

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

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Executive Summary

From March 24–28, 2016, a coalition of SARG, Russian, and Iranian forces captured the Syrian city of Tadmor, and subsequently, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Palmyra from ISIL militants, who had held the area since May 2015. ISIL forces had planted explosives throughout the modern city as well as the archaeological site, which SARG and Russian forces are now systematically clearing. Though this has slowed the SARG advance, soldiers, journalists, and heritage experts have gained access to the Palmyra Archaeological Museum (PAM) and portions of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, providing the first detailed ground-level images in months. Preliminary evidence supports previous claims that ISIL conducted acts of deliberate destruction targeting ancient monuments and more modern cultural assets. Palmyra and modern Tadmor have sustained significant and widespread combat damage. The situation is still fluid, but initial assessments of the available photographs and videos confirm substantial damage to the Arch of Triumph, ostensibly by ISIL militants. Various sources have reported significant damage to the museum and its remaining collections caused by airstrikes and ISIL acts of iconoclasm similar to the ISIL-publicized performative deliberate destructions in the Mosul Museum in Iraq. As previously reported, the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums evacuated the larger part of the PAM's collections just prior to ISIL's capture of Tadmor, but larger objects and those securely mounted to the museum structure could not be evacuated in the time available. In some instances, we cannot yet distinguish the cause(s) of damage to sculptures and other objects. Furthermore, both SARG and Russian airstrikes were reported with unprecedented frequency in the area, reportedly causing the damage to the Uthman bin Affan Mosque and Bilal ibn Rabia Mosque. The situation is still unfolding, and it would be premature to estimate the extent of the damage to Tadmor and ancient Palmyra given that much of the area remains inaccessible due to explosives. Moreover, time is needed to assess the significant damage linked to the ISIL 10-month occupation and the subsequent SARG campaign to retake Palmyra since September 2015 and to discern the effects of these recent damage incidents from the significant incidents documented prior to ISIL occupation when Tadmor and ancient Palmyra were militarized by SARG and consequently damaged and looted.

Combat damage continued to be the most devastating source of damage in both Syria and Iraq. Russian airstrikes hit two sites in Raqqa — an “archaeological market” near Hattin Cemetery and an area near al-Imam al-Nawawi Mosque— and Opposition forces damaged the al-Sayyida Aisha Mosque in Aleppo. Coalition forces in Iraq reportedly damaged the Al Aisha Mosque in Mosul.

¹ This report is based on research conducted by the “Cultural Preservation Initiative: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq.” 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.

Key Points

- SARG and Russian forces capture Palmyra from ISIL militants, providing the most comprehensive photographic documentation of the historic site and its museum since the ISIL occupation started in May 2015 (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0041, SHI 16-0042, and SHI 16-0043**).
- The Uthman bin Affan Mosque and Bilal ibn Rabia Mosque in Tadmor, Homs Governorate was damaged, reportedly by Russian airstrikes (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0039**).
- Two sites in the city of Raqqa, a market near Hattin Cemetery and an area near al-Imam al-Nawawi Mosque, were damaged reportedly by Russian airstrikes (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0038**).
- The al-Sayyida Aisha Mosque in the city of Aleppo, Aleppo Governorate was damaged reportedly by Russian airstrikes (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0040**).
- reportedly damage the Al Aisha Mosque in Mosul, Ninawa Governorate reportedly by US-led Coalition airstrikes (**ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 16-0009**).

Heritage Timeline

March 29, 2016

Multiple media outlets published articles discussing the state of the site of Palmyra:

<http://www.rferl.org/content/infographics/tracking-palmyras-destruction/27222768.html>

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/syrias-palmyra-can-be-repaired-in-five-years-1459176051>

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/surveying-post-isil-damage-palmyra-160329081912477.html>

- *FranceTV* published an article titled “**Palmyre toujours en danger, selon un spécialiste syrien.**” (“**Palmyra is still in danger, according to a Syrian specialist**”) APSA’s Cheikhmous Ali argues that Palmyra is not safe in the hands of SARG forces.
<http://culturebox.francetvinfo.fr/expositions/patrimoine/palmyre-toujours-en-danger-selon-un-specialiste-syrien-237229>
- **DGAM** published a statement titled “**In response to a misleading article by Raf Sanchez.**” This statement claims that a Telegraph article written on March 28, 2016 misquoted Maamoun Abdulkarim and overstated the amount of damage done to Palmyra’s monuments and museum by ISIL militants.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1960>

- Russian Times* published an article titled “**Palmyra damage monstrous, but mendable: Experts accept challenging task to restore ancient city.**” Russian antiquities expert argue the plans to restore Palmyra are feasible if the restoration of the site is treated as a task of global importance.
<https://www.rt.com/news/337497-palmyra-damage-restoration-challenge/>
- March 28, 2016

DGAM published an article titled “**In photos: museum of Palmyra post liberation.**” Photographs of the Palmyra Museum show damage to the building and defaced and damaged artifacts.
<http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1957>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1dGMJre1IM&feature=youtu.be>
- Al Ghad Al Arabi TV Channel* published an article titled “ فيديو وصور (Syrian opposition in Palmyra: 70% of the city completely destroyed).” A member of the Popular Committee of the Syrian Revolution reports that much of the modern city of Palmyra has been destroyed as a result of constant airstrikes by SARG and Russian forces.
<http://alghad.tv/70-#-تدمر-في-السورية-المعارضة-و-صور-فيديو-70-من-المدينة-تدمر-بالكامل>
- Al Dastour* published an article titled “سوريا: خطة عاجلة لترميم آثار تدمر” (An Urgent Plan to Renovate the Ruins of Palmyra).” Syrian authorities announced an emergency plan to restore and reconstruct the monuments of Palmyra destroyed by ISIL militants.
<http://www.dostor.org/1017043>
- Al Monitor* published an article titled “**Unemployed Iraqis join in looting of antiquities**” (by Wassim Bassem). The lack of protection for Iraq’s sites by Iraqi authorities and the deteriorating security condition in the country are leading to more illegal excavations in Iraq.
<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/03/iraq-archeological-sites-looting-protection.html#>
- AFP via Yahoo News* published an article titled “**Syria’s Palmyra can be restored ‘in five years.’**” According to Maamoun Abdulkarim, it will take five years to restore Palmyra to its pre-war state with the help of UNESCO.
<http://news.yahoo.com/syrias-palmyra-restored-five-years-112751440.html>

- *The Atlantic* published an article titled “**The State of Palmyra’s Ruins**” (by J. Weston Phippen). Maamoun Abdulkarim is optimistic that the destruction of Palmyra can be undone now that SARG forces have secured the site.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/03/syria-palmyra/475617/>
- **Heritage for Peace** published their weekly newsletter “**Damage to Syria’s Heritage 28th March 2016.**”
<http://www.heritageforpeace.org/syria-culture-and-heritage/damage-to-cultural-heritage/previous-damage-newsletters/>
- *Voice of America* published an article titled “**Ancient Plundered City Seen as Bridge to Peace**” (by Rosanne Skirble). Maamoun Abdulkarim is confident that Palmyra can be restored, though others (including Amr al-Azm) are not so optimistic.
<http://www.voanews.com/content/ancient-blundered-city-palmyra-bridge-peace/3258504.html>
- Multiple articles discuss the extent of the damage to Palmyra and possible reconstruction plans:
<http://www.npr.org/2016/03/28/472176301/in-the-ruins-of-palmyra-how-many-of-the-syrian-citys-antiquities-remain>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03p8jcn>
<http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/28/middleeast/isis-palmyra-treasures-destroyed/index.html>
- News outlets cover the demining operation in Palmyra:
<http://kcbj.com/news/nation-world/see-syria-troops-remove-mines-bombs-after-historic-city-palmyra-taken-from-isis>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/12205918/Syrian-regime-troops-struggle-to-clear-explosive-booby-traps-in-Palmyra.html>
<https://www.rt.com/news/337414-russia-palmyra-mine-robots/>
- Drone footage and other photographs of Palmyra emerge:
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35909456>
<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/29/world/middleeast/scenes-from-palmyra-indicate-isis-slowed-assault-on-treasures.html>

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/28/the-islamic-state-didnt-do-as-much-damage-to-palmyra-as-we-feared/>

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/28/palmyra-ruins-syria-recapture-isis-antiquities>

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/29/world/middleeast/isis-historic-sites-control.html>

March 27, 2016

Multiple news outlets published photographs taken by photographer Maher Mounes, which show the condition of several monuments at Palmyra, including the Theater, the Colonnade, the Temple of Bel, and the Triumphal Arch.

<http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1955>

<http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1955>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/12205433/First-pictures-from-inside-the-recaptured-city-of-Palmyra.html>

<http://www.businessinsider.com/photographs-reveal-the-destruction-left-behind-by-isis-in-the-ancient-city-of-palmyra-2016-3>

- *Al Hayat* published an article titled “بعد «داعش» آثار تدمر معرضة للنهب من قوات النظام السوري (After ISIL, this time Palmyra’s Archaeology is under threat from looting by the Syrian Regime forces).” APSA’s Cheikmous Ali argues that SARG forces also pose a danger to Palmyra.
<http://www.alhayat.com/Articles/14761213/تدمر-آثار-داعش-بعد-السوري-النظام-قوات-من-النهب-معرضة>
- *Reuters* published an article titled “**Islamic State driven out of Syria’s ancient Palmyra city**” (by Dominic Evans). SANA provided Reuters with a handout with several photographs of damage to the Palmyra Museum, including destroyed and damaged artifacts.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-palmyra-idUSKCN0WT04R>
- *France 24* published an article titled “**Palmyra Ruins Generally ‘in good shape’: Syria Antiquities Chief.**” Maamoun Abdulkarim reports that the site of Palmyra is in a much better state than the DGAM had feared. <http://www.france24.com/en/20160327-palmyra-ruins-generally-good-shape-syria-antiquities-chief>

- UNESCO published an article titled “**UNESCO Director-General and President Vladimir Putin discuss the protection of Palmyra’s cultural heritage**” (by UNESCO Media Services). Director-General Irina Bokova and President Putin have both offered support and expertise to help rebuild and protect Palmyra.
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/unesco-director-general-and-president-vladimir-putin-discuss-the-protection-of-palmyras-cultural-heritage/#.Vvm070Irl1N>
 - Several media outlets published articles discussing the capture of Palmyra by SARG forces.
<http://www.dailysabah.com/mideast/2016/03/27/assad-regime-troops-capture-palmyra-from-daesh>
<http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2016/03/27/world/middleeast/ap-ml-syria-palmyra-glance.html>
 - US ICOMOS published an article titled “**Syrian, Russian forces drive Islamic State out of Palmyra; Syria Pledges to Restore Damaged Monuments; UNESCO plans Expert Mission, International Conference on Rebuilding**” (by Andrew Potts). This article discusses the offensive to take Palmyra and possible restoration efforts post-conflict. <http://www.usicomos.org/syrian-russian-forces-drive-islamic-state-out-of-palmyra-syria-pledges-to-restore-damaged-monuments-unesco-plans-expert-mission-international-conference-on-rebuilding/>
- March 26, 2016
- Several media outlets published photographs showing damage to monuments at Palmyra, including airstrike damage to the walls of Qalaat Shirkuh.
<http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1948>
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=177&id=1947>
<http://apsa2011.com/apsanew/palmyra26-03-2016/>
- The Guardian* published an article titled “**Restoring Syria’s Pearl of the desert: a reason for optimism amid the storm of terror**” (by Maamoun Abdulkarim). Maamoun Abdulkarim, the head of the DGAM, discusses the damage done to Palmyra by ISIL militants. Once the security situation is stable, he writes, the DGAM will visit the site in order to assessing the damage and create a plan for its restoration.
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/26/palmyra-syria-isis-maamoun-abdelkarim>

March 25, 2016

DGAM published an article titled “بالفيديو: عودة القلعة العربية في تدمر” (Video: The return of the Arab fortress in Palmyra). The DGAM republished drone footage released by Sputnik News, which shows part of the archaeological site of Palmyra.

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=177&id=1945>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFHclm9F41w>

- *ANSamed* published an article titled “**Syria: Italy ready to be ‘cultural peacekeepers in Palmyra’.**” Italy is ready to send “cultural peacekeepers” to the Palmyra once it is freed from ISIL militants, according to Culture Minister Dario Franceschini.
http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/culture/2016/03/25/syria-italy-ready-to-be-cultural-peacekeepers-in-palmyra_303a2cba-dc44-483a-ba7d-18fda9b2e14a.html
 - *Art Daily* published an article titled “**Syria antiquities chief Maamun Abdelkarim vows to rebuild Palmyra temples razed by IS**” (AFP). Abdulkarim vows that the monuments of Palmyra destroyed by ISIL will be restored with expert international help once the city is recaptured.
<http://artdaily.com/news/86039/Syria-antiquities-chief-Maamoun-Abdelkarim-vows-to-rebuild-Palmyra-temples-razed-by-IS#.VvVMhWQrI1j>
- March 24, 2016
- World Politics Review* published an article titled “**The Next Monuments Men? How Militaries Could Protect Culture in Conflict**” (by Sasan Aghlani). Italy and other states are looking for ways to utilize military resources in order to protect cultural property in conflict zones.
<http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/18295/the-next-monuments-men-how-militaries-could-protect-culture-in-conflict>
- **DGAM** published an article titled “**Ancient city of Palmyra is being restored.**” DGAM officials that it will conduct a field visit to Palmyra to assess damage to the site in collaboration with local and international experts.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1944>
 - *Mirror Spectator* published an article titled “**Armenian Church and School to be Renovated in Homs.**” St. Mesrob Church and Sahakyan National College in Homs will be renovated this summer after it was damaged by shelling and occupied by opposition forces between 2011 and 2014.
<http://www.mirrorspectator.com/2016/03/24/armenian-church-and-school-to-be-renovated-in-homs/>

- **SNHR** published an article titled “**Armed opposition factions targeted Mrs. Aisha Mosque in Al Zahraa neighborhood in Aleppo governorate in March 23.**” A mosque in Aleppo was damaged by opposition forces.
<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/03/24/armed-opposition-factions-targeted-mrs-aisha-mosque-in-al-zahraa-neighborhood-in-alppo-governorate-in-march-23/>
 - *Cosmos Magazine* published an article titled “**Syrian Farmers’ lost landscape**” (by Laurie Zoloth). The current drought in Syria is reminiscent of one that devastated Syrian civilization in the late 2nd-millennium BCE. <https://cosmosmagazine.com/society/syrian-farmers-lost-landscape>
- March 23, 2016
- The Art Newspaper* published an article titled “**UK government publishes its first Culture White Paper in half a century**” (by Martin Bailey). The UK Culture Minister has published a White Paper, a governmental policy statement on culture. It discusses the the £30m Cultural Protection Fund for heritage in global conflict zones, which is due to launch in late spring.
<http://theartnewspaper.com/news/news/uk-government-publishes-its-first-culture-white-paper-in-half-a-century/>
- *L’Orient Le Jour* published an article titled “**De Baalbeck à Palmyre, la Suisse au coeur de l’aventure archéologique**” (From Baalbek to Palmyra, Switzerland at the heart of the adventure of archaeology)” (by May Makarem). Paul Collart, a Swiss archaeologist who excavated both the Temple of Baal-Shamin in Palmyra and the Temple of Jupiter in Baalbek, is discussed.
<https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/977098/de-baalbeck-a-palmyre-la-suisse-au-coeur-de-laventure-archeologique.html>
- March 21, 2016
- Hyperallergic* published an article titled “**A 3D Database of Threatened Syrian Heritage sites**” (by Claire Voon). French 3D digitization agency ICONEM launched “Syrian Heritage,” a project organized with the DGAM to preserve cultural heritage increasingly threatened by warfare and violence.
<http://hyperallergic.com/284327/a-3d-database-of-threatened-syrian-heritage-sites/>
- March 19, 2016
- New York Times* published an article titled “**Like Among the Ruins**” (by Kanishk Tharoor). Salam al-Kuntar and the author discuss a number of destroyed or damaged sites in Syria and Iraq.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/20/opinion/sunday/life-among-the-ruins.html>

- March 18, 2016 **DGAM** published an article titled “اكتشاف منحوتة نادرة في رحلة بريف دمشق” (The discovery of a rare sculpture in Rakhleh in Rif Dimashq).” A rare 2nd-century CE Roman burial site has been uncovered in Rakhleh.
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=177&id=1940>
- **Saving Antiquities for Everyone (SAFE)** published an infographic titled “**Heritage at Risk: A Tool for Understanding the Real Threat to Syria’s Cultural Heritage**” to share data on Syrian heritage at risk .
<http://savingantiquities.org/heritage-at-risk-a-tool-for-understanding-the-real-risk-to-syrias-cultural-heritage/>
- March 17, 2016 **SNHR** reports that 78 churches and 2146 mosques in Syria were damaged between March 2011 and March 2016.
<http://sn4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/toll-of-attacks-on-churches-in-5-years-.jpg>
<http://sn4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/toll-of-attacks-on-mosques-in-5-years-.jpg>
- March 16, 2016 *Middle East Eye* published an article titled “**Art and activism collide at Iraqi artefact exhibition in Toronto**” (by Jillian D’Amours). Iranian artist Morehshin Allahyari uses 3D printing to recreate artefacts destroyed by ISIL in hopes of sharing memory and culture. A dozen reconstructed artifacts are on display at Trinity Square Video gallery.
<http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/art-and-activism-collide-iraqi-artefact-exhibition-1186982388>
- **Palmyra Coordination** posted a video titled “تدمير - آثار الدمار في منازل المدنيين (Palmyra - The effects of destruction of civilian homes).” Airstrikes have caused extensive damage to the area around the Uthman bin Affan Mosque in Palmyra.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CliKMNfMF4>
- March 12, 2016 *El Espectador* published an article titled “**Como se roban la historia siria** (How the history of Syria is stolen)” (by Juan David Torres Duarte). Looting of archaeological sites is rampant in Syria, with all sides in the conflict participating in the theft and sale of illegally excavated artifacts.
<http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/elmundo/se-roban-historia-siria-articulo-621670>

Military and Political Context

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

1. Homs Governorate:
 - On March 21, airstrikes, suspected to be of Russian origin, struck several areas in and around the the city of Palmyra.²
 - On March 23, civilians in Palmyra were reportedly urged by ISIL militants to flee the city as the fighting edged closer. Residents of the city reported that ISIL militants “planted explosive devices in the palm groves and in archaeological areas.”³
 - On March 25, the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that SARG forces had captured Qalaat Shirkuh from ISIL forces. According to Syrian Antiquities Chief Maamoun Abdulkarim, SARG forces had also “liberated the district of hotels and restaurants as well as the Valley of the Tombs” in the southwest area of the city.⁴
 - On March 27, SARG and pro-regime forces, backed by heavy Russian and SARG airstrikes, recaptured the city of Palmyra from ISIL militants. The Syrian army then announced that it would use the city of Palmyra as “a launchpad to expand military operations” against ISIL forces in the northern governorates of Raqqa and Deir ez Zor.⁵
 - On March 29, pro-regime forces advanced towards the ISIL-held town of al-Qaryatayn, southwest of the city of Palmyra. According to SOHR and SANA, the forces, backed by “intense” SARG and Russian airstrikes, captured several “strategic hilltops overlooking the town” as well as rural farmland south of the town.⁶
2. Hasakah Governorate:
 - On March 28, the western-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) reportedly reached the village of al-Malha, on the border with Raqqa Governorate.⁷
3. Raqqa Governorate:
 - On March 20, SOHR reported that Russian airstrikes in the city of Raqqa killed at least 55 civilians. According to the activist group Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently (RBSS), the Russian airstrikes struck near the national hospital, a former army base, and other neighborhoods in the city of Raqqa.⁸

² <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-21/343279-26-pro-regime-fighters-killed-battling-isis-near-syrias-palmyra.ashx> ; <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/isis-kills-26-syrian-soldiers-palmyra-160321170000620.html>

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/syrian-army-seizes-hills-overlooking-isis-held-town-of-palmyra/2016/03/23/8e152a78-f0e1-11e5-a2a3-d4e9697917d1_story.html ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35888723> ; <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=45372&> ; <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/25/world/middle-east/syria-palmyra-isis.html>

⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35898995> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN0WR0RA> ; <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-25/344090-syrian-army-advances-in-palmyra-fighting-activist.ashx>

⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-palmyra-idUSKCN0WT04R>

⁶ <http://dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-29/344546-syria-govt-forces-advance-on-isis-town-near-palmyra-activists.ashx>

⁷ <http://aranews.net/2016/03/western-backed-forces-report-new-gains-eastern-syria-approaching-raqqa/>

⁸ <http://rudaw.net/NewsDetails.aspx?pageid=202577> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-raqqa-idUSKCN0WL0IW> ; <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/death-toll-climbs-airstrikes-held-syrian-city-37788941>

4. Aleppo Governorate:
 - On March 16, a group of Syrian opposition forces captured the village of Ghazal from ISIL militants in northern Aleppo Governorate.⁹
 - On March 18, SARG airstrikes focused on city of Bzaa in eastern Aleppo Governorate, killing three civilians and wounding dozens more.¹⁰
5. Deir ez Zor:
 - On March 17, ISIL militants released a video depicting the contents of a SARG weapons depot captured by the group in the town of Ayyash. The capture is thought to be the largest seizure of weapons by the group thus far.¹¹

Other Key Points:

- During the reporting period, the US-led coalition conducted airstrikes in the areas of Ayn Isa, Hawl, Kobani, Manbij, Mar'a, Palmyra, and Raqqa.¹²
- On March 16, Reuters, analyzing satellite imagery, reported that “just under half” of Russia’s aircraft has flown out of Syria since March 14, 2016.¹³
- On March 17, the three Kurdish-controlled regions in Syria voted to approve the creation of a federal system in northern Syria. The new federal system would be known as the “federal democratic system of Rojava - Northern Syria” and would include the already “autonomous administrations” of Afrin and Kobane in Aleppo Governorate and Jazira in Hasakah Governorate, as well as new mainly Arab and Turkmen areas captured by Kurdish forces from ISIL forces. The move was met with criticism from both the Syrian regime and members of the Syrian opposition.¹⁴
- On March 24, the second round of Syrian peace talks concluded in Geneva. The two sides were able to agree on “some key principles” but no “concrete” steps were taken toward a political solution. The next round of peace talks are scheduled to begin in early April.¹⁵
- On March 25, the US announced that it had killed several key ISIL militants in the past week including the “purported second-in-command,” Abdul Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli (aka Hajji Imam).¹⁶

⁹ http://www.orient-news.net/en/news_show/106209/0/Opposition-controls-Aleppos-Ghazel-ISIL-fails-in-recapturing-it

¹⁰ http://www.orient-news.net/en/news_show/106369/0/Assad-jets-kill-three-civilians-and-injure-tens-in-Aleppo-eastern-countrysides-Bzaa

¹¹ <http://spioenkop.blogspot.com/2016/03/islamic-state-captures-ayyash-weapons.html>

¹² See: “US DOD News Release Military Strikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq”. *Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve*. News Release No: [694796](#), [696234](#), [697254](#), [698631](#), [699811](#), [702194](#), [703953](#), [705731](#), [705740](#), [705871](#)

¹³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-force-idUSKCN0WI19D>

¹⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-federalism-idUSKCN0WJ1EP>; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35830375>; <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/03/18/Syrian-rebels-condemn-Kurdish-led-moves-towards-regional-autonomy.html>

¹⁵ <http://news.yahoo.com/un-says-aiming-restart-syria-peace-talks-april-174029894.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35899711>

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

1. Ninawa Governorate:

- On March 19, the US-led coalition carried out several airstrikes on the city of Mosul, reportedly targeting an ISIL warehouse, a car bomb manufacturing workshop, an intelligence office located inside the University of Mosul, and a security office located across from the university. A cafe was also reportedly struck during the airstrikes. Iraqi news sources reported at least 25 civilian deaths.¹⁷
- On March 24, Iraqi security forces and Kurdish Peshmerga forces, backed by US-led coalition airstrikes and artillery from a US Marine base, recaptured at least four villages between the town of Makhmour and the ISIL-held town of Qayyarah in what is being called the first operation to retake the ISIL-held city of Mosul. The Iraqi army named the villages captured as Mahana, Kdalah, Krmurde, and Khabandan, which are located approximately 50 miles south of the city of Mosul.¹⁸
- On March 25, Iraqi security forces, backed by US-led coalition airstrikes and Kurdish Peshmerga forces, attempted to recapture another ISIL-held village of Nur. Their efforts, however, were stalled by explosives planted by ISIL militants. A report later claimed that many Iraqi security forces had abandoned their positions and retreated out of fear of an ISIL reprisal attack.¹⁹
- On March 25, Yezidi and tribal fighters recaptured the areas of Um al-Dhiban and Um Jaris, west of the town of Sinjar.²⁰
- From March 26 to March 28, locals reported US-led coalition airstrikes in the neighborhoods of as-Sukkar, al-Masaref, and Baladiyat in the city of Mosul, as well as airstrikes on ISIL locations near the Mosul airport and an ISIL headquarters in the district of Sahha.²¹
- On March 27, thousands of Iraqi civilians fled from their villages to the town of Makhmour as Iraqi and Kurdish Peshmerga forces continued to advance on ISIL-held areas.²²
- On March 28, local sources reported that dozens of ISIL militants had fled the city of Mosul prompting the group to increase “security measures on the entrances and exits of the city” and remove local leaders from positions of power.²³

¹⁷ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/20/middleeast/mosul-iraq-airstrikes-isis/index.html> ; <https://www.facebook.com/Mosul-Eye-552514844870022/> ; <https://news.vice.com/article/the-us-led-coalition-bombed-the-university-of-mosul-for-being-an-islamic-state-headquarters> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/699172/department-of-defense-press-briefing-by-colonel-warren-via-teleconference-from>

¹⁸ <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/4ff55a9a1e3942a8af9799bb47f11f13/iraq-says-its-launched-offensive-recapture-held-mosul> ; <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/03/24/Iraqi-army-starts-offensive-in-region-around-Mosul.html> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35889937> ; <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/24032016> ; <http://post.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq-situation-report-march-22-28-2016>

¹⁹ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-25/344095-iraqi-forces-make-slow-progress-south-of-mosul.ashx> ; <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/03/26/iraqi-soldiers-flee-again-in-iraq-army-s-first-mosul-operation.html>

²⁰ <http://post.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq-situation-report-march-22-28-2016>

²¹ <http://aranews.net/2016/03/isis-removes-local-leaders-power-iraqi-mosul/>

²² <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-27/344277-thousands-of-iraqis-flee-fighting-south-of-mosul.ashx>

²³ <http://aranews.net/2016/03/isis-removes-local-leaders-power-iraqi-mosul/>

2. Al Anbar Governorate:
 - On March 17, Iraqi security forces, backed by allied forces, recaptured the district of al-Muhammadi in the city of Hit.²⁴
 - On March 19, Iraqi security forces, backed by US-led coalition air support, began a broad operation to liberate the cities of Hit and Kubaysa from ISIL.²⁵
 - On March 25, Iraqi forces and tribal fighters, backed by US-led coalition airstrikes, recaptured the sub-district of Kubaysa from ISIL.²⁶
 - On March 26, 10 ISIL militants entered the Ain al-Assad military base and detonated suicide vests, killing at least 18 Iraqi soldiers.²⁷
3. Baghdad Governorate:
 - On March 18, thousands of Iraqi supporters of Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr demonstrated against government corruption just outside of the Green Zone in the capital of Baghdad.²⁸
 - On March 25, Moqtada al-Sadr delivered a speech to tens of thousands of his supporters as they continued a weeklong sit-in just outside of the Green Zone. Al-Sadr warned political party leaders against opposing Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's efforts to fight corruption.²⁹
 - On March 29, an ISIL suicide bombing struck Tayaran Square in the district of Bab Sharji, killing three people and wounding 27.³⁰
4. Babil Governorate:
 - On March 25, a suicide bomber attacked a local football game in the town of Iskandariyah, killing at least 31 people and wounding 71 more. Many of the victims were between the ages of ten and 16. ISIL later took responsibility for the attack.³¹
5. Erbil Governorate:
 - On March 19, an ISIL rocket attack against a US-base in the town of Makhmour killed one US Marine and wounded eight others.³²
 - On March 21, the US military announced the establishment of the first "all-American fire base in Iraq" since the beginning of the fight against ISIL located in the town of Makhmour.³³

²⁴ <http://www.albawaba.com/news/iraqi-army-advances-further-anbar-province-battle-against-daesh-818400>

²⁵ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/03/19/Iraq-forces-in-major-push-against-ISIS-in-Anbar.html> ; <http://post.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq-situation-report-march-22-28-2016>

²⁶ <http://post.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq-situation-report-march-22-28-2016>

²⁷ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/isil-suicide-attackers-storm-army-base-iraq-160326120309877.html>

²⁸ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/03/18/Iraq-s-Sadr-spurns-calls-to-drop-sit-in-over-bastion-of-corruption.html>

²⁹ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-25/344103-thousands-rally-in-baghdad-in-support-of-shiite-cleric.ashx>

³⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-security-idUSKCN0WV0AC>

³¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35904425> ; <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/26/world/middleeast/iraq-isis-bombing.html>

³² https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-soldier-in-iraq-becomes-the-second-combat-death-in-war-against-islamic-state/2016/03/19/f906b677-4b5e-4840-a77c-64b19d7ef5e8_story.html ; <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/20/politics/us-firebase-iraq-isis/index.html> ; <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2016/03/22/us/politics/ap-us-united-states-iraq-attack.html>

³³ <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-sets-first-all-american-fire-base-iraq/3247919.html>

6. Salah ad Din Governorate:
 - On March 24, Kurdish Peshmerga Special Forces arrived in the town of Tuz Khurmatu, east of the city of Tikrit, in an attempt to ensure security and reduce the chances of violence by Shia militias in the mixed Arab, Kurd, and Turkmen town.³⁴
7. Kirkuk Governorate:
 - On March 16, an Iraqi Air Force plane crashed in the district of Hawija, northwest of the city of Kirkuk. Two pilots and a third crewmember were reported as missing. ISIL claimed responsibility for the downing of the plane and shared footage of the plane crash site. However, an Iraqi official stated that an investigation to determine the cause of the crash was underway.³⁵
8. Diyala Governorate:
 - On March 22, the Dijla Operations Command (DOC) and the Shia Popular Mobilization Front began “clearing operations” against ISIL militants in Lake Hamrin, al-Khalauia, and near Qara Tapa, to the east and northeast of the city of Baquba.³⁶

Other Key Points:

- During the reporting period, the US-led coalition conducted airstrikes in the areas of Albu Hayat, Baghdadi, Beiji, Fallujah, Habbaniyah, Haditha, Hit, Huwayjah, Kirkuk, Kisik, Mosul, Qayyarah, Ramadi, Rutbah, Sinjar, Sultan Abdullah, and Tal Afar.³⁷
- On March 18, supporters of Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr staged sit-ins across southern governorates in Iraq including in the governorates of Babil and Karbala'.³⁸
- On March 21, the Shia militia known as the League of the Righteous (or Asaib Ahl al-Haq) issued a warning against US marines fighting in Iraq via the group’s TV station, stating that the US must “withdraw its forces immediately,” declaring the group an occupying force.³⁹
- On March 22, Turkish forces conducted airstrikes against Kurdish PKK targets in northern Iraq. The exact location of the strikes are unknown.⁴⁰

Other significant political and military events during the reporting period:

- On March 17, the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK), an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) claimed responsibility for the March 13th suicide bombing in Ankara that killed 37 people. This is the second deadly suicide attack that TAK has taken responsibility for in 2016.⁴¹
- On March 17, US Secretary of State John Kerry acknowledged that ISIL was carrying out genocidal actions against Yezidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims “by self-proclamation, by ideology and by actions.”⁴²

³⁴ <http://post.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq-situation-report-march-22-28-2016> ; <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/290320165>

³⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-missing-pilots-idUSKCN0WI280>

³⁶ <http://post.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq-situation-report-march-22-28-2016>

³⁷ See: “US DOD News Release Military Strikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq”. *Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve*. News Release No: [694796](#), [696234](#), [697254](#), [698399](#), [698631](#), [699811](#), [702194](#), [703953](#), [705731](#), [705740](#), [705871](#), [706762](#)

³⁸ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/03/iraq-situation-report-march-15-21-2016.html>

³⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-iran-usa-idUSKCN0WN1BL>

⁴⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-kurds-idUSKCN0WP14F>

⁴¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-blast-idUSKCN0WJ00N>

⁴² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35831711> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Mar-17/342782-us-says-to-cooperate-with-investigations-into-genocide-by-isis.ashx>

- On March 19, a suicide bomber killed four people in the popular tourist area of Istiklal Street in Istanbul, killing four people and wounding 39 more. Turkish officials later reported that an Turkish member of ISIL was responsible for the attack.⁴³
- On March 22, three bombings struck the Zaventem Airport and the Maelbeek metro station in Brussels, killing more than 30 people and wounding dozens more. ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack.⁴⁴

Satellite Imagery and Geospatial Analysis

A geospatial specialist collaborating with ASOR CHI identified illicit tunnel excavations occurring within northern Iraq. Analyzed satellite imagery from between 2014 and 2015 shows spoil heaps next to larger archaeological mounds (Arabic, *tell*, pl. *tellul*) in the Tel Afar region. These indicate the presence of tunneling into the sides of tells in the search for antiquities. This tunneling technique leaves little visible damage to archaeological mounds unlike the larger looting pits that appear as craters on satellite imagery. The spoil heaps are often the only clear visible evidence.

So far this damage has only been seen on a small number of sites in the region, though analysis of the area is ongoing. These instances of damage occurred between late 2014 and early 2016. Often tunnel entrances occur in concentrated areas rather than tunneling into multiple sides of the tell at the same time.

The clearest example of this type of illegal excavation is seen on the largest tell at Qara Tepe, a multi-tell site. In the DigitalGlobe image, spoil heaps were identified on the northwest side of the tell with small visible holes where the tunneling took place since September 17, 2015. A smaller spoil heap then appeared on the eastern side of the same tell in the February 26, 2016 satellite image. This is the same timeline of destruction as seen at other tell sites in the region.

The site of Khidhr Alyas was previously damaged when the Shrine of Khider al-Elias was intentionally destroyed between January and July 2014. Even before 2014, the site was militarized with embankments near the base, and a set of stairs cut into the north side for access to the shrine. After the destruction of the shrine, the tell was then subjected to illegal tunneling excavation between January and September 2015. A trench and spoil heap are visible on the north side of the tell in the DigitalGlobe image from September 17, 2015. In the image from February 26, 2016, there is also new bulldozing along the mound's north edge and up onto its north slope. Further analysis and monitoring will continue for similar types of damage to tells within this region.

⁴³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/21/world/middleeast/istanbul-suicide-bombing-turkey-isis.html> ; <http://www.newsweek.com/isis-istanbul-suicide-bomber-followed-israeli-tourists-hotel-report-438871>

⁴⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35869254>



Qara Tepe (DigitalGlobe; November 19, 2014)



Qara Tepe (DigitalGlobe; September 17, 2015)



Qara Tepe (DigitalGlobe; February 26, 2016)



Khidhr Alyas (DigitalGlobe; January 2, 2015)



Khidhr Alyas (DigitalGlobe; February 26, 2016)

Incident Reports: Syria

SHI 16-0038

Report Date: March 19, 2016

Site Name: Market near the cemetery of Hattin (مقبرة حطين) and the al-Nawawi Mosque (Imam al-Nawawi Mosque) (مسجد الإمام النووي)

Date of Incident: March 18, 2016; March 19, 2016

Location: Raqqa City, Raqqa Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Market and mosque in the city of Raqqa.

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Reported Russian airstrikes damage two heritage sites in Raqqa.

Incident Source and Description: On March 19, 2016 the activist group Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently (RBSS) published an article that listed 15 locations that had been targeted by Russian airstrikes between March 18 and March 19, 2016.⁴⁵ Included in the list were a market near Hattin cemetery and an area near al-Imam al-Nawawi Mosque. According to RBSS, on March 18,

⁴⁵ <http://www.raqqa-sl.co/en/?p=1736>

2016 Russian airstrikes hit the market near Hattin cemetery. The extent of the damage to the market remains unknown, and details as to the significance of the market remain unclear. According to an eyewitness report in July of 2014, the same market was also located next to the Raqqa City Wall.⁴⁶ ISIL militants allegedly “transferred the busy Friday market next to Raqqa’s old wall, a historical site, and moved...market day to Thursday so it would not distract people from attending Friday prayers in the mosque.”⁴⁷

According to RBSS, on March 19, 2016 Russian airstrikes struck the area near al-Imam al-Nawawi Mosque. The extent of the damage to the mosque is unknown. Al-Imam al-Nawawi Mosque has been previously damaged by SARG airstrikes. According to Amnesty International, on November 28, 2014 SARG airstrikes hit the al-Imam al-Nawawi mosque as a seminar was taking place.⁴⁸ The airstrikes killed several civilians, but the extent of the damage to the mosque at that time remains unknown. In addition, ISIL has reportedly repurposed the al-Imam al-Nawawi Mosque on at least two occasions. In 2013, ISIL was reported to be receiving “complaints about its members’ conduct” in the mosque.⁴⁹ In January 2015, RBSS reported that a member of the Judicial Official within ISIL’s Central Command, Abu Ali Anbari, was delivering lectures in al-Imam al-Nawawi Mosque “between Maghrib and Isha prayers.”⁵⁰

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the condition of Hattin market, the al-Nawawi Mosque, and other heritage located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns and intense military activity.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Al Akhbar: <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/20421>

Amnesty International: https://www.amnesty.nl/sites/default/files/public/al-raqa_under_attack.pdf

As Sakina: <http://www.assakina.com/news/news2/58391.html>

Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently:

March 19, 2016: <http://www.raqqa-sl.co/en/?p=1736>

January 1, 2015: <http://www.raqqa-sl.co/en/?p=245>

Terrorism Research Initiative:

<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/447/html>

⁴⁶ For previous reports on damage to Raqqa City Wall see: **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0072 in Weekly Report 38; ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0132 in Weekly Report 59-60.**

⁴⁷ <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/20421>

⁴⁸ https://www.amnesty.nl/sites/default/files/public/al-raqa_under_attack.pdf; <http://www.assakina.com/news/news2/58391.html>

⁴⁹ <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/447/html>

⁵⁰ <http://www.raqqa-sl.co/en/?p=245>



al-Imam al-Nawawi Mosque from an unknown date (As Sakina; November 30, 2014)

SHI 16-0039

Report Date: March 22, 2016

Site Name: Uthman bin Affan Mosque (جامع عثمان بن عفان); Bilal ibn Rabia Mosque (مسجد بلال)

Date of Incident: March 16, 2016; March 22, 2016

Location: Palmyra, Homs Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Mosques

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Russian airstrikes on Palmyra damaged Uthman bin Affan Mosque and Bilal ibn Rabia Mosque in Palmyra.

Incident Source and Description: On March 16, 2016, Palmyra Coordination posted a video showing damage to the area around Uthman bin Affan Mosque in Palmyra following a series of airstrikes by Russian forces.⁵¹ While the caption of the video claims the mosque was destroyed, it appears to still be standing. The quality of the video is such that the extent of damage to the mosque cannot be confirmed. It does appear that most of the surrounding buildings are either destroyed or heavily damaged.

On May 22, 2015 *Al Jazeera* reported that SARG airstrikes had damaged both the Uthman bin Affan Mosque and the Iman Mosque in Palmyra but did not elaborate on the extent of the damage.⁵² Palmyra Coordination posted a YouTube video of the damage to the mosque.⁵³ The video shows only the outside of the mosque. The windows appear to have been blown out, and the area around the mosque is littered with debris. This damage was confirmed by a photo published by Reuters on March 27, 2016, via a handout given to Reuters by Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA).⁵⁴

The Palmyra Coordination posted photographs from the stay day showing damage to Bilal ibn Rabia Mosque in Palmyra, following airstrikes by Russian forces.⁵⁵ The photographs show the mosque's exterior. The windows and doors appear to have been blown out, and there appears to be structural damage. Pieces of the facade of the structure have fallen off. The Bilal Mosque was previously damaged on December 9, 2015. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) reported that SARG warplanes "fired a missile near Bilal Mosque", partially damaging the mosque and its minaret.⁵⁶ (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0160** in **Weekly Report 71-72**).

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

⁵¹ <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=485778151547129>

⁵² <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/isil-expands-syria-territory-palmyra-capture-150521133817603.html>

⁵³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQS5hepbfkA>

⁵⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/news/picture/islamic-state-driven-out-of-syrias-ancie?articleId=USKCN0WT04R&slideId=1128137822>

⁵⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/revo.palmyra3/posts/487782114680066>

⁵⁶ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2015/12/09/15361/>

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the condition of the Uthman bin Affan Mosque and the Bilal ibn Rabia Mosque, and other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns and intense military activity. Additionally, ASOR CHI is directing critical attention to the condition of all periods of cultural heritage of Palmyra and the city of Tadmor area given its significance as a UNESCO World Heritage Site with a vulnerable civilian population.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Palmyra Coordination:

<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=485778151547129>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CliKMNfMF4&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.facebook.com/revo.palmyra3/posts/487782114680066>

<https://twitter.com/PalmyraRev1/status/708371485010878464?lang=en>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQS5hepbfkA>

Al Jazeera: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/isil-expands-syria-territory-palmyra-capture-150521133817603.html>

Syrian Network for Human Rights:

December 9, 2015: <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2015/12/09/15361/>

August 16, 2015:

<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2015/08/16/government-forces-shelling-targeted-a-mosque-in-palmyra-in-august-16/>

Reuters:

<http://www.reuters.com/news/picture/islamic-state-driven-out-of-syrias-ancie?articleId=USKCN0WT04R&slideId=1128137822>



Exterior of Uthman bin Affan Mosque (SANA Handout via Reuters; March 27, 2016)



Exterior of Uthman bin Affan Mosque (Palmyra Coordination YouTube video; June 16, 2015)



Exterior of Uthman bin Affan Mosque (Palmyra Coordination YouTube video; June 16, 2015)



Damage to exterior of Bilal ibn Rabia Mosque (Palmyra Coordination; March 22, 2016)



Damage to exterior of Bilal ibn Rabia Mosque (Palmyra Coordination; March 22, 2016)



Damage to exterior of Bilal ibn Rabia Mosque (Palmyra Coordination; March 22, 2016)



Pre-damage photo of Bilal ibn Rabia Mosque (Abu Shami Patarr Twitter; May 22, 2015)

SHI 16-0040

Report Date: March 24, 2016

Site Name: al-Sayyida Aisha Mosque (مسجد السيدة عائشة) (al-Sayidda Aisha Mother of the Believers Mosque ; مسجد السيدة عائشة أم المؤمنين)

Date of Incident: March 23, 2016

Location: Al Zahra Neighborhood, Aleppo City, Aleppo Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Mosque

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: Artillery rocket fire damages mosque.

Incident Source and Description: On March 24, 2016 SNHR reported that “local made rocket shells” were fired on al-Sayyida Aisha Mosque in the neighborhood of Al Zahra, causing damage to the mosque. The artillery fire reportedly came from “armed opposition territory” in the city.⁵⁷ No photographs or video were available at the time of publication.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the condition of the al-Sayyida Aisha Mosque and the condition of other heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns and intense military activity.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

SNHR:

<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/03/24/armed-opposition-factions-targeted-mrs-aisha-mosque-in-al-zahraa-neighborhood-in-alppo-governorate-in-march-23/>

⁵⁷ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/03/24/armed-opposition-factions-targeted-mrs-aisha-mosque-in-al-zahraa-neighborhood-in-alppo-governorate-in-march-23/>

SHI 16-0041

Report Date: March 28, 2016

Site Name: Palmyra (تدمر), including:

- Agora (الأغورا)
- Baths of Diocletian (الحممامات)
- Decumanus (Great Colonnade; الشارع الطويل)
- Camp of Diocletian (معسكر ديوقلسيان)
- Funerary Temple (المعبد الجنائزي)
- Triumphal Arch of Septimius Severus (Monumental Arch; قوس النصر)
- Senate (مجلس الشيوخ)
- Tariff Court (قاعة الضرائب)
- Temple of Bel (معبد بل)
- Temple of Nabu (معبد نبو)
- Tetrapylon (النترابيل)
- Theater (مسرح)

Date of Incident: March 25–28, 2016

Location: Tadmor, Homs Governorate, Syria

Site Description:

- Palmyra (تدمر) - From UNESCO: “First mentioned in the archives of Mari in the 2nd millennium BC, Palmyra was an established caravan oasis when it came under Roman control in the mid-first century CE as part of the Roman province of Syria. It grew steadily in importance as a city on the trade route linking Persia, India, and China with the Roman Empire, marking the crossroads of several civilisations in the ancient world. A grand, colonnaded street of 1100 meters' length forms the monumental axis of the city, which together with secondary colonnaded cross streets links the major public monuments including the Temple of Bel, Diocletian's Camp, the Agora, Theatre, other temples, and urban quarters. Architectural ornament including unique examples of funerary sculpture unites the forms of Greco-Roman art with indigenous elements and Persian influences in a strongly original style. Outside the city's walls are remains of a Roman aqueduct and immense necropolises. An oasis in the Syrian desert, north-east of Damascus, Palmyra contains the monumental ruins of a great city that was one of the most important cultural centers of the ancient world. From the first to the second century, the art and architecture of Palmyra, standing at the crossroads of several civilizations, married Greco-Roman techniques with local traditions and Persian influences.”⁵⁸
- Agora (الأغورا) - Palmyra's massive Agora was built ca. 150 CE as part of a complex that also included the Tariff Court and the Senate.⁵⁹ The structure has 11 entrances and contains the remains of 200 columns that once held statues of prominent citizens. The inscriptions on the column bases indicate the manner in which these statues were grouped: the eastern side was reserved for senators, the northern side for Palmyrene officials, the western side for soldiers, and the southern side for caravan chiefs.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/23>

⁵⁹ Browning 1979: 157

⁶⁰ Darke 2006: 240

- Baths of Diocletian (الحمّامات) - The Baths of Diocletian, built during the reign of Diocletian (r. 284-305 CE) in Palmyra following the defeat of the Palmyrene queen Zenobia, are for the most part not visible above the level of the foundation. The complex's entrance may still be seen and is marked by four massive red Egyptian granite columns. Inside, the outline of a bathing pool surrounded by a colonnade is still visible, as well as an octagonal room that served as a dressing room containing a drain in its center.⁶¹
- Decumanus (Great Colonnade; الشارع الطويل) - The Decumanus Maximus (or Great Colonnade) at Palmyra was the main colonnaded avenue in the city. The colonnade was built in several stages during the second and third centuries CE and stretched for over a kilometer.⁶² The Decumanus (as in most Roman cities) is on an east-west axis, linking the Temple of Bel in the southeastern end of the city to the West Gate and the Funerary Temple in the northwestern section. Several other colonnaded streets branch off perpendicularly from the Decumanus. The entrances to several monuments, including the Temple of Nabu, the Baths of Diocletian, and two nymphaea, are incorporated into the colonnade. Many of the columns of the colonnade (which is around 1.2 km long) still bear protruding brackets, on which statues of the city's patrons and elite would have been placed.⁶³
- Camp of Diocletian (معسكر ديوقلسيان) - The Camp of Diocletian was a Roman military complex built between 293 and 305 CE under the emperor Diocletian at the western end of the colonnaded Decumanus. This construction was part of a refortification plan for Palmyra following the defeat of the independent Palmyrene Empire and the Roman recapture of the city in the 270s CE.⁶⁴ The camp was laid out around two colonnaded streets, the *via praetoria* and the *via principalis*, which intersected at a tetrapylon. The *via praetoria* ran from the Praetorian Gate to the *principia* (military headquarters). Within the *principia*, and located at the highest point in the camp, was the so-called "Temple of the Standards," where the legion's standards were likely kept. The Temple of Allat is also located within the camp.⁶⁵
- Funerary Temple (المعبد الجنائزي) - The Funerary Temple is actually a second century CE temple tomb, and is one of the only tombs found within the city walls. The building consists of a portico supported by six Corinthian columns, behind which is a large room with steps leading down to the underground burial chambers.⁶⁶ No inscriptions have been found to identify this tomb.
- Triumphal Arch of Septimius Severus (Monumental Arch; قوس النصر) - Also known as the Monumental Arch or Victory Arch, the Triumphal Arch was constructed during the reign of Septimius Severus (r. 193 to 211 CE). The arch is impressive from an architectural standpoint as it solves a problem somewhat unique to Palmyra. The layout of this ancient city was unusual for the Roman period because its main streets did not completely align with the four cardinal points of the compass. The monumental arch was constructed at the point of a thirty-degree turn in the Decumanus. To solve this issue, the arch incorporated two facades angled apart from one another, one leading to the Tetrapylon and the other forming the entrance to the *via sacra*

⁶¹ Beattie and Pepper 2001: 288

⁶² Burns 2009: 214

⁶³ Butcher 2003: 244ff

⁶⁴ Millar 1993: 182, 227

⁶⁵ Burns 2009: 216

⁶⁶ <http://www.syriaphotoguide.com/home/palmyra-funerary-temple>

(or sacred road) leading to the Temple of Bel. The arch is richly decorated with stone carvings and is one of the most lavishly adorned monuments in the city.⁶⁷

- Senate (مجلس الشيوخ) - The small structure thought to be the Senate building of Palmyra consists of an entrance hall, a peristyle court, and a chamber with an apse surrounded by rows of seating. The building was likely once larger but was partially demolished ca. 150 CE to make room for the curved portico that encloses the theater. The building probably dates to the early first century CE.⁶⁸
- Tariff Court (قاعة الضرائب) - The Tariff Court is so named because it is the site of the discovery of a massive stone block called the Tariff of Palmyra. Inscribed on the block in Greek and Aramaic were the rates of taxes on goods entering or leaving the city. The block dates to 137 CE and is now in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.⁶⁹
- Temple of Bel (معبد بل) - The Temple of Bel is one of the most recognizable monuments of Palmyra, and one of the most important first century CE religious building in the Near East. Evidence of a temple at the site dates to the Hellenistic era (although the site probably dates to at least ca. 2000 BCE). Construction began on the temple *cella* around 17 CE, and it was dedicated in 32 CE. Between 80 and 120 CE, the temple's *temenos* was enlarged, and a colonnaded portico was added on the north, east, and south sides of the complex. In the late second century CE, a larger colonnaded portico and a propylaeum (entrance) was added to the west side (the current entrance dates to the 12th century, when the temple complex was fortified by the Burids).⁷⁰

The design of the temple complex belongs to a style variously known as Palmyrene, Phoenician, Roman, or Syro-Phoenician. Essentially, this consists of design with many Roman or Greek attributes, but also with typically Near Eastern features. For example, this design of a temple complex with small *cella* or *naos* surrounded by a large open space can be traced back to Syria's Ugaritic civilization. The colonnaded portico is a typically Classical feature, but it does not diminish the size of the enclosed *temenos*.⁷¹ The the Corinthian columns on the Temple of Bel *cella* are a typically Greco-Roman addition, and the stepped merlons (the triangular structures on the *cella* roof) are a Mesopotamian feature.⁷²

The *cella* at the Temple of Bel stood on a podium at the center of the *temenos*, surrounded by a prostyle of Corinthian columns. The interior of the *cella* was unique in that it contained two *adyta* (inner sanctuaries containing cult images). While the complex is called the Temple of Bel, several other local deities were there worshipped, as well.⁷³

The *temenos* contains the remains of a lustral basin (used to purify oneself before making an offering), an altar, a banquet hall, and an unidentified building with niches. In the northwest corner of the *temenos* there is a ramp along which sacrificial animals were led into the temple area, to be sacrificed on the altar. There were three monumental gateways, of which the main

⁶⁷ Burns 2009: 214

⁶⁸ Darke 2006: 240

⁶⁹ Darke 2006: 240; Burns 2009: 215

⁷⁰ Burns 2009: 210

⁷¹ Burns 2009: 20

⁷² <http://www.syriaphotoguide.com/home/palmyra-temple-of-bel>

⁷³ Gates 2003: 390ff

entry was through the west gate.

The temple *cella* was converted to a mosque when the temple complex was fortified by the Burids in the 12th century, and remained in service until 1929. By then, the temple complex had become a small village, whose inhabitants were expelled in order to conduct excavations.⁷⁴

- Temple of Nabu (معبد نبو) - The remains of the Temple of Nabu consist only of the temple podium and the bases of the columns that formed the porticos of the temple *cella* and *temenos*. The *cella* opened south onto an outdoor altar. It dates to ca. 75-100 CE.⁷⁵
- Tetracylon (النترا بيل) - Unlike most Roman cities in the region, Palmyra did not conform to the standard city plan of two intersecting streets (a *decumanus* running east-west and a *cardo* running north-south). The main colonnaded street of Palmyra changes direction twice, and at these points unique architectural devices, namely as the Triumphal Arch and the Tetracylon, were built to make the route appear more harmonious.⁷⁶ The Tetracylon consists of four large plinths, each supporting four columns topped by a massive corinth. This type of tetracylon is called a *tetrakionion*, in which the four corners of the structure are not connected overhead. Only one of the original pink Egyptian granite columns survives – the other are modern reproductions.⁷⁷
- Theater (مسرح) - Palmyra's late second century CE Severan-period theater is located southwest of the colonnaded Decumanus. The theater is unfinished, consisting only of the lowest level of seating, the *ima cavea* (the *media* and *summa caveae* would normally be above this lowest section, which is reserved for the elite), but still represents one of the best preserved Roman theaters in Syria. The Theater is ringed by a colonnaded portico which opens onto a colonnaded street leading to Palmyra's Southern Gate.⁷⁸

Site Date:

- Palmyra: early 2nd millennium foundation, primarily Hellenistic, Palmyrene, Roman, Byzantine
- Agora: ca. 150 CE
- Baths of Diocletian: ca. 150 CE
- Decumanus: late 2nd century CE
- Camp of Diocletian: 293–305 CE
- Funerary Temple: 2nd century CE
- Triumphal Arch: 193–211 CE
- Senate: 1st century CE
- Tariff Court: 1st century CE
- Temple of Bel: Hellenistic, 1st century CE–late 2nd century CE, 12th century CE–1929 CE (use as mosque)
- Temple of Nabu: 75–100 CE
- Tetracylon: late 2nd century CE
- Theater: late 2nd century CE

⁷⁴ Kaizer 2002: 67

⁷⁵ Burns 2009: 214

⁷⁶ Darke 2006: 238

⁷⁷ <http://www.syriaphotoguide.com/home/palmyra-tetracylon>

⁷⁸ Darke 2006: 240

Incident Summary: New photographs of Palmyra are available following the recapture of the city and archaeological area by SARG supported by Russian airstrikes.

Incident Source and Description: On March 27, 2016 the Syrian regime announced that it had recaptured the city of Palmyra from ISIL after ten months of occupation.⁷⁹ Throughout the month of March 2016, clashes have been ongoing with SARG and pro-regime forces against ISIL militants. Increased Russian and SARG airstrikes were also reported by local activist groups. The offensive to retake Palmyra began on March 14, 2016 when Russian forces began focusing their airstrikes on the city of Tadmor and Palmyra and the surrounding area.⁸⁰ In tandem, SARG forces along with pro-regime forces advanced on the city and the ancient site. In addition, the US-led Coalition reported one airstrike near the city of Palmyra on March 23, 2016.⁸¹

On March 25, 2016 the news agency Russia 24 released a video taken by drone of the archaeological site of Palmyra.⁸² The video shows the present state of several of the main monuments of the western section of ancient Palmyra, including the Agora, the Baths of Diocletian, the colonnaded Decumanus, the Triumphal Arch, the Senate, the Tariff Court, the Temple of Bel, the Temple of Nabu, the Tetrapylon, and the Theater. On March 27, 2016 DGAM published 14 high-quality photographs of several monuments, including several of the Temple of Bel and the Theater, as well as two clearer photographs of the Triumphal Arch.⁸³ Also on March 27, 2016 the Associated Press published new drone footage from Russian State TV and the Syrian Military Media Centre of the Theater, a large section of the Decumanus, and the Funerary Temple.⁸⁴ Getty Images published many new photographs by Maher Al Mounes, Valery Sharifulin, and a Getty stringer showing several monuments, including the Decumanus, the Triumphal Arch, the Camp of Diocletian, the Senate, the Temple of Bel, the Temple of Nabu, the Tetrapylon, and the Theater.⁸⁵ On March 28, 2016 TASS Russian News Agency published several new photographs of Palmyra, including the Triumphal Arch, and the Tetrapylon.⁸⁶

Below is a short summary of the current state of each monument featured by these sources, as well as past damage:

- [Agora](#): There is no reported damage. No major damage is apparent.
- [Baths of Diocletian](#): There is no reported damage. No major damage is apparent.
- [Decumanus](#): No specific incident of damage to the Colonnaded Avenue has been reported, but an AP video shows a large amount of debris on the ground probably consisting of collapsed columns and pieces of the entablature from the colonnade.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-palmyra-idUSKCN0WT04R>

⁸⁰ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/03/russian-syrian-iranian-coalition-seizes.html>

⁸¹ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/703953/coalition-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

⁸² <https://www.youtube.com/embed/zFHcIm9F41w>

⁸³ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1955>

⁸⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y53thid5DqQ&feature=youtu.be>

⁸⁵ http://www.gettyimages.com/galleries/photographers/maher_al_mounes ; http://www.gettyimages.com/galleries/photographers/valery_sharifulin ; <http://www.gettyimages.com/galleries/search?phrase=palmyra+stringer&family=Editorial&sort=>

⁸⁶ <http://tass.ru/en/society/865440>

⁸⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y53thid5DqQ>

- [Camp of Diocletian](#) : No major new damage is apparent. In December 2014, it was reported that SARG forces had militarized the area of the Camp. On June 13, 2015 ASOR CHI sources in Syria reported that SARG had bombarded the archaeological precinct of Palmyra, damaging a part of the north wall of Diocletian’s Camp. On June 16, 2015, footage was posted to YouTube showing damage to the northern wall, attributed also to the aerial bombardment. For previous incidents, see: **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 14-0103** in **Weekly Report 20**; **SHI 15-0096** in **Weekly Report 45**.
- [Funerary Temple](#) : There is no reported damage. No major new damage is apparent.
- [Triumphal Arch of Septimius Severus](#): On October 4, 2015 ISIL detonated explosives around the arch, causing major damage to the central and south gateways of the three-gate arch. Photographs provided by the DGAM are clearer evidence of ISIL’s deliberate destruction of the arch in October 2015 (previously published photographs were of fairly low quality).⁸⁸ For previous incidents, see: **SHI 15-0138** in **Weekly Report 61-62**.
- [Senate](#): There is no reported damage. No major new damage is apparent.
- [Tariff Court](#): There is no reported damage. No major new damage is apparent.
- [Temple of Bel](#): A Russia 24 video confirms the complete destruction of the cella of the Temple of Bel on August 30, 2015 by ISIL.⁸⁹ Several columns of the south side of the portico that follows the *temenos* wall of the temple complex appear to have collapsed since the destruction of the *cella*. Damage to the columns possibly occurred on February 10, 2016 when, according to Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), SARG forces fired missiles on the Temple of Bel complex, “destroying 3 columns completely and partially damaging the fence.”⁹⁰ The modern wall on the west side of the *temenos* to the right of the temple’s monumental gateway has partially collapsed.⁹¹ Several photographs provided by Maher Al Mounes show graffiti within the temple complex. For previous incidents, see: **SHI 15-0055** in **Weekly Report 33**; **SHI 15-0127** in **Weekly Report 55-56**; **SHI 16-0026** in **Weekly Report 79-80**.
- [Temple of Nabu](#): There is no reported damage. No major new damage is apparent.
- [Tetrapylon](#): There is no reported damage. No major new damage is apparent.
- [Theater](#): No new major structural damage is apparent, though the site clearly suffers from neglect and overgrowth of vegetation. SARG airstrikes allegedly caused unspecified damage to the Theater in July 2015. ISIL militants carried out executions in the Theater from May to July 2015. On February 10, 2016 SARG airstrikes again allegedly caused unspecified damage to the Theater. For previous incidents, see: **SHI 15-0096** in **Weekly Report 45**; **SHI 15-0104** in **Weekly Report 47-48**; **SHI 16-0026** in **Weekly Report 79-80**.

⁸⁸ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1955> ; <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1823>

⁸⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/embed/zFHclm9F41w>

⁹⁰ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/02/11/18241/>

⁹¹ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1955>

Monuments that have been the focus of previous ASOR CHI Incident Reports but have not yet been photographed following the SARG capture of Palmyra include:

- Baalshamin Temple: **SHI 15-0096** in **Weekly Report 45** (SARG bombardment); **SHI 15-0124** in **Weekly Report 55-56** (intentional destruction)
- Hypogeum of Artaban: **SHI 14-0073** in **Weekly Report 13** (looting); **SHI 15-0058** in **Weekly Report 34** (looting)
- Hypogeum of Taibul: **SHI 14-0086** in **Weekly Report 16-17** (looting)
- Tower Tombs of Atenaten, Elahbel, Iamliku, Kithoth, Tower tomb #71, J. Aurelius Bolma, and the Banai: **SHI 15-0128** in **Weekly Report 57-58** (intentional destruction)

Pattern: Military activity: explosives; Military activity: gunfire/light weaponry; Military activity: occupation/militarization; Military activity: vehicles/heavy weaponry; Military activity: reuse of ancient/historic structure; Military activity: landmines; Military activity: intentional destruction; Military activity: intentional performative destruction; Vandalism; illegal excavation; Theft; Site management.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI is directing critical attention to the condition of all periods of cultural heritage at Palmyra, given the high visibility and ongoing significance of the city and UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Sources:

Online Reporting

AP:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y53thid5DqQ>

BBC:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35906568>

DGAM:

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1955>

<http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1823>

Russia 24:

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TASS Russian News Agency: <http://tass.ru/en/society/865440>

Syrian Network for Human Rights: <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/02/11/18241/>

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<http://www.syriaphotoguide.com/home/palmyra-tetrapylon>
<http://www.syriaphotoguide.com/home/palmyra-temple-of-bel>

UNESCO: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/23>

Site Overview



Video still of eastern section of Palmyra (Russia 24; March 25, 2016)

Agora, Tariff Court, and Senate



Southern section of Agora (left) and Tariff Court (right) (Russia 24; March 25, 2016)

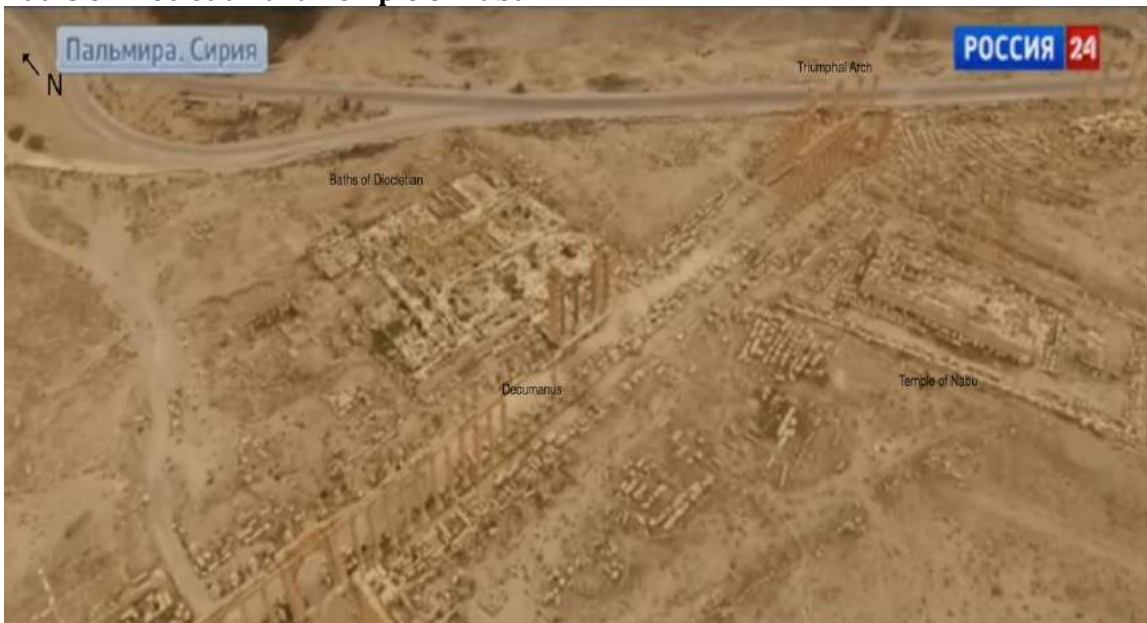


Agora (top), Tariff House (bottom), a colonnaded street (top right) (Russia 24; March 25, 2016)



Senate and Agora (far left), colonnaded street (top), Tetrapylon (far right) looking northwest (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)⁹²

Baths of Diocletian and Temple of Nabu



Baths of Diocletian (top left), Triumphal Arch (top right), Temple of Nabu (right), Decumanus (middle) (Russia 24; March 25, 2016)

⁹² <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517773930>



Destroyed Triumphal Arch (far right) with Temple of Nabu in foreground (Stringer/Getty; March 27, 2016)⁹³



Baths of Diocletian area facing south, including entrance (left) (Stringer/Getty; March 27, 2016)⁹⁴

⁹³ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517769240>

⁹⁴ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517769200>

Decumanus



East entrance to Theater complex on Decumanus facing southwest (DGAM; March 27, 2016)



Decumanus looking north (TASS Russian News Agency; March 28, 2016)



Soldier walking southwest towards Decumanus, with Theater on the right (TASS Russian News Agency; March 28, 2016)



Decumanus facing west towards the Tetrpylon (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)⁹⁵

⁹⁵ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517781178>



Decumanus facing west towards the Tetrapylon (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)⁹⁶

Camp of Diocletian



Camp of Diocletian with Tower Tombs in the distance (Stringer/Getty; March 27, 2016)⁹⁷

⁹⁶ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/view-of-the-great-colonnade-in-the-ancient-city-of-palmyra-news-photo/517835450>

⁹⁷ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517769240>



Camp of Diocletian looking west with destroyed Telecommunications tower in the distance (Stringer/Getty; March 27, 2016)⁹⁸

Funerary Temple



South wall of the Funerary Temple, with tombs of the Northern Necropolis in the distance (AP; March 27, 2016)

⁹⁸ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517769224>



Pediment of the Funerary Temple, with Qalaat Shirkuh in upper left field (AP; March 27, 2016)

Triumphal Arch of Septimius Severus



Remains of northern gateway of the Triumphal Arch surrounded by debris (looking southeast), with Temple of Bel in the distance (TASS Russian News Agency; March 28, 2016)



Remains of northern gateway of the Triumphal Arch surrounded by debris (looking northwest), with Qalaat Shirkuh in the distance. (DGAM; March 27, 2016)



Remains of Triumphal Arch looking northwest, surrounded by debris (DGAM; March 27, 2016)



Remains of northern gateway of the Triumphal Arch surrounded by debris (BBC; March 27, 2016)



Remains of northern gateway of Triumphal Arch looking northwest (far left) (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)⁹⁹

⁹⁹ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517781180>



Remains of northern gateway of Triumphal Arch looking northwest (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁰⁰



Rubble of destroyed Triumphal Arch (left) facing south (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ <http://media.gettyimages.com/photos/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-remains-of-arch-picture-id517857752>

¹⁰¹ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/ruins-of-the-monumental-arch-destroyed-by-isis-militants-in-news-photo/517781794>



Rubble of destroyed Triumphal Arch (left) facing south (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁰²



Rubble of destroyed Triumphal Arch facing south (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁰³

¹⁰² <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/ruins-of-the-monumental-arch-destroyed-by-isis-militants-in-news-photo/517781890>

¹⁰³ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/the-colonnade-of-the-monumental-arch-destroyed-by-isis-news-photo/517782582>



Rubble of destroyed Triumphal Arch (Valery Sharifullin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁰⁴



Rubble of destroyed Triumphal Arch facing east (Valery Sharifullin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/ruins-of-the-monumental-arch-destroyed-by-isis-militants-in-news-photo/517782596>

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/ruins-of-the-monumental-arch-destroyed-by-isis-militants-in-news-photo/517835476>

Temple of Bel



Temple of Bel complex showing damage to *cella* (Russia 24; March 25, 2016)



Destruction of *cella* and columns of southern section of Temple of Bel complex (Russia 24, March 25, 2016)



Cella of Temple of Bel (Russia 24; March 25, 2016)



Road (*Via sacra*) leading southeast to Temple of Bel complex (AP; March 27, 2016)



Gateway of *cella* of Temple of Bel, surrounded by rubble from the destroyed *cella* (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁰⁶



Gateway of *cella* of Temple of Bel, surrounded by rubble of the temple and a stone with graffiti in southeast section of *temenos* (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-shows-the-remains-of-the-entrance-to-the-news-photo/517769914>

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-shows-graffiti-on-a-stone-reading-in-arabic-news-photo/517769962>



Interior southwest wall of Temple of Bel *temenos* and rubble with graffiti (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁰⁸



Interior west wall of Temple of Bel *temenos* (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517770018>

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517770022>



Interior west wall of Temple of Bel *temenos*, with rubble from destroyed *cella* in foreground (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹¹⁰



Interior west wall of Temple of Bel *temenos*, with rubble from destroyed *cella* in foreground (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517781166>

¹¹¹ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517770008>



Exterior of west wall of Temple of Bel complex (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹¹²



Collapsed section of exterior western wall of Temple of Bel complex, to the right of the Monumental Gateway (DGAM; March 27, 2016)

¹¹² <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-a-tourist-sign-in-news-photo/517770038>



Rubble from destruction of *cella* in interior Temple of Bel complex, facing northwest (DGAM; March 27, 2016)



Interior of Temple of Bel complex facing northwest, with monumental gateway on the left (DGAM; March 27, 2016)



Gateway of cella of Temple of Bel facing northeast, surrounded by rubble of the *cella*, with lustral basin in foreground (DGAM; March 27, 2016)



Gateway of *cella* of Temple of Bel facing northwest, surrounded by rubble of the *cella* and overgrown vegetation (DGAM; March 27, 2016)



Gateway of *cella* of Temple of Bel facing northeast, surrounded by rubble of the *cella* (DGAM; March 27, 2016)



Gateway of *cella* of Temple of Bel facing north, surrounded by rubble of the *cella* on the steps of the *cella* podium (DGAM; March 27, 2016)



Via sacra leading southeast towards the Temple of Bel complex, with the Visitors Center on the left (DGAM; March 27, 2016)



Overview of eastern half of site, with graffiti on modern building west of Temple of Bel (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 26, 2016)¹¹³

¹¹³ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/view-of-the-ancient-town-of-palmyra-a-unesco-world-heritage-news-photo/517641578>



Temple of Bel seen from Orchards area (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹¹⁴



Soldier walking west through Temple of Bel *temenos* (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/palmyra-a-unesco-world-heritage-site-a-substantial-number-news-photo/517782538>

¹¹⁵ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/syrian-government-army-soldier-on-the-ruins-of-the->



South wall of Temple of Bel *temenos* (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹¹⁶



Gateway of Temple of Bel *cella* surrounded by rubble (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹¹⁷

[temple-news-photo/517781688](https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/the-great-colonnade-in-palmyra-a-unesco-world-heritage-site-news-photo/517781688)

¹¹⁶ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/the-great-colonnade-in-palmyra-a-unesco-world-heritage-site-news-photo/517781378>



Soldier walks through Temple of Bel *temenos* next to monumental gateway (left) (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹¹⁸



Exterior northwest corner of Temple of Bel *temenos* (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/ruins-of-the-temple-of-bel-destroyed-by-isis-militants-in-news-photo/517781436>

¹¹⁸ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/syrian-government-army-soldier-on-ruins-of-the-temple-of-news-photo/517781000>

¹¹⁹ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/ruins-of-the-temple-of-baalshamin-destroyed-by-isis-news-photo/517781788>



Interior of monumental gateway to Temple of Bel *temenos* (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹²⁰



Interior of monumental gateway to Temple of Bel *temenos* with collapsed wall (left) (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹²¹

¹²⁰ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/palmyra-a-unesco-world-heritage-site-a-substantial-number-news-photo/517781882>

¹²¹ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/ruins-of-the-temple-of-bel-destroyed-by-isis-militants-in-news-photo/517782564>



Interior of monumental gateway to Temple of Bel *temenos* (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹²²



Interior of monumental gateway to Temple of Bel *temenos* (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹²³

¹²² <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/palmyra-a-unesco-world-heritage-site-a-substantial-number-news-photo/517781414>

¹²³ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/palmyra-a-unesco-world-heritage-site-a-substantial-number-news-photo/517781174>

Tetrapylon



Tetrapylon taken from western edge of Theater complex (TASS Russian News Agency; March 28, 2016)



Tetrapylon taken from western edge of Theater complex (Maher Al Mounes/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹²⁴

¹²⁴ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-part-of-the-news-photo/517773934>



Tetrapylon facing south (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹²⁵

Theater



Theater and surrounding monuments facing east (Russia 24; March 25, 2016)

¹²⁵ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/palmyra-a-unesco-world-heritage-site-a-substantial-number-news-photo/517782546>



Theater and surrounding monuments facing west (Russia 24; March 25, 2016)



Decumanus and Theater facing south (AP; March 27, 2016)



Theater facing south, with overgrown vegetation in seating area (*cavea*) (AP; March 27, 2016)



Interior of Theater stage (*porticus post scaenam*) facing west (DGAM; March 27, 2016)



Interior of Theater facing west with overgrown vegetation on stage (*pulpitum*) and *cavea* (DGAM; March 27, 2016)

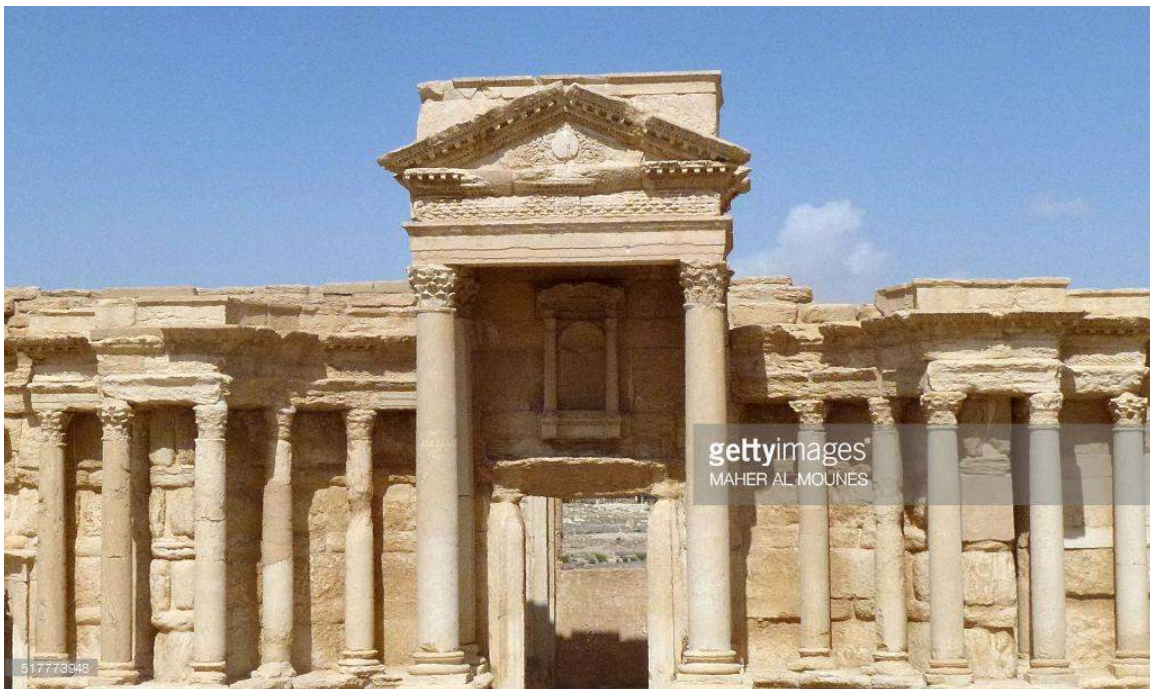


Interior of Theater stage backdrop (*scaenae frons*) (Maher Al Mounes; March 27, 2016)¹²⁶

¹²⁶ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-the-theatre-in-news-photo/517773948>



Interior of Theater with overgrown vegetation on *pulpitum* and in *orchestra* (Maher Al Mounes; March 27, 2016)¹²⁷



Interior of Theater *scaenae frons* (Maher Al Mounes; March 27, 2016)¹²⁸

¹²⁷ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-the-theatre-in-news-photo/517773942>

¹²⁸ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-the-theatre-in-news-photo/517773948>



Interior of Theater with overgrown vegetation and debris on *pulpitum* and in *orchestra* (Maher Al Mounes; March 27, 2016)¹²⁹



Eastern exterior portico of Theater complex (Valery Sharifun; March 27, 2016)¹³⁰

¹²⁹ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/general-view-taken-on-march-27-2016-shows-the-theatre-in-news-photo/517773954>

¹³⁰ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/view-of-the-roman-theatre-in-the-ancient-city-of-palmyra-a-news-photo/517835688>



Interior of Theater with overgrown vegetation and debris on *pulpitum* and in *orchestra* (Valery Sharifulin; March 27, 2016)¹³¹



Eastern entrance to portico bordering Theater complex (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹³²

¹³¹ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/view-of-the-roman-theatre-in-the-ancient-city-of-palmyra-a-news-photo/517858020>

¹³² <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/view-of-the-great-colonnade-in-the-ancient-city-of-palmyra-news-photo/517835440>



Eastern entrance to portico bordering Theater complex facing north (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹³³



Eastern entrance to portico bordering Theater complex facing north (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹³⁴

¹³³ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/view-of-the-great-colonnade-in-the-ancient-city-of-palmyra-news-photo/517858006>

¹³⁴ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/view-of-the-great-colonnade-in-the-ancient-city-of-palmyra-news-photo/517835422>



Overview of Theater and surrounding sites facing east (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹³⁵

¹³⁵ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/an-elevated-view-of-palmyra-a-unesco-world-heritage-site-news-photo/517763064>

SH 16-0042

Report Date: March 28, 2016

Site Name: Qalaat Shirkuh (Qal'at Fakr al-Din al-Maani; Citadel of Palmyra; قلعة فخر الدين المعني)

Date of Incident: March 26, 2016

Location: Tadmor, Homs Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Long attributed to the Lebanese amir Fakhr al-Din (1590-1635 CE), recent Polish research has shown that Qalaat Shirkuh is actually an Ayyubid-era construction built ca. 1230 CE by the Homs Amir al-Mujahid Assad al-Din Shirkuh II (r. 1186-1240 CE). Shirkuh was also responsible for Qalaat al-Shmemis in Hama Governorate and Qalaat Rahba in Raqqa Governorate. The original 13th century fortification consisted of a triangular fortress of seven towers. This design was extended soon after to include curtain walls and a deep ditch surrounding the fortress.¹³⁶

Site Date: ca. 1230 CE

Incident Summary: SARG forces retake Qalaat Shirkuh from ISIL militants

Incident Source and Description: Throughout the month of March 2016, clashes have been ongoing with SARG and pro-regime forces against ISIL militants in the Palmyra area. Increased Russian and SARG airstrikes were also reported by local activist groups. The offensive to retake Palmyra began on March 14, 2016 when Russian forces began focusing their airstrikes on the city of Palmyra and the surrounding area.¹³⁷ In tandem, SARG forces along with pro-regime forces advanced on the city and the ancient site. In addition, the US-led Coalition reported one airstrike near the city of Palmyra on March 23, 2016.¹³⁸

On March 10, 2016 the Palmyra Coordination Committee released new photographs allegedly showing reported Russian airstrikes damaging Qalaat Shirkuh. According to the group, “tens” of Russian airstrikes struck the Citadel.¹³⁹ See: **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 16-0035 in Weekly Report 83-84**. On March 25, 2016 SARG forces announced they had recaptured Qalaat Shirkuh from ISIL militants.¹⁴⁰ Russia 24 also posted a video of the exterior of Qalaat Shirkuh, filmed by drone.¹⁴¹ The SARG capture of the fortress was confirmed and corroborated the next day, when Syrian News Channel posted a video of SARG soldiers at the fortress.¹⁴² On March 27, 2016 the Syrian regime announced that it had recaptured the city of Palmyra from ISIL after ten months of occupation.¹⁴³ Further damage was caused when ISIL abandoned the fortress after days of bombardment, allegedly detonating explosives around the main entrance of the fortress and

¹³⁶ Burns 2009: 243

¹³⁷ <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/03/russian-syrian-iranian-coalition-seizes.html>

¹³⁸ <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/703953/coalition-strikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

¹³⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/revo.palmyra3/photos/a.433973920060886.1073741829.410518082406470/483966871728257/>

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=177&id=1945>

¹⁴¹ http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x403jpk_drone-footage-shows-ongoing-battle-for-palmyra_news

¹⁴² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ms3KtTurcak>

¹⁴³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-palmyra-idUSKCN0WT04R>

completely destroying the entranceway staircase.¹⁴⁴ This is confirmed in photographs taken by TASS photographer Valery Sharifulin, which show SARG soldiers using a rope to climb the fortification walls to enter the fortress.

Structurally, Qalaat Shirkuh appears largely intact. There is clear evidence of damage from airstrikes and other explosives to the fortification's curtain walls, and there are several places where the battlements at the top of the walls have partially collapsed. Debris from collapse or airstrike damage is strewn throughout the fortification's courtyards and staircases. The corridors in the fortress interior are also strewn with debris. One photograph shows a partially collapsed ceiling.

Qalaat Shirkuh also sustained damage in 2015. APSA published photographs and videos from mid-May 2015 showing combat between ISIL militants and SARG forces centered on the fortress. In July 2015, APSA published photos, apparently taken by ISIL militants, showing minor damage to the exterior walls of the fortress. In late September 2015, it was reported that Qalaat Shirkuh had been bombed multiple times by SARG forces, with local activist Khaled al-Homsi alleging at least a third of the exterior walls had been damaged by airstrikes. See **SHI 15-0086** in **Weekly Report 41**; **SHI 15-0134** in **Weekly Report 59-60**.

Pattern: Military activity: explosives; Military activity: gunfire/light weaponry; Military activity: occupation/militarization; Military activity: reuse of ancient/historic structure.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI is directing critical attention to the condition of all periods of cultural heritage at Palmyra, given the high visibility and ongoing significance of the city and UNESCO World Heritage Site. ASOR CHI has not been able to verify the condition of the all of the monuments at the ancient site and will continue to monitor the situation as more information becomes available.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Syrian News Channel (Alikhbariya):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ms3KtTurcak>

DGAM:

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1948>

<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=177&id=1945>

Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA):

March 26, 2016: <http://sana.sy/en/?p=72903>

March 27, 2016: <http://sana.sy/en/?p=72999> (video of exterior)

Russia 24 via Breaking News Channel:

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x403jpk_drone-footage-shows-ongoing-battle-for-palmyra_news

¹⁴⁴ <http://web.archive.org/web/20160327133431/http://sana.sy/en/?p=72903>

Scholarly:

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



An explosion or airstrike near Qalaat Shirkuh (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 25, 2016)¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/hostilities-between-the-syrian-government-army-and-isis-news-photo/517477568>



Airstrike damage on the western curtains walls (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁴⁶



Airstrike damage to western walls (APSA; March 26, 2016)

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/fakhr-al-din-al-maani-citadel-in-palmyra-a-unesco-world-news-photo/517754090>



Minor airstrike damage to northwestern curtain wall (DGAM; March 26, 2016)



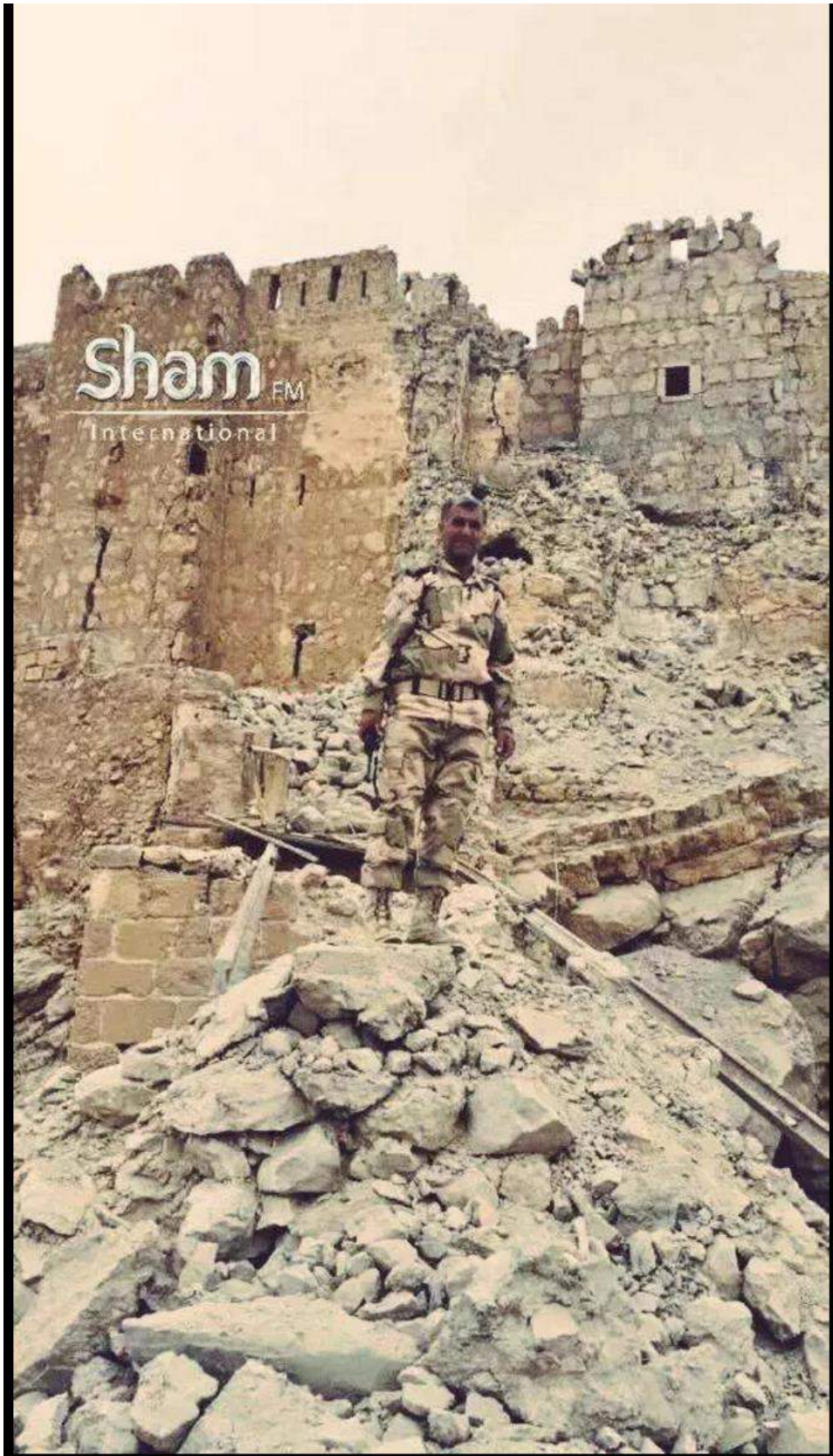
Airstrike damage to eastern curtain wall and partial collapse of battlement (SANA; March 27, 2016)



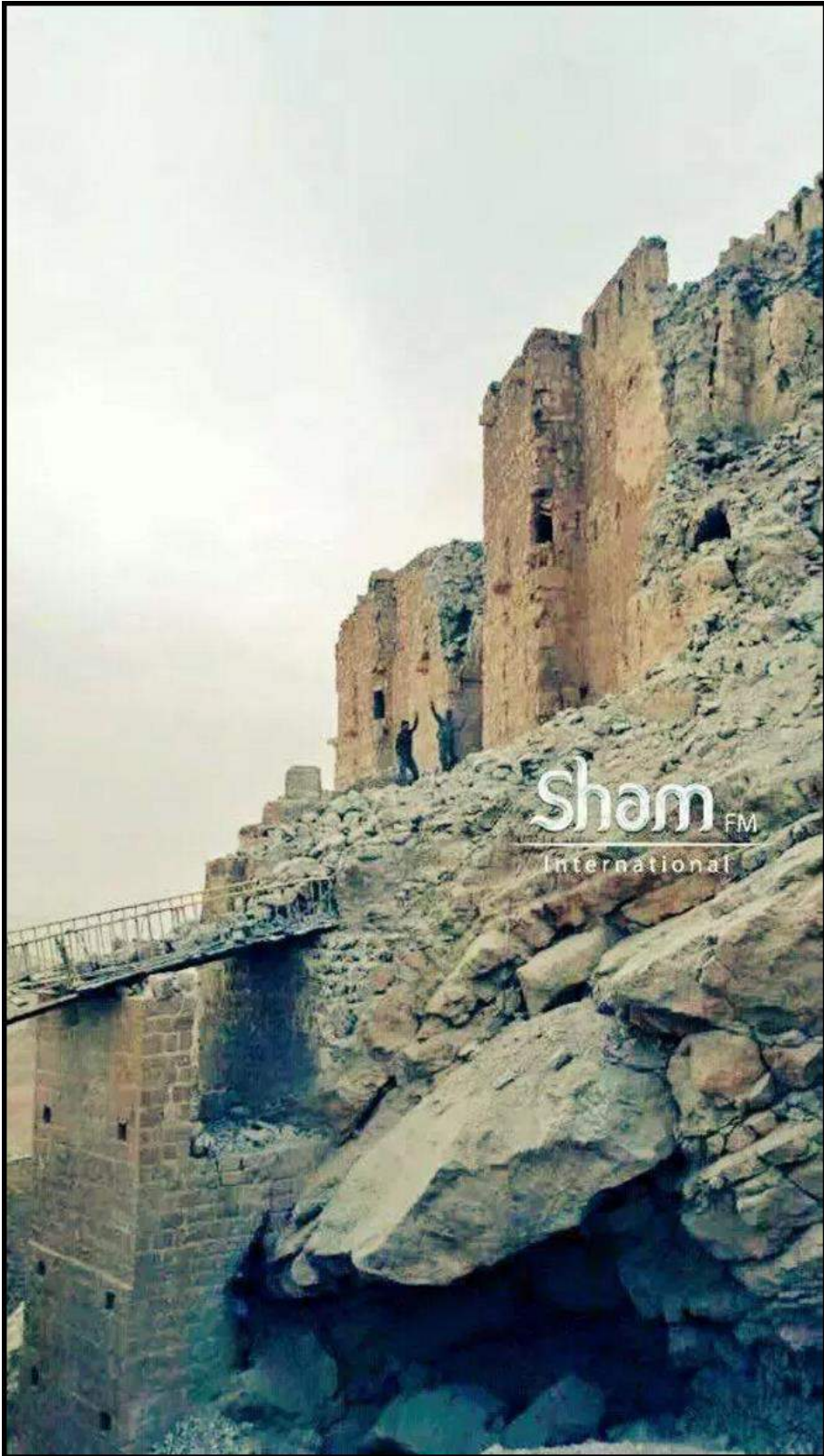
Partial collapse of eastern battlement (SANA; March 27, 2016)



Partial collapse of eastern battlement (SANA; March 27, 2016)



Major damage to northeastern curtain wall (republished by APSA; March 26, 2016)



Major damage to eastern curtain wall and fortress entrance (republished by APSA; March 26, 2016)



Debris and wall collapse on eastern battlement (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁴⁷



Debris on the road leading to Qalaat Shirkuh (western curtain wall) (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/soldier-of-the-syrian-government-army-near-fakhr-al-din-al-news-photo/517754960>

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/soldiers-of-the-syrian-government-army-near-fakhr-al-din-al-news-photo/517759082>



SARG soldiers stand on the cliff below the curtain wall (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁴⁹



SARG soldiers rappelling down a cliff below Qalaat Shirkuh, with major damage to northeast curtain wall seen in top right (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/syrian-government-army-soldiers-on-their-way-to-the-top-of-news-photo/517754172>

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/syrian-government-army-soldiers-on-their-way-to-the-top-of-news-photo/517735350>



SARG soldiers climb down the cliff face below the fortress (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁵¹



SARG soldiers climb up the eastern cliff face, with the destroyed bridge in top left and major damage to the curtain wall in top right (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/syrian-government-army-soldiers-on-their-way-to-the-top-of-news-photo/517754058>

¹⁵² <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/syrian-government-army-soldiers-on-their-way-to-the-top-of-news-photo/517759078>



Major damage to northeastern corner of fortress (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁵³



Major damage to northeastern corner of fortress (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/soldier-of-the-syrian-government-army-near-fakhr-al-din-al-news-photo/517754944>

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/soldiers-of-the-syrian-government-army-near-fakhr-al-din-al-news-photo/517763084>



Debris on interior staircase (looking south) (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁵⁵



Debris on fortress staircase (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/syrian-government-army-soldier-walks-down-the-steps-in-news-photo/517759848>

¹⁵⁶ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/syrian-government-army-soldiers-in-fakhr-al-din-al-maani-news-photo/517753848>



Debris on fortress staircase (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁵⁷



Debris and partial wall collapse on eastern battlement (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/fakhr-al-din-al-maani-citadel-in-palmyra-a-unesco-world-news-photo/517753910>

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/syrian-government-army-soldier-points-to-palmyra-from-the-news-photo/517735492>



Partial ceiling collapse in fortress interior (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁵⁹



Debris and minor damage to interior of fortress and window (Syrian News Channel; March 26, 2016)

¹⁵⁹ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/syrian-government-army-soldiers-in-fakhr-al-din-al-maani-news-photo/517759822>



Debris in fortress interior (Valery Sharifulin/Getty; March 27, 2016)¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/syrian-government-army-soldier-in-fakhr-al-din-al-maani-news-photo/517759870>

SHI 16-0043

Report Date: March 28, 2016

Site Name: Palmyra Archaeological Museum

Date of Incident: Unknown, post-May 2015

Location: Palmyra City, Homs Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Built in 1961 to house artifacts from Palmyra and the surrounding area, the museum is located in the southwestern part of the modern day city of Palmyra in a location known as the Museum Square, which is a strategic intersection for the two vital roads linking the town: the road to Homs in the west and the road to Damascus in the southwest. Museum Square is also considered the northern entrance to the archaeological area. The museum building is surrounded by the relatively modern (ca. 1940) town of Tadmor to the north and to the east, and the archeological area to the south and west.

Site Date: Palmyra Museum: 1961; The Lion of al-Lāt: 1st Century AD

Incident Summary: Several media outlets publish new video footage and photographs of the interior and exterior of the museum.

Incident Source and Description: On March 27, 2016 Russia Today released video footage of the interior of the Palmyra Museum after the area was recaptured by SARG and pro-regime forces.¹⁶¹ The video and subsequent photographs released by other media outlets showed that the museum suffered heavy damage and destruction since takeover of the city by ISIL militants in May 2015. There is evidence of intentional destruction by ISIL militants as well as damage caused by the ongoing military activity in the area. The Syrian State News Agency (SANA) released video from inside the museum that showed heavy damage to some artifacts, including a statue of the Greek goddess Athena, now damaged with its head and raised arm missing.¹⁶² At least one gallery of the museum appears to have suffered some form of explosion or other method of widespread destruction due to the high number of damaged statues littering the hallway. As is also apparent in the videos and photographs, many windows and doors of the museum have been damaged and several ceilings in various halls have collapsed while others have detached and remain hanging. Display cabinets and showcases in the museum halls have also been damaged.

Reports of damage to the Palmyra Museum have been ongoing since ISIL militants took control of the city in May 2015.¹⁶³ While ISIL released several videos of its intentional destruction inside the archaeological site, no such video footage was released by the group of its damage to the Palmyra Museum or to the artifacts located inside. As evidenced by the photographs and video footage, there are a large number of artifacts still remaining in the museum despite previous reports that hundreds if not thousands of artifacts had been removed. ASOR CHI could not immediately find any

¹⁶¹ <http://ar.rt.com/hi43> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q16IRoWln9o>

¹⁶² <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/28/world/middleeast/syria-palmyra.html>

¹⁶³ For additional information on damage to the museum, see: **ASOR CHI Incident Report 15-0086** in **Weekly Report 41**; **ASOR CHI Incident Report 15-0086** in **Weekly Report 42-43**; **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0114** in **Weekly Report 51-52**, **ASOR CHI Incident Report 15-0116** in **Weekly Report 53-54**.

evidence of structural damage to the exterior of the museum, including the structures' walls and columns. However, bullet holes are present in the facade, and a large hole is present through one part of the roof into the museum. The electrical wiring of the building has also been damaged.

Prior to ISIL's takeover of the city of Palmyra, there were reports that Syrian officials had removed hundreds of artifacts from the museum and taken them to an unknown location.¹⁶⁴ However, these same reports differ as to the number of artifacts that were previously removed from the museum. In May of 2015, DGAM Director Maamoun Abdulkarim stated that prior to ISIL's capture of the city that "most" objects in the museum had been removed with the exception of many large items that were too heavy to move.¹⁶⁵ According to Abdulkarim, the Palmyra Museum was almost completely empty as the majority of the artifacts had been relocated to Damascus. Abdulkarim cited residents in Palmyra as reporting that ISIL militants broke "some plaster statues" in the museum that represented life in the prehistoric eras.¹⁶⁶ Abdulkarim did not mention any damage to the museum's antiquities.¹⁶⁷ In a later interview in August 2015 with CNN, Abdulkarim offered the number of approximately 4,000 busts and statues had been evacuated from Palmyra.¹⁶⁸ Shortly after the recapturing of the city of Palmyra, the Associated Press put the number of previously rescued artifacts at 400, citing an interview with Abdulkarim.¹⁶⁹ In July 2015, National Geographic conducted an interview with DGAM Director Maamoun Abdulkarim and recorded the mission to save the artifacts as such: "[M]useum staff in Palmyra [with the orders and directions by Abdulkarim who was in Damascus] barricaded themselves inside the building and began wrapping and crating Greco-Roman statuary, jewelry, ancient glass, and mosaics. The museum's prized mummies were hidden inside bricked-up enclosures. A stone lion [the Lion of al-Lât]...was too heavy to be moved, so the staff encased the lion inside a large metal box."¹⁷⁰ According to this account, on May 21, 2015 two trucks hired by Abdulkarim were loaded with crated artifacts and departed just as ISIL militants approached the city. According to Abdulkarim, when the militants saw that museum employees were loading the trucks with crated artifacts, they opened fire on them, wounding three. From Palmyra, "the curators dropped off their wounded colleagues at the hospital in Homs, the nearest city, and continued on to Damascus. There... the antiquities were stashed in secure locations." According to Abdulkarim, as a result of this operation 95 percent of the museum's artifacts were saved.¹⁷¹ When the DGAM released photographs on May 28, 2016 from the Palmyra Museum they made the following statement regarding the statues of artifacts in the museum: "[The DGAM] could evacuate (sic) about 400 statues or heads of statues, in addition to hundreds of exhibits at the museum, i.e. artifacts, transportable statues, storage boxes. The sudden invasion of terrorist militants of ISIS in May 2015 made it difficult to evacuate the larger statues and a few exhibited heads of statues fixed on the walls of the museum halls."¹⁷² It is unclear as to whether the DGAM is stating they now intend to relocate these artifacts for restoration or the more likely scenario which is that they had already "evacuated" those 400 artifacts. Additionally,

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/15/world/middleeast/ancient-ruins-at-palmyra-are-endangered-by-isis-advance-in-syria.html> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jFwtq97dIA>

¹⁶⁵ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/isis-enters-palmyra-museum-150523124654003.html>

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/isis-enters-palmyra-museum-150523124654003.html>

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/isis-enters-palmyra-museum-150523124654003.html>

¹⁶⁸ <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/19/middleeast/syria-antiquities-damascus/index.html>

¹⁶⁹ <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/syria-troops-recapture-ancient-city-palmyra-blow-37970886>

¹⁷⁰ <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/07/150710-palmyra-syria-isis-looting-museum-archaeology/>

¹⁷¹ <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/07/150710-palmyra-syria-isis-looting-museum-archaeology/>

¹⁷² <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1957>

Abdulkarim said that officials have a “list of all the statues” that were left in Palmyra.¹⁷³ The Director of the Palmyra Museum, Khalil al-Hariri, announced that he would return to the city on March 28, 2016 having fled Palmyra ten months ago.¹⁷⁴ However, prior to this operation many “significant objects” had already gone missing when the museum was still under SARG control, and many artifacts had already been spotted on the international market.¹⁷⁵

The Lion of al-Lāt was reportedly destroyed shortly after ISIL militants captured Palmyra in May 2015. According to one report, the metal protective box installed by museum employees was pried open by ISIL militants and intentionally destroyed by some form of explosives.¹⁷⁶ However, Syrian state media has since reported that the the Lion of al-Lāt was found to be damaged but not destroyed.¹⁷⁷ According to Abdulkarim, the broken pieces “could be put back together.”¹⁷⁸ A recent photograph of the statue corroborates these claims.

The Lion of al-Lāt was located in front of the Palmyra Museum. According to the DGAM, the statue is three meters high and “depict[s] a lion opening its mouth...as if she were roaring. [The lion] stands on its front limbs, between them, appears a lamb laying down in peace. The guardian lion represented one of the creative works of man and a masterpiece of palmerean [sic] sculpture.”¹⁷⁹ According to a recent BBC podcast *Museum of Lost Objects*, the Lion of al-Lāt was discovered in 1977 by a Polish archaeological expedition. Prior to that, the “statue had lain buried in the ruins of the ancient city, though parts had been used as foundation stones in other buildings.”¹⁸⁰ The statue weighed 15 tons. Sculptor Jozef Gazy completed the first restoration of the lion. By 2005, “[T]he lion had become unbalanced and another restoration job - again led by a Polish team - rebuilt the statue to resemble as closely as possible what is thought to be the ancient design, with the lion appearing to leap out of the temple wall. After this it was placed in front of the Palmyra museum. Across the left paw of the lion is a Palmyrene inscription: ‘May al-Lat bless whoever does not spill blood on this sanctuary’.”¹⁸¹

Pattern: Military activity: explosives, intentional destruction, light weaponry; Vandalism; Theft.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI is directing critical attention to the condition of all periods of cultural heritage at Palmyra, given the high visibility and ongoing significance of the city and UNESCO World Heritage Site.

ASOR CHI has not been able to verify the exact number of Palmyrene statues and artifacts that were removed by Syrian authorities prior to the invasion of ISIL in May 2015, nor the exact number of

¹⁷³ <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/syria-troops-recapture-ancient-city-palmyra-blow-37970886>

¹⁷⁴ <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/syria-troops-recapture-ancient-city-palmyra-blow-37970886>

¹⁷⁵ <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/07/150710-palmyra-syria-isis-looting-museum-archaeology/>; <http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-syria-palmyra-20150522-story.html>

¹⁷⁶ <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/07/150710-palmyra-syria-isis-looting-museum-archaeology/>

¹⁷⁷ For further information on the reported damage to the Lion of al-Lāt see **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0086 UPDATE in Weekly Report 42-43, ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0105 in Weekly Report 47-48, ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0086 UPDATE in Weekly Report 50)**

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.9news.com.au/world/2016/03/30/11/21/palmyra-a-literal-minefield-of-booby-traps-after-liberation-from-isil>

¹⁷⁹ <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?p=314&id=1731>

¹⁸⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35720366>

¹⁸¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35720366>

statues and artifacts damaged inside the museum at the present time. In addition, ASOR CHI cannot confirm if or how many artifacts were looted by ISIL after their capture of the city of Palmyra.

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Damage to the exterior of the Palmyra Museum (SANA; March 29, 2016)¹⁸²

¹⁸² <http://sana.sy/en/?p=73215>



The damage to interior of Hall 3 of the Palmyra Museum (ABNA 24; March 28, 2016)



A model of the Temple of Bel and Palmyrene artifacts located in Hall 2 of the Palmyra Museum prior to damage (Michael Danti; 2010)



The same model as seen in the above photograph of Hall 2 appears to be undamaged, a soldier appears to be replacing the placards on the model. However a large area of the exterior wall has been destroyed, and many artifacts are either damaged or missing (AP; March 27, 2016)



Palmyrene artifacts located in the Qasr Al Heir Hall in the Palmyra Museum prior to damage (Michael Danti; 2010)



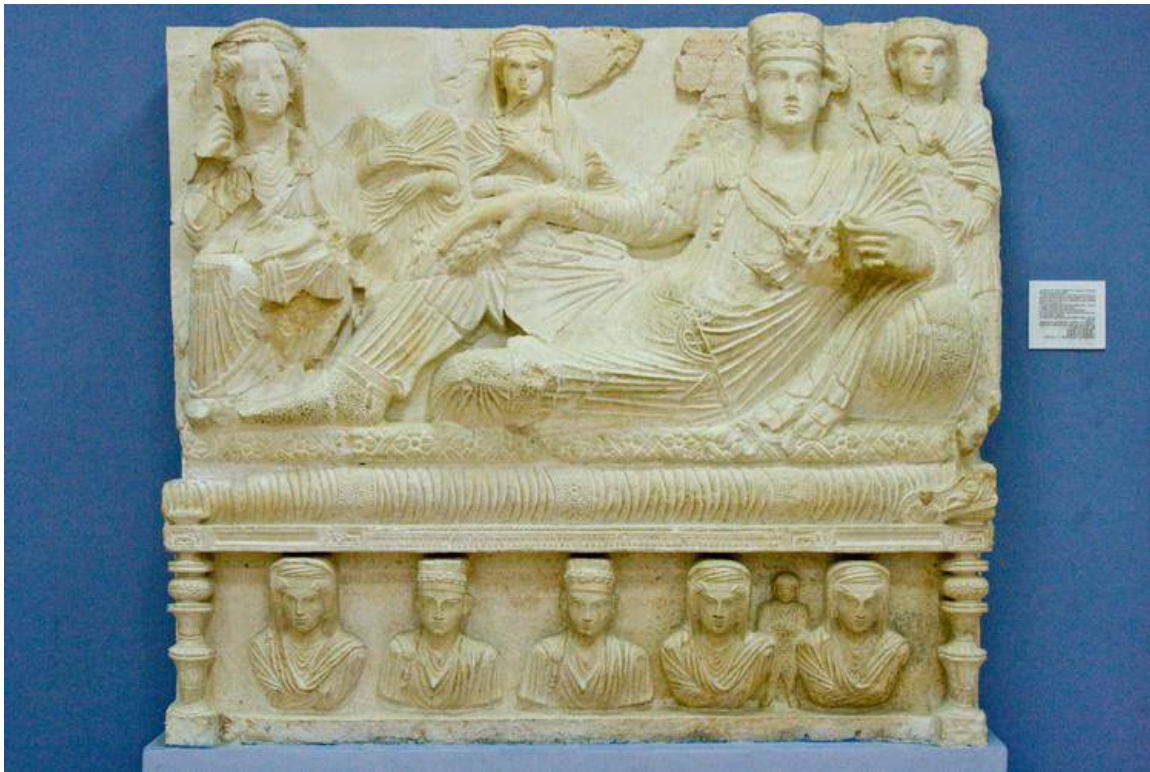
Damage to the Qasr Al Heir Hall (Sputnik; March 29, 2016)



Palmyrene figures located in Hall 4 of the Palmyra Museum prior to damage (Michael Danti; 2010)



Damage to Hall 4 (SANA; March 29, 2016)¹⁸³



Palmyrene funerary monument from the Tower Tombs (Alamy/WSJ; 2008)¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ <http://sana.sy/en/?p=73215>

¹⁸⁴ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/palmyra-museum-photos-reveal-the-treasures-lost-1459284776>



Defacement of Palmyrene funerary monument from the Tower Tombs (APSA; March 27, 2016)



The Athena Statue seen as it once stood in the Eastern Corridor of the Palmyra Museum (Michael Danti; 2010)



© AFP/Getty Images
Damaged and broken Palmyrene artifacts inside the Eastern Corridor of the Palmyra Museum (Sputnik; March 27, 2016)



Detail of Palmyrene funerary monument in Hall 5 (Brian McMorrow/WSJ; photographed 2008)



Damage to Palmyrene artifacts in Hall 5 (Sputnik; March 28, 2016)



The Lion of al-Lāt as seen outside of the Palmyra Museum (Michael Danti; 2010)



Damage to the Lion of al-Lāt (DGAM; March 28, 2016)

Incident Reports: Iraq

IHI 16-0009

Report Date: March 28, 2016

Site Name: Al Aisha Mosque (مسجد أم المؤمنين عائشة)

Date of Incident: March 26, 2016

Location: Mosul City, Ninewa Governorate, Iraq

Site Description: Mosque

Site Date: Unknown

Incident Summary: US-led Coalition airstrike targets and damages mosque.

Incident Source and Description: On March 26, 2016 the Iraqi activist group Mosulyoon reported that a US-led Coalition aerial bombardment campaign the Al Alish Mosque in the neighborhood of Al-Nur. According to Mosulyoon, ISIL militants had repurposed the building and were using it as a security building. The strike killed several ISIL militants.¹⁸⁵

Pattern: Military activity: explosives; Military activity: reuse of cultural heritage structure.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will continue to monitor the condition of the Al Aisha Mosque, as well as other heritage sites within the city of Mosul, and the condition of heritage sites located in regions subject to ongoing aerial bombardment campaigns and intense military activity.

Sources:

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Mosulyoon: <https://www.facebook.com/mosulyoon/posts/962960277133037:0>

¹⁸⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/mosulyoon/posts/962960277133037:0>



Reportedly the Al Aisha Mosque one day after the airstrike (Mosulyoon; March 27, 2016)¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/mosulyoon/photos/pcb.963548210407577/963548010407597/>