinian militia Aknaf Beit al-Maqdis, with rebel support, clashed with ISIL fighters in the Palestinian Yarmouk Refugee Camp, a neighborhood of southern Damascus.⁵
3. Daraa Governorate
 - During the reporting period, Syrian government airstrikes reportedly killed at least 16 civilians in the rebel-held towns of Bael, Karak Sharqi, and Tafas.⁶
4. Idlib Governorate
 - During the reporting period, Syrian government forces reportedly dropped barrel bombs around the governorate.⁷
5. Kobani Area
 - During the reporting period, about a dozen coalition airstrikes hit ISIL positions around Kobani.⁸
6. Hasakah Area, Hasakah Governorate
 - During the reporting period, about half a dozen coalition airstrikes hit ISIL positions around Hasakah.⁹

Other key points:

- On April 13, the Southern Front, an alliance of Western-backed rebels that control a small but strategic area near the Jordanian and Israeli borders, released official statements denouncing military cooperation with al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra.¹⁰

³ AP, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/04/14/world/middleeast/ap-ml-syria.html>

⁴ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/syria-steps-up-airstrikes-on-rebel-held-aleppo-1429204918>;
<http://syriahr.com/en/2015/04/explosive-barrels-kill-and-wound-many-civilians-in-aleppo-and-dara/>;
<http://syriahr.com/en/2015/04/human-losses-and-bombardment-with-explosive-barrels-on-aleppo/>

⁵ AP, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/04/15/world/middleeast/ap-ml-syria.html>;
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/15/us-mideast-crisis-yarmouk-idUSKBN0N611820150415>;
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32318134>; <http://syriahr.com/en/2015/04/80-of-the-yarmouk-camp-is-under-control-by-the-is/>

⁶ AP, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/activists-syrian-government-air-raids-kill-at-least-16/2015/04/19/d3ca5920-e69d-11e4-8581-633c536add4b_story.html;
<http://syriahr.com/en/2015/04/18-killed-by-air-strikes-on-dara/>

⁷ AFP, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/04/15/Monitor-Air-raids-kill-24-around-battleground-Syria-city-.html>;
<http://syriahr.com/en/2015/04/air-strikes-explosive-barrels-and-clashes-around-idlib/>;
<http://syriahr.com/en/2015/04/the-helicopters-drop-18-explosive-barrels-on-areas-in-lattakia-and-idlib/>

⁸ http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0814_iraq/Airstrikes6.html

⁹ http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0814_iraq/Airstrikes6.html

¹⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/14/us-mideast-crisis-syria-south-idUSKBN0N511N20150414>;

J. Cafarella, C. Kozak, and the ISW Syria Team, "Syria Situation Report: April 7-14, 2015,"

- On April 14, UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura announced that he would try to restart peace talks.¹¹

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

1. Ramadi Area, Anbar Governorate
 - During the reporting period, ISIL made significant advances in and around the provincial capital of Ramadi and got to about half a kilometer away from the city center; although reinforcements of Iraqi security forces and allied Shiite Popular Mobilization militias started for Ramadi on April 18 and several coalition airstrikes have hit ISIL positions in the area during the reporting period, the imminent fall of Ramadi is possible.¹²
2. Baiji Oil Refinery, Salah ad Din Governorate
 - On April 14, ISIL launched a major attack on the Baiji Oil Refinery, Iraq's largest refinery, with intense clashes ensuing between the group and Iraqi security forces, supported by allied Shiite Popular Mobilization militias and more than two dozen coalition airstrikes, until ISIL was reportedly completely expelled from the refinery by April 19.¹³
3. Baghdad Area
 - During the reporting period, bombs in and around Baghdad killed several dozen people and injured many more. Although the Baghdad area has been the repeated target of bomb attacks against civilians, the violence it experienced during this reporting period was especially deadly.¹⁴

http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-Gs02hCig_wU/Vs2HKCH9VtI/AAAAAAAAADBc/oEMHIdAffjg/s1600/SYR%2BSITREP%2BMap%2BApril%2B7-14%2B2015_high.png

¹¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/14/us-mideast-crisis-syria-talks-idUSKBN0N51SW20150414>; <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/15/world/middleeast/uns-syria-envoy-looks-to-revive-talks.html>

¹² <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/17/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-idUSKBN0N72H920150417>; AP, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/04/15/world/middleeast/ap-ml-islamic-state.html>; <http://www.wsj.com/articles/pentagon-chief-plays-down-possible-loss-of-iraqi-city-1429219583>; <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/04/18/Iraqi-army-begins-operation-to-expel-ISIL-from-Ramadi.html>; S. Adnan, P. Martin, and O. al-Dulimi, "Iraq Situation Report: April 14-15, 2015," <http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2015/04/iraq-situation-report-april-14-15-2015.html>; S. Adnan, P. Martin, and O. al-Dulimi, "Iraq Situation Report: April 16-17, 2015," <http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2015/04/iraq-situation-report-april-16-17-2015.html>;

http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0814_iraq/Airstrikes6.html

¹³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/18/mideast-crisis-iraq-refinery-idUSL5N0XF09420150418>; <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/iraqi-forces-retake-much-baiji-oil-refinery-isis-n344031>; <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/4/19/iraq-government-said-to-have-retaken-baiji-refinery-from-ISIL.html>; <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-04-19/iraqi-forces-retake-baiji-oil-refinery-from-islamic-state-u-s->; S. Adnan, P. Martin, and O. al-Dulimi, "Iraq Situation Report: April 14-15, 2015," <http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2015/04/iraq-situation-report-april-14-15-2015.html>; S. Adnan, P. Martin, and O. al-Dulimi, "Iraq Situation Report: April 16-17, 2015,"

<http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2015/04/iraq-situation-report-april-16-17-2015.html>;

http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0814_iraq/Airstrikes6.html

¹⁴ AFP, <http://news.yahoo.com/baghdad-car-bombs-kill-eight-110758300.html>; AP, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/04/15/world/middleeast/ap-ml-iraq.html>; AP, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/04/17/world/middleeast/ap-ml-iraq.html>; AP, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/officials-say-attacks-around-iraqs-capital-kill-14-people/2015/04/19/a9adecf0-e6bc-11e4-8581-633c536add4b_story.html

4. Erbil, Erbil Governorate (Iraqi Kurdistan)
 - On April 17, a car bomb detonated near the U.S. consulate in Erbil killed 3 people unassociated with the consulate, including 2 Turkish citizens, and injured about a dozen others, reportedly including 1 American; ISIL claimed responsibility.¹⁵ Such violence has been rare in the capital of the semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region.
5. Fallujah Area, Anbar Governorate
 - During the reporting period, about half a dozen coalition airstrikes hit ISIL positions around Fallujah.¹⁶

Other key points:

- On April 17, the governor of Salah ad Din Governorate announced that Izzat al-Douri, Saddam Hussein's interior minister, the highest-ranking member of the former Saddam regime who was still at large and an ISIL ally, was killed in clashes in the Harmin Mountain area of Salahuddin Governorate.¹⁷
- The involvement of Shiite Popular Mobilization militias in the Ramadi situation is a good indicator of how dire the situation is for the Iraqi government. Because Ramadi is a Sunni city, the Iraqi government's use of the Shiite militias here risks inflaming sectarian tensions even further and is most likely a last-resort option.

¹⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/18/us-mideast-crisis-us-consulate-idUSKBN0N81RF20150418>; <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/car-bomb-explodes-outside-u-s-consulate-iraq-state-department-n343536>; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/04/240812.htm>; <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/s/496379--iraq-suicide-attack-kills-3-near-us-consulate-in-erbil>

¹⁶ http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0814_iraq/Airstrikes6.html

¹⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/18/world/middleeast/saddam-hussein-aide-izzat-ibrahim-al-douri-reported-killed.html>; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/20/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-douri-idUSKBN0NA10T20150420>

Incident Reports: Syria

SHI 15-0067

Report Date: April 15, 2015

Site Name: al-Mataiya Byzantine village

Date of Incident: unspecified, early 2015

Location: al-Mataiya (Elemtaih) village, southern Hauran plain, 2 km from the Jordanian border, Daraa Governorate, Syria

Coordinates:

Site Description: A 2 ha area of Byzantine (and later) ruins, partially reconstructed, in the southern section of al-Mataiya village. Some of the ruins have been incorporated into the modern village buildings.

Site Date: Byzantine

Source of Destruction: On April 14, 2015, the DGAM posted a report on the Byzantine remains at al-Mataiya as part of a general update on heritage impacted by the recent intensive combat in Daraa Governorate. According to the report, “six byzantine churches with the beautiful temple” were damaged. Damage to the temple included the collapse of the upper part of the main facade, a 0.5 x 1 m pit dug at the front of the main facade, and four pits dug within the temple. The report also enumerated numerous pits dug throughout the ancient village in the vicinity of the temple and an apparent attempt to break “the statue of eagle at the main entrance.”

Pattern: Damage to built heritage in regions of Syria heavily impacted by combat. On February 20, 2015, Fars News Agency listed al-Mataiya as one of several “insurgent strongholds” raided by regime troops. A second report from the same date noted that another army unit had thwarted an attempt by “insurgents” to enter Syria from Jordan south of al-Mataiya. Due to its location, the town has clearly been of recent strategic importance, both for movement through the Hauran plain and for cross-border movement.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI is continuing to monitor regional built heritage and archaeological landscapes impacted by the prolonged conflict. Assessing the ways in which archaeological heritage has been caught up in sectarian clashes is a high priority.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

DGAM: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1656>

Fars News Agency:

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13931201000295>

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13931201000279>



Al-Mataiya Byzantine village (DGAM; posted April 14, 2015)



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Al-Mataiya Byzantine village (DGAM; posted April 14, 2015)



Al-Mataiya Byzantine village (DGAM; posted April 14, 2015)

SHI 15-0068

Report Date: April 18, 2015

Site Name: Shinshara (Khirbet Hass) (SHI 1017)

Date of Incident: Unknown; probably very late March–April 2015

Location: Jebel Zawiya Archaeological Park, UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient Villages of Northern Syria, Limestone Massif, Idlib Governorate, Syria

Coordinates:

Site Description: Shinshara (also known as Khirbet Hass) consists of an approximately 4 ha area of well-preserved Byzantine structures (houses and basilica) in the archaeological park of Jebel Zawiya, close to other Byzantine sites such as al-Bara and 2 km from the village of Rebiaa.

Site Date: Byzantine

Source of Destruction: On April 18, 2015, APSA published two images of a Byzantine carved sarcophagus lid that had recently been broken in the middle.¹⁸ A third image appears to show the inscription on the sarcophagus itself. The report does not present information as to the possible source of the damage.

Pattern: The site of Shinshara has been severely impacted by occupation by IDPs from the nearby town of Kafrouma and elsewhere; since its occupation in 2012, parts of the site have been mined for building stone, used as a garbage dump, and otherwise actively inhabited. The habitation of the site has also drawn bombardment attacks since at least 2013, as reported by APSA. In October 2013, APSA published a report on an incident of barrel bombing at Shinsharah that damaged architecture at the site (though images in this report also showed evidence for intensive architectural stone quarrying).¹⁹ Since the capture of Idlib city by rebel forces on March 29, 2015, the Assad regime has targeted the city and its surroundings with continuous barrel bomb attacks. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, “no fewer than 335” barrel explosives were dropped on Idlib and its countryside since March 29.²⁰ This constellation of factors makes it difficult to assess the proximate cause of damage to specific components of the site.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: The sites of Jebel Zawiya and the other sites that make up the UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient Villages of Northern Syria are of critical interest for ongoing heritage monitoring and preservation initiatives. As sites of outstanding universal archaeological value, but also significant places that have provided refuge for displaced Syrian people, these sites occupy a delicate position.

¹⁸ <http://apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/idlib/sites/1201-dlibshenshara-2.html>

¹⁹ <http://apsa2011.com/index.php/en/apsa-rapports/823-shenshara-3.html>

²⁰ <http://syriahr.com/en/2015/04/700-air-strikes-on-idlib-in-20-days/>

Sources:

Online Reporting:

APSA:

April 18, 2015: <http://apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/idlib/sites/1201-dlibshenshara-2.html>

May 2014: <http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/idlib/sites/723-idlib-le-massif-calcaire-rapport-sur-le-site-de-shenshara-2.html>

October 2013: <http://apsa2011.com/index.php/en/apsa-rapports/823-shenshara-3.html>

Syrian Observatory for Human Rights: <http://syriahr.com/en/2015/04/700-air-strikes-on-idlib-in-20-days/>

Scholarly:



Shinshara, broken sarcophagus lid (APSA; posted on April 18, 2015)



Shinshara, broken sarcophagus lid (APSA; posted on April 18, 2015)



Shinshara, Byzantine sarcophagus (APSA; posted on April 18, 2015)

SHI 15-0069

Report Date: April 18, 2015

Site Name: Archaeological sites within the territory of Jebel Semaan (Simeon Mountain), including Deir Semaan (SHI #657), Fadra, Sitt al-Rum (SHI #1018), and Refadeh (SHI #958)

Date of Incident: Ongoing, unspecified

Location: Jebel Semaan, the limestone massif northwest of Aleppo, UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient Villages of Northern Syria, Aleppo Governorate, Syria

Coordinates:

Site Description: Areas of Byzantine standing architecture on the Jebel Semaan limestone massif.

Site Date: Byzantine

Source of Destruction: On April 18, 2015, the DGAM published a report on the condition of the Jebel Semaan sites. This report presents an update on data reported by the DGAM on September 10–11, 2014, and included in the September 2014 DGAM summary report (See ASOR CHI Weekly Report 6, Incident Report SHI 14-0029). The April 18, 2015, report presents information on a more limited number of sites:

Simeon Citadel: According to the DGAM, armed gangs are building illegally inside the citadel in the refectory (?) and outside the citadel wall.

Deir Semaan northern road: This road extends from the Triumphal arch toward the west. Ancient structures on both sides of the road were mined for building stones, and new constructions were built within the ancient structures and at the main monastery entrance.

Sitt al-Rum: Ongoing illegal construction using stones from Byzantine architecture, digging within the church, and vandalization of a mosaic panel.

Refadeh: Illegal quarrying to the east, south, and north of the site. Illegal excavations within the southern part of the site. Use of architectural stones to construct new buildings and a road built within the site to facilitate removal of stones. The stones of the fallen tower west of the castle were broken; the southern facade cracked and collapsed.

Fadra: Digging, vandalism, broken ancient stones, and new road construction.

The report also claims that there is ongoing excavation, vandalism, and mining of ancient architecture at the following sites within Jebel Semaan: Teqla (Taqla), Zarzita (Zarzarita), Bazahir, al Mashad, Sinkhar, Sheikh Slaiman and Zazitta. In comparison with the September 2014 status report, this new report presents some new information, but it primarily indicates that occupation and utilization of the Jebel Semaan sites is ongoing and, apparently, undeterred.

On April 4, 2015, APSA also published a report showing evidence for intensive stone-quarrying and looting at the site of Deir Semaan (Simeon Monastery), as well as evidence for the militarization of the site by (apparently) Islamist fighters (See ASOR CHI Weekly Report 35, Incident Report SHI 15-0062).

Pattern: Archaeological sites throughout the area west of Idlib and Aleppo continue to be subjected to damage from looters and from the use of sites as shelters or as building material by IDPs. Furthermore, the Aleppo countryside has in recent months (March–April 2015) been subject to prolonged bombardment and combat, further exacerbating the condition of IDPs and preventing monitoring or enforcement at occupied and militarized archaeological sites.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI has already prioritized the sites of Deir Semaan and this region for monitoring and evaluation.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

DGAM: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1659>

Scholarly:

Burns, Ross. *Monuments of Syria*. London: Tauris, 2009.

Hajjār, Abd. *The Church of St. Simeon and the Stylite and other archaeological sites in the mountains of Simeon and Halaqa*. Damascus: Sidawi Printing House, 1991.

Ḥajjar, Abd Allah and Ibrahim, Yuḥanna. *Kanīsat al-Qiddīs Sam‘ān al-‘Amūdī wa-āthār jabalī Sam‘ān wa-Ḥalaqah [The Church of Saint Simeon Stylites and the antiquities of Mounts Simon and Halaqah]*. Aleppo: Dār Mārdīn, 1995.

Kurdy, M., Jean-Luc Biscop, L. de Luca, and M. Florenzano, “3D Virtual Anastylis and the Reconstruction of Several Buildings in the Site of Saint-Simeon, Syria.” *International Archives of Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing* 38.5: 2-4.

Saouaf, Soubhi. *Qal'at Sem'an: St. Simeon's Monastery and its Environments*. Aleppo: École Georges Salem, 1956.