

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

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Executive Summary

During the reporting period, the escalation of Russian intervention in Syria has increased uncertainty and the potential for combat damage to cultural heritage across a large area. Incidents of cultural heritage damage due to combat occurred in the area of Bosra and Tadmor — in both instances SARG airstrikes and the occupation of heritage sites by military forces were the root causes. In Palmyra, ASOR CHI analyses of high-resolution satellite imagery revealed the ISIL intentional destruction of six tower tombs and damage to a seventh. ISIL forces currently occupy the UNESCO World Heritage Site for military positions, originally constructed on-site during the SARG military occupation of the area, and as a means to shield fighters from airstrikes. In Iraq, communications with in-country sources have continued to be difficult, particularly in the area of Mosul. DigitalGlobe satellite imagery revealed multiple new constructions at the site of Nineveh built immediately outside the perimeter walls of the ancient city between March 7, 2015 and August 29, 2015. In-country sources indicate that this activity by ISIL and related clearance on cultural sites in Iraq is linked to ISIL involvement in securing and dealing in real estate.

Key Points

- A barrel bomb was detonated at the citadel of Bosra ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0133](#)).
- Airstrikes against ISIL military targets in the Tadmor area damaged the Citadel of Palmyra ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0134](#)). CHI discovered new evidence of undocumented destruction in the Valley of the Tombs at Palmyra using DigitalGlobe satellite imagery, including severe damage and total destruction of seven Tower Tombs ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0128](#)).
- Satellite imagery shows ongoing looting and militarization at the site of Apamea ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0129](#)) and new evidence of these activities at Tell Houach ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0130](#)).
- Russian military forces intervened in the Syrian conflict on the side of Bashar al-Assad’s regime.

Heritage Timeline

¹ This report is based on research conducted by the “Cultural Preservation Initiatives: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq.” Weekly reports reflect reporting from a variety of sources and ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives Weekly Report 59–60: 1

- September 29, 2015 *Stand Point* published an article titled “**Why Palmyra Should Matter To The West**” (by Daniel Johnson). Johnson provides a detailed account of the rise and fall of ancient Palmyra and the heritage crisis that has developed over the past few months there. Western leaders are accused of not taking action. The article also accuses Islamist perpetrators of barbarism.
<http://standpointmag.co.uk/features-october-2015-palmyra-daniel-johnson-should-matter-to-the-west>
- *U.S. Department of State* released a media note titled “**Conflict Antiquities: Forging a Public/Private Response to Save Iraq and Syria’s Endangered Cultural Heritage**” (from the Office of the Spokesperson). “The Department of State and The Metropolitan Museum of Art are co-sponsoring an experts’ symposium at The Metropolitan Museum of Art that will feature two panels reviewing international cooperation against the looting and trafficking of antiquities from the conflict in Iraq and Syria.” Speakers (including ASOR CHI’s Michael Danti) will discuss the link between looting and trafficking of antiquities and ISIL’s funding efforts.
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/09/247298.htm>
- September 27, 2015 *BBC* published an article titled “**IS conflict: France launches airstrikes in Syria.**” BBC reports first air strikes from France against the Islamic State in Syria, expanding their efforts beyond Iraqi airspace for the first time. President Francois Hollande reported that French planes had destroyed an ISIL training camp in Deir ez-Zor.
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34372892>
- September 25, 2015 *The World Monuments Fund Britain* will host an event, “**Heritage and Conflict: Syria’s Battle to Protect Its Past,**” on November 12 in London. The event will feature talks by Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums for Syria, Prof. Maamoun Abdulkarim and Programme Manager for the Google Cultural Institute, James Davis, as part of a new series of WMF talks: *The Past, Today*.
<http://www.wmf.org.uk/activities#157>
- *ICCROM* has announced the call for applications for its next “**First Aid to Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis**” course will take place in Washington, DC from May 23 to June 24, 2016.
http://www.iccrom.org/wp-content/uploads/FAC-2016-Announcement_final.pdf
 - *Bernama* published an article titled “**Arab Foreign Ministers Condemn Cultural Cleansing of Heritage Landmarks**” (by Manik Mehta).
<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v8/wn/newsworld.php?id=1174083>

- The Antiquities Coalition* published an article titled “**Unprecedented Forum United Global Government Leaders with Archaeology, Art, Museum Communities in Fight Against ‘Cultural Cleansing’**” According to The Antiquities Coalition, the purpose of this conference was to call the international community to action in ending the trade of “blood antiquities,” a “key source” for terrorist financing.
<http://theantiquitiescoalition.org/press-releases/the-asia-society-announces-september-summit-with-the-antiquities-coalition-to-tackle-cultural-racketeering/>
- Al Monitor* published an article titled “**Turkey major conduit for Syrian ‘blood antiquities’**” (by Pinar Tremblay). The article attributes the rise in the exploitation of Syrian antiquities to ISIL’s need to “increase their cash flow,” given the recent decline in oil sales and the limited money made from kidnapping, taxation and extortion.” U.S. Congress estimates that blood antiquities are the second-largest source of income for IS despite Turkey insisting that due to the “white-collar” and complicated nature of the crime of looting and selling cultural artifacts, IS could not possibly be using this as a method of fundraising. The IS Ministry of Antiquities, however, organizes the looting of archaeological sites in Iraq and Syria and with Turkey’s “long and porous border and intense refugee traffic,” it has become a hotspot for looted antiquity transit. The Syrian government has said that they would like to know which antiquities have been reclaimed by the Turkish government.
<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/09/turkey-syria-cultural-heritage-turns-into-blood-antiquities.html>
- The Times* published an article titled “**Assad drops barrel bombs on Palmyra,**” (by Catherine Philip). Barrel bombs dropped by the Syrian government have caused “extensive damage to Palmyra’s citadel.” There were reportedly 13 bombs (oil drums packed with explosives and shrapnel” that struck the citadel during three days of bombardment, after the delivery of new Russian weapons to the Assad regime. Activist Khaled al-Homsi reports that almost a third of the walls of the citadel have been damaged.
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/article4566934.ece>

September 24, 2015

Newsweek published an article titled “**Culture Under Threat: The Fight to Save the Middle East’s Antiquities from Terrorism**” (by Jack Martinez). A meeting at the Asia Society Museum on New York’s Upper East Side brought in academics, U.S. officials, and members of the Antiquities Coalition. The majority of the article focuses on a recent UNESCO Conference where Irina Bokova met with U.N. officials and ministers from around the world. At this conference, Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh urged those attending these meetings to begin to “turn words into deeds.”

<http://www.newsweek.com/syria-antiquities-trafficking-threat-isis376338>

- *Asia Society* published an article titled “**Can the World Save Antiquities Under Terrorist Threat?**” (by Eric Fish). *Asia Society Policy Institute* President Kevin Rudd spoke at the conference titled *Culture Under Threat* in New York on Thursday, September 22nd. He summarized “rapidly multiplying instances of cultural destruction and antiquities trafficking.” Also present: Iraq’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, Jordan’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nasser Judeh, and Egypt’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sameh Hassan Shoukry.
<http://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/can-world-save-antiquities-under-terrorist-threat>
 - *The Japan Times* published an article titled “**Experts and locals team up in scramble to document Syria’s heritage.**” (by the Associated Press). A new project backed by UNESCO: Million Image Database of the Oxford Institute of Digital Archaeology has begun to slip 3-D cameras to activists and residents in Syria to “scan antiquities before they are damaged or destroyed” in hopes of staying ahead of ISIL and in hopes of being able to replicate artifacts using Chinese 3-D concrete printing. Camera users can upload the pictures or videos to the project’s website, which for the time being is closed to the public to provide anonymity and the project as a “scholarly venture” rather than as a social media opportunity. Project leaders aim to share the results with the public in the future. ASOR CHI was also cited for its “more low-tech approach aimed at protecting at least some sites.” LeeAnn Gordon is quoted for her role at ASOR CHI.
<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/24/world/experts-locals-team-scramble-document-syrias-heritage#.Vgnk1BNVikp>
- September 23, 2015
- Al Jazeera* published an article titled “**Residents flee Palmyra as Syrian government bombs ISIL.**” The article provides a report on airstrikes in Palmyra by the Syrian government, which began Friday, September 18. These airstrikes have killed more than 100 people, including both civilians and fighters. The article also summarizes the heritage destroyed since ISIL’s takeover of the city.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/residents-flee-palmyra-syrian-government-bombs-isis-150923200307921.html>
- *U.S. News and World Report* published “**New push to document, protect or one day recreate Syria’s heritage in face of danger**” (by Sarah El Deeb). See above summary from *The Japan Times*. Link also features broadcast from *Inform News*, which questions ISIL’s motives for laying bombs around Palmyra.
<http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2015/09/23/experts-and-locals-scrambling-to-document-syrias-heritage>

- September 22, 2015 *The New Statesman* published an article titled “**The Men Saving Syria’s treasures from Isis**” (by Jeremy Bowen). The article documents the fall of Palmyra to ISIL on May 19, 2015 and workers who saved the majority of the Tadmor Museum’s collections shortly before the siege. The article includes follow-up interviews with Khalil Hariri, former museum director, and Mohammed al-Asaad, son of Khaled al-Asaad (publicly executed by ISIL in May 2015). <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/art-design/2015/09/men-saving-syria-s-treasures-isis>
- September 20, 2015 *The Clarion Project* published an article titled “**ISIS on New Campaign to Destroy Christian Houses in Nineveh.**” The Clarion Project published an article on the destruction of 21 houses belonging to Iraqi ethnic minority groups (Christian and Shabak) in the Karakush District in the Nineveh plains, according to Said Mamuzini, spokesman for the Democratic Kurdish Party. <http://www.clarionproject.org/news/isis-new-campaign-destroy-christian-houses-nineveh>
- September 19, 2015 *The Independent* published an article titled “**Syrian Government Forces Kill ‘at least 12’ ISIS fighters in Airstrikes on Ancient Palmyra**” (by Lizzie Dearden). **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0134.** <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syrian-government-forces-kill-at-least-12-isis-fighters-in-airstrikes-on-ancient-palmyra-10508929.html>
- *BBC* published an article titled “**Syria crisis: ‘Deadly air raids’ against IS in Palmyra.**” BBC describes the recent Syrian government airstrikes as the “heaviest bombardments” yet on the city of Palmyra. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34300223>
 - *The Wall Street Journal* published an article titled “**‘Deadly Airstrikes’ Against Islamic State in Palmyra, Activists Say.**” (by the AP). A local activist disclosed at least 30 air raids on Palmyra, which killed at least 15 people. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/deadly-airstrikes-against-islamic-state-in-palmyra-activists-say-1442655133>
- September 18, 2015 *ARA News* published an article titled “**Dozens killed in renewed barrel bomb attacks in Syria’s Daraa**” (by Ahmed Hammad). Approximately 21 civilians were reported to have been killed in a late night barrel bomb attack on the town of Busra al-Sham. Busra al-Sham has reportedly been under the control of anti-Assad forces since March 2015. Victims of the bombing are still being uncovered from the rubble. <http://aranews.net/2015/09/dozens-killed-in-renewed-barrel-bomb-attacks-in-syrias-daraa/>

- *Hurriyet Daily News* published an article titled “**Barrel bombs kill 21 civilians near Syria's Daraa**” (AFP). Confirmation on the barrel bombing of the ancient city of Busra al-Sham. The article indicates the city has been under rebel control since March.
<http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/barrel-bombs-kill-21-civilians-near-syrias-daraa-monitor-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=88671&NewsCatID=352>
- September 17, 2015 *Itremedia* published an article titled “**Siria. Unesco Lancia L’Allarme Saccheggio dei Siti Archeologici**” (by Daniele Cardetta).
<http://oltremedianews.it/siria-unesco-lancia-lallarme-saccheggio-dei-siti-archeologici/>
- *The Turkish Republic Home* published an article titled “**Syria Archaeological Sites Looted ‘On Industrial Scale’.**”
<http://www.turkishrepublichome.com/news/syria-archaeological-sites-looted-on-industrial-scale/>
- September 16, 2015 Social media reports indicated recent barrel bombing at the citadel in Bosra, which was confirmed by CHI sources on the ground. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0133.**
<http://all4syria.info/Archive/251587>
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1679387025637790&id=1642112122698614
- *ABC News* published an article titled “**The Fight to Save Syria’s Antiquities From the Hands of ISIS**” (by Lauren Effron, Alex Marquardt, Ashley Louszko, and Bruno Roeber). Report on recent concerted efforts from Syria’s Department of Antiquities at the National Museum in Damascus to “catalogue, photograph and then finally delicately pack artifacts that are thousands of years old into wooden crates to be stored in top secret storage facilities in Damascus and elsewhere.”
<http://abcnews.go.com/International/fight-save-syrias-antiquities-hands-isis/story?id=33776060>
- *ABC Nightline* aired a segment titled “**Protecting Syria’s Antiquities from ISIS**” (by Alex Marquardt). ABC Nightline on-the-ground report of recent preservation efforts at the National Museum in Damascus, headed by Dr. Maamoun Abdulkarim. He claims his initiatives are apolitical. Report features first-hand footage from ASOR CHI.
<http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/video/protecting-syrias-antiquities-isis-33823029>
- *La Jornada* published an article titled “**El Comete un ‘Saqueo a excala industrial’ en Siria: Unesco.**” This article reports on the recent UNESCO conference in Sophia, Bulgaria. APSA cited for its role in tracking the destruction and/or looting of more than 900

monuments and archaeological sites within the past four years of civil war, intensified by the emergence of the Islamic State.

<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2015/09/16/ei-comete-un-saqueo-a-escala-industrial-en-siria-unesco-4320.html>

- *Yahoo News* published an article titled “**Syria Archaeological Sites Looted ‘on Industrial Scale’: UNESCO**” (by Vessela Sergueva and Diana Simeonova). Account of UNESCO press conference that took place in Sofia, Bulgaria on September 16. Director General Irina Bokova encouraged the EU to strengthen legislation related to imported antiquities and the “comprehensive ratification” of the 1970 UNESCO Convention. Syrian antiquities director Maamoun Abdulkarim Skyped in, asking for “aid from the international community.”
<http://news.yahoo.com/syria-archeological-sites-looted-industrial-scale-unesco-085955729.html>
- *UNESCO* published an article titled “**“Bulgaria plays a strategic role in the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural objects,” says UNESCO Director-General.**” On September 16, UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova, participated in an international conference on “Fighting the looting of Syria’s cultural heritage” in Sofia, Bulgaria, to strengthen global mobilization and regional cooperation against the looting and trafficking of “blood antiquities,” financing terrorism in the Middle East.
http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/bulgaria_plays_a_strategic_role_in_the_fight_against_illicit_trafficking_of_cultural_objects_says_unesco_director_general/#.VgxyWhNViko
- *Focus News Agency* published an article titled “**Norwegian Embassy to Bulgaria to Host Conference on Syria Cultural Heritage Plundering.**” Report from Sophia, Bulgaria where the Minister of Culture Vezhdi Rashidov will participate in a conference on the destruction of cultural heritage in Syria entitled “Fight against the plundering of Syria’s cultural heritage.” <http://www.focus-fen.net/news/2015/09/16/383357/norwegian-embassy-to-bulgaria-to-host-conference-on-syria-cultural-heritage-plundering.html>
- *Malta Today* published an article titled “**ISIL Lays Waste to Mankind’s Heritage**” (by Martina Borg). A general overview of ISIL’s attempt to impose a “caliphate” over the region. Borg identifies their destruction of “shared cultural heritage” as one of several tactics for achieving this goal. Includes before/after satellite imagery of the destruction of the Temple of Bel. Interviewed: Anthony Frendo, Professor of Near East Archaeology at the University of Malta.
http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/arts/art/57093/isil_lays_waste_to_mankinds_heritage#.VgAPSN9VhBe

- *West Virginia Public Broadcasting* published an article titled “**Cultural Preservationist Sheds Light on Threatened World Heritage Sites**” (by Jesse Wright). The article covers a recent talk by former U.S. Army Reserve Major, Corine Wegener on the destruction of the “world’s common cultural heritage,” arguing that the cultural heritage at risk in the conflict zone is shared by all of us. Wegener remarks on the lack of “disaster response” in the United States.
<http://wvpublic.org/post/cultural-preservationist-sheds-light-threatened-world-heritage-sites>
- *Vanderbilt News* published an article entitled “**Protecting Syrian and Iraqi Culture Topic of Vanderbilt Lecture and Exhibit**” (Ann Marie Deer Owens). The article promotes an upcoming talk by Resident Professor of Anthropology, Dr. Brian Daniels.
<http://news.vanderbilt.edu/2015/09/protecting-syrian-iraqi-culture-topic-of-vu-lecture-exhibit/>

Military and Political Context

The most significant political and military events during the reporting period in Syria were:

1. Aleppo:
 - On September 16, the Syrian regime carried out airstrikes in the neighborhood of al-Sukkari, killing 4 people and injuring 10. Syrian helicopters also attacked the neighborhood of al-Mashad with an “explosive barrel,” killing 20 people and injuring 35. The Syrian regime also struck the al-Maghayir neighborhood killing 14 and injuring 30.²
 - On September 17, the Syrian regime carried out airstrikes in Aleppo, reportedly killing dozens. The US Embassy in Syria condemned the attack on their Twitter account.³
 - On September 20, 75 US-trained Syrian rebels entered Syria through Turkey. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the rebels entered Syria in twelve vehicles armed with “light weapons and ammunition”. The group’s entry was protected by air cover provided by the US-led coalition.⁴
 - On September 20, Syria’s state news agency reported rebels killed 14 civilians, including seven children, in artillery bombardments.⁵
 - On September 21, SARG forces continued its bombardment of Aleppo, focusing on the city’s northern areas controlled by opposition forces. According to reports, at least 18 civilians were killed in the Al-Shaar neighborhood.⁶

² <http://www.syriadeeply.org/articles/2015/09/8287/death-continues-rain-aleppo/>

³ <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Sep-17/315617-barrel-bomb-kills-11-civilians-in-aleppo-activists.ashx>

⁴ <http://www.albawaba.com/news/75-us-trained-rebels-enter-syria-turkey-monitor-745694> ; <http://dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Sep-20/315942-75-us-trained-rebels-have-entered-syria-from-turkey-since-friday-activists.ashx>

⁵ <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2015/9/20/syria-report-14-killed-in-rebel-shelling-of-aleppo>

⁶ <http://news.yahoo.com/syria-missile-strike-kills-18-civilians-aleppo-112207733.html> ; <https://news.vice.com/article/videos-show-graphic-aftermath-of-syrian-regime-strikes-in-aleppo> ;

- On September 25, Russian forces conducted airstrikes on ISIL targets in east Aleppo. Various sources provided conflicting accounts on whether Russian pilots flew the Russian fighter jets. The attacks were also reported to be a joint exercise between the Syrian and Russian air forces.⁷
 - On September 26, the US military confirmed that of the 75 US-trained Syrian rebels who entered Syria from Turkey on September 20, 56 had surrendered their weapons to suspected members of al-Nusra Front (JAN). According to Pentagon spokesman, Cpt. Jeff Davis, the rebels handed “six pick-up trucks and a portion of their ammunition” to JAN. This incident occurred between September 20–21, shortly after the rebels’ entry.⁸
2. Raqqa:
- On September 17, activists from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the activist group Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently reported that the Syrian army had conducted a dozen airstrikes on the ISIL-held city. The number of casualties is unknown.⁹
 - On September 18, activists from Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently reported clashes between ISIL and two YPG units in the village of Al Heisha.¹⁰
 - On September 18, activists from Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently reported ongoing airstrikes in Raqqa via the group’s Twitter account.
 - On September 21, activists from Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently reported seven air raids by the SARG via the group’s Twitter account, targeting three town squares, a school, and a residential area. Images posted to the group’s Twitter account illustrated the damage to many buildings as well as footage of the wounded and the dead. According to the group, more than 20 civilians were killed in the airstrikes.
 - On September 27, The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported two explosions in Raqqa. The group believed US-Coalition airstrikes targeting members of ISIL were the cause.¹¹
3. Homs:
- On September 18, a video was posted to Conflict News’ Twitter account showing what was claimed to be a downed SARG jet. The jet was reportedly shot down by ISIL fighters.¹²
 - On September 18, the Syrian army conducted at least 25 airstrikes on Tadmor, currently held by ISIL forces. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, it was one of the most sustained SARG bombardments on Tadmor in recent months.¹³

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/09/21/Regime-missiles-kill-18-civilians-in-Syria-s-Aleppo-.html>

⁷ <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13940703000408>

⁸ http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34368073?ocid=socialflow_twitter

⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/17/us-mideast-crisis-syria-raqqa-idUSKCN0RH11N20150917;http://bigstory.ap.org/article/9c5df84e5f8d42f480dfa55ebcf9126f/activists-syrian-army-stages-airstrikes-held-raqqa>

¹⁰ <http://www.raqqa-sl.com/en/>

¹¹ <http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/09/27-ypg-killed-in-hasakah-and-2-explosions-rock-al-raqqa-city/>

¹² <https://twitter.com/Conflicts/status/644645307293241344>

¹³ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Sep-18/315781-syrian-jets-pound-isis-held-areas-for-second-day.ashx>

- On September 21, rocket attacks conducted by the Syrian army were reported via various activist Twitter accounts in the Muhajren and al-Abasiyah areas of Homs. Twitter accounts documented damage via images and videos.
 - On September 21, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that 38 ISIL members were killed by SARG airstrikes in the Homs countryside. The airstrikes struck Tadmor and two other towns.¹⁴
 - On September 26, Syrian activist groups on Twitter, including the Local Coordination Committees of Syria, reported at least 25 casualties, the majority of whom were children following barrel bombings by the SARG forces that hit a children's playground in the Waer neighborhood of Homs.
 - On September 27, the Syrian army fired a missile into the last rebel-held neighborhood of Waer, killing 17 people including women and children.¹⁵
4. Damascus
 - On September 20, a shell struck the Russian Embassy compound in the capital city. Russia's foreign minister called for "concrete action" and blamed "anti-government" militants for firing on the embassy.¹⁶
 5. Daraa
 - On September 21, Syrian forces fired shells and one missile on Daraa al-Balad, killing and wounding several people according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Syrian forces also shelled the town of Sayda and Samlin in western Daraa. Injuries and casualties were unknown.¹⁷
 6. Quneitra
 - On September 21, Syrian military forces used guided missiles to attack ISIL forces moving on the roads between the western areas al-Samadanya and Rasm al-Rawadi. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, this attack killed one fighter and wounded four others. In addition, fighting was renewed between Syrian rebel groups and ISIL against SARG and pro-SARG militias near Tallat al-Hamriyyeh in the northern countryside.¹⁸
 7. Deir ez-Zor
 - On September 27, France announced it had carried out its first airstrikes in Syria. French President Francois Hollande, announced to reporters at the United Nations in New York that six fighter planes had destroyed their targets, which included an ISIL training camp.¹⁹

Other Key Points:

- A six-month ceasefire agreement in Homs and Idlib Governorates has been reached between pro-Assad and anti-Assad forces. This ceasefire would reportedly result in an

¹⁴ <http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/09/120-killed-yesterday-21092015/> ; <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/142098/World/Region/Syrian-regime-air-strikes-kill--IS-fighters-Monito.aspx> ; <http://news.yahoo.com/syrian-regime-air-strikes-kill-38-fighters-monitor-075533893.html>

¹⁵ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/09/27/Missile-kills-17-in-rebel-enclave-in-Syria-s-Homs.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Sep-21/316108-russia-calls-for-action-after-shell-hits-damascus-embassy-compound.ashx#.VgAj8rU8yw4.twitter>

¹⁷ <http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/09/deaths-in-shelling-at-daraa-city- and-clashes-at-the-northern-countryside-section-of-al-quneitra/>

¹⁸ <http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/09/deaths-in-shelling-at-daraa-city- and-clashes-at-the-northern-countryside-section-of-al-quneitra/>

¹⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/27/us-mideast-crisis-france-syria-idUSKCN0RR07Y20150927>

exchange of two territories in different areas of Syria, an end to attacks on civilians, and a cessation of bombing. The two territories in question are rebel-held Zabadani, between Homs and the Lebanese border, and the Shiite villages of Kefraya and Foua in Idlib Province. The Shiites in Idlib will be re-located to other government held areas while Zabadani's Sunnis will be moved to "insurgent held" Idlib. The deal was reached with international efforts including Iran, a representative from the Sunni group Ahrar al-Sham, the United Nations, Turkey, and Qatar.²⁰

- Debates are continuing as to whether the U.S. should have discussions with Russia regarding their ongoing efforts in Syria. During the reporting period, Secretary of State John Kerry stated that President Obama believed "military talks with Russia on Syria are an important next step and [he] hopes they will take place shortly".²¹ Russia has openly admitted to supplying weapons. In addition, Russia has announced plans to supply 200,000 tons of liquefied petroleum to Assad, through a port in Crimea annexed by Russia in March 2014.²²
- On September 17, US officials reported the presence of Russian helicopters at a Syrian airfield. The helicopters are an addition to the 200-strong infantry force, battle tanks, and artillery along with additional provisions, believed by US officials to already be present in Syria.²³
- On September 20, it was reported that Russia had begun using drones in surveillance missions over Syria. U.S. defense officials are unaware of any military strikes occurring but believe such actions could occur in the near future.²⁴
- Russian officers are facing criminal charges after reportedly going public on their orders to deploy to Latakia; however, Russia's defense minister disputed the claim that any Russian ground troops would be deployed to Syria.²⁵
- Kurdish fighters from the YPG released a message on the social media site Reddit calling for volunteer recruits to join their forces. Their message also included calls for funding and for specialists, such as engineers, to aid their fight against ISIL.²⁶
- On September 18, The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence based at King's College in London published a report on ISIL defectors. The report concluded four main reasons for defecting: the killing of other Sunni Muslims, brutality, corruption, and harsh living conditions.²⁷
- On September 26, The New York Times published an article reporting that nearly 30,000 foreign recruits had entered Syria to fight in the ranks of ISIL. This number is double the number of recruits who entered the country last year.²⁸

²⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/26/world/middleeast/syria-rebels-reach-truce-with-assad.html>

²¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/18/us-mideast-crisis-kerry-talks-idUSKCN0R11HN20150918>

²² <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/16/does-putin-russia-plan-for-syria-military-escalation> ; https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russias-move-into-syria-upends-us-plans/2015/09/26/6b285a06-5bba-11e5-8475-781cc9851652_story.html

²³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/16/us-syria-crisis-russia-helicopters-idUSKCN0RG30T20150916>

²⁴ <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russia-begins-drone-flights-over-syria-u-s-officials-n431001>

²⁵ <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russian-soldiers-who-went-public-on-syria-deployment-facing-threats-lawyer-says/531862.html>

²⁶ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/17/kurdish-fighters-wed-really-appreciate-if-you-came-to-syria-to-help-fight-isis>

²⁷ <http://icsr.info/2015/09/icsr-report-narratives-islamic-state-defectors/>

²⁸ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/27/world/middleeast/thousands-enter-syria-to-join-isis-despite-global-efforts.html>

- According to the activist group Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, water in Raqqa is now undrinkable. The group reported drinking water was contaminated with algae, rust, and brown and white worms.²⁹

The most significant political and military events during the reporting period in Iraq were:

1. Baghdad:
 - On September 17, ISIL claimed responsibility for a double suicide blast in a Baghdad market that targeted two checkpoints. At least 23 people were killed and more than 60 were wounded.³⁰
 - On September 21, a car bomb exploded in Baghdad in the southeastern neighborhood of al-Ameen. The car bombing occurred near a vegetable market. According to Iraqi medical officials, 11 people were killed and 42 were wounded. ISIL later claimed responsibility for the attack.³¹
 - On September 21, a roadside bomb killed three people and wounded five more in the northeastern district of al-Shaab.³²
 - On September 22, militants fired rockets toward Camp Victory near the Baghdad airport. Iraq's military command center said they had found rocket launchers on two trucks in the Taji area, which had been used to fire the rockets.³³
 - On September 28, a car bombing occurred in central Baghdad near the Ishtar Sheraton hotel, killing at least 4 people. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.³⁴
2. Al Anbar
 - On September 26, the US-led coalition conducted five airstrikes in the town of Hit, targeting an ISIL command and control facility, an ISIL headquarters, and a facility for making vehicle bombs.³⁵
 - On September 26, the US-led coalition conducted airstrikes in Kubaysah, targeting parts of a cement factory that were being used by ISIL to house weapons, fighters, and other equipment.³⁶
3. Northern Iraq
 - On September 22, Turkish jets attacked PKK camps in northern Iraq they claimed were being used as "education and logistic" hubs.³⁷

Other Key Points:

- The Baghdad Chief of Crimes Unit, Brigadier Ismail Hamid Zair, was killed in the Hajj tragedy of September 24.³⁸

²⁹ <http://www.raqqa-sl.com/en/?p=1401>

³⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34277021>

³¹ <http://www.startribune.com/car-bomb-in-baghdad-neighborhood-kills-8-people/328507211/>

³² <http://www.startribune.com/car-bomb-in-baghdad-neighborhood-kills-8-people/328507211/>

³³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/21/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-violence-idUSKCN0RL1SV20150921> ; <http://www.albawaba.com/news/militants-attack-area-near-baghdad-airport-746590>

³⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/28/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-violence-idUSKCN0RS2NO20150928>

³⁵ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/09/27/U-S-allies-conduct-23-air-strikes-in-Syria-Iraq-U-S-military.html>

³⁶ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/09/27/U-S-allies-conduct-23-air-strikes-in-Syria-Iraq-U-S-military.html>

³⁷ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/23/us-turkey-kurds-idUSKCN0RN0Y120150923> ; <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/09/23/Turkish-jets-pound-Kurdish-militant-camp-in-northern-Iraq.html>

³⁸ <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/270920151>

- Iraq announced that its military officials in Baghdad are in “intelligence and security cooperation” with Russia, Iran, and Syria to counter the ISIL threat. According to Russian media reports, officers from each country will lead the coordinating efforts on a rotating basis.³⁹
- Areas of Iraq have been experiencing a cholera outbreak. As of September 23, 121 cases and four deaths have been reported. The outbreak began in the Abu Ghraib suburb and is being blamed on contaminated drinking water and issues in Iraq’s water and sewage infrastructure.⁴⁰

The most significant political and military events during the reporting period in Turkey were:

- On September 20, Turkish protesters, numbered in the tens of thousands, gathered in Istanbul to protest against violence being committed by Kurdish rebels. Those who spoke at the rally reportedly denounced the ongoing violence in Turkey between the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the Turkish military. Turkey, the U.S., and the EU have designated the PKK as a terrorist organization. While the Turkish military has stepped up its efforts in fighting ISIL forces, it also has simultaneously escalated its fight on the PKK and other Kurdish paramilitaries, who continue to battle ISIL for control of Kurdish-majority areas.⁴¹

Satellite Imagery and Geospatial Analysis

Over the course of the reporting period, the Geospatial team analyzed seven new satellite images from locations throughout Syria and Iraq. These images covered 275 different archaeological sites and heritage resources. Many of these heritage assets showed no new damage. The analysis included an updated image of Apamea (Syria) from Sept. 20, 2015 that showed no new looting pits since August 24, 2015 (detailed in **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0130**); however, a few sites did show more damage, including the sites of Nineveh (Iraq), various historical elements within the city of Raqqa (Syria), and the site of Tell Bi’aa (located in the outskirts of Raqqa).

The area around the site of Nineveh underwent some changes since March 7, 2015. Based upon a satellite image from August 29, 2015, new buildings were observed around the walls of the archaeological site (See **ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0095**). Newly identified construction includes small buildings along the western side of the site, a large building on site’s southwest corner, and a smaller building in the northwest. All of these new buildings lie outside the city walls and are not likely impacting subsurface deposits. One large building within the ancient city walls has expanded and has adversely impacted the site. On the site’s northern portion, ISIL has demolished the former Spring Festival Stadium and all debris has been cleared away.

Images of Raqqa reveal multiple changes that have occurred over the last few months based on comparison with an earlier image taken February 7, 2015 (See **ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0132** for full details). The new image, from September 5, 2015, shows new damage to the Bab Harran (an Abbasid period gate), a segment of the restored Abbasid city wall, and the modern

³⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/27/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-russia-idUSKCN0RQ0RY20150927> ; <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/27/iraq-strikes-intel-sharing-agreement-with-russia-syria-and-iran>

⁴⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/23/us-iraq-cholera-idUSKCN0RN1DL20150923>

⁴¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/10000-protest-in-turkey-against-kurdish-rebel-violence/2015/09/20/958e7f5a-5fa7-11e5-8475-781cc9851652_story.html

Shrine to Uwais al-Qurani and Ammar Bin Yasser. Based on this new image, the Bab Harran has been completely destroyed since February 7, 2015. During the destruction of this gate, part of the city wall was damaged. Afterwards, all the debris was cleared from the area leaving just a vacant lot where the gate once stood. The Shrine to Uwais al-Qurani and Ammar Bin Yasser had been damaged over the course of the last year. The shrines were deliberately destroyed by bombs on May 14, 2014 with videos posted online of the destruction.⁴² After the deliberate destruction, the debris was partially cleared. An image from October 10, 2014 showed the continuing clearing of debris from the location and growing debris piles on the northeastern part of the site. The mosque in the center of the site was partially damaged and the courtyard in the center had gone out of use. By February 7, 2015, the mosque was being deliberately dismantled. The most recent image from September 5, 2015 shows the site is now completely vacant — the mosque has been dismantled and removed along and all the debris from the area of the shrines has been cleared. The debris piles from the northeastern part of the site have also been cleared away.

In addition to the destruction of these sites in Raqqa, earthen embankments were built along the northern edge of the city between February and September, located close to the Abbasid Palace and the site of Tell Bi'aa (See **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0131**). The large mounded site of Tell Bi'aa, located close to Raqqa, also shows some earthen embankments radiating out from the site, particularly along its eastern edge. This dirt possibly comes from the increasing mining of archaeological deposits from the southeastern corner of the archaeological mound. ASOR CHI and other organizations first identified this mining in February of 2014 — it has continued to grow with multiple paths created to ease the way for trucks and equipment.

⁴² http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=c88_1401464558

Incident Reports: Syria

SHI 15-0131

Report Date: September 29, 2015

Site Name: Tell Bi'aa (Tuttul)

Date of Incident: Ongoing, recent looting and looting dating back to 2013

Location: Tell Bi'aa, Outskirts of Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Ancient Tuttul was a major urban center in the Bronze Age situated near the confluence of the Balikh and Euphrates Rivers. The city was a transregional cult center of the god Dagan and part of the kingdom of the Amnanum with a predominant Amorite ethnos.

Site Date: Early Bronze Age, Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Hellenistic, Roman, Islamic

Incident Summary: Analysis of satellite imagery shows continued looting/illegal excavation at Tell Bi'aa since early September 2015.

Incident Source and Description: Prior to the Syrian conflict, small-scale looting had occurred on the mound, two small buildings were constructed in the northeast part of the site, and soil was removed from the southeastern area (see **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 14-0053**).

As of February 9, 2015, the site was affected by industrial-scale looting on its southeast and southwest peripheries, which was documented by several sources.⁴³ A UNITAR report documents the looting up to October 9, 2014. New small-scale looting is visible in a recent satellite image dated February 2, 2015 in association with the seasonal encampments of transhumant pastoralists. The site is obscured by cloud cover in the most recent image dated February 7, 2015 (See **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0023**).

DigitalGlobe satellite imagery dating to February 12, 2014 shows damage to a small area on the mound's southeast side caused by heavy machinery. A new roadway up the slope of the mound was built to allow the passage of trucks and excavating equipment. A January 9, 2015 image shows that the affected area was later expanded in multiple directions. Looting pits are visible on the site as well, and looting appears to occur in advance of, or in conjunction with, earth removal. The most recent image dating to September 5, 2015 shows a considerable part of the mound has been removed. New earthen embankments — certainly part of ISIL's defensive strategy for the city — are seen on the northern and eastern side of the mound, and there are tire tracks between these earthworks and the excavated portions of the site. There is another embankment to the south, which may also have been built using earth from the mound.

DigitalGlobe satellite imagery also shows that embankments were built around the northern edge of Raqqa between February 2, 2015 and September 5, 2015 (See **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0132**).

⁴³ <http://www.unitar.org/unosat/chs-syria>

Pattern: Illegal excavation; looting.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI has designated the Raqqa area as a high priority for monitoring and future remediation efforts, and will attempt to gather further information on these reports via in-country sources as well as DigitalGlobe satellite imagery as it becomes available. ASOR CHI continues to monitor the condition of cultural heritage sites in and around Raqqa/Tell Bi'aa.

Sources:

Scholarly:

UNITAR 2014. *Satellite-based Damage Assessment to Cultural Heritage Sites in Syria*. (UNITAR). <http://www.unitar.org/unosat/chs-syria>



Mound of Tell Bi'aa, areas of interest highlighted in red (DigitalGlobe; September 5, 2015)



Tell Bi'aa, no recent, visible damage in the southeast quadrant (DigitalGlobe; October 22, 2013)



Tell Bi'aa, evidence of earth removal/looting on southeast side of mound (DigitalGlobe; February 12, 2014)



Tell Bi'aa, earth removal expanded in multiple directions and looting pits and access ramps are visible (DigitalGlobe; January 9, 2015)



Tell Bi'aa, digging of mound expanded further (DigitalGlobe; September 5, 2015)

SHI 15-0132

Report Date: September 29, 2015

Site Name: Raqqa, Great Mosque of Raqqa, Bab Harran, the City Wall, Shrine of Uwais al-Qurani and Ammar Bin Yasser

Date of Incident: Ongoing damage, from 2013 to present

Location: Raqqa, Al-Raqqa Governorate, Syria

Site Description:

Great Mosque: "In the centre of the walled area some of the remains of the Great Mosque of al-Rafiqa whose construction was originally undertaken in 772 under Caliph al-Mansur. The courtyard was rebuilt (1165-1166) by Nur al-Din who devoted a good deal of attention to building projects in the Jezira. The remains seen today comprise only two elements: an uncompromisingly plain 25 m round minaret, Mesopotamian in inspiration but probably dating from Nur al-Din's restoration; and part of the courtyard colonnade in mud-brick arches including the inscription recording Nur al-Din's contribution."⁴⁴

Bab Harran: The northern gate of Raqqa, through the city wall, on the road to Haran, Turkey. It was probably constructed with the walls in the eighth century.

City Wall: "There have been recent efforts to reconstruct the semi-circular baked and mud brick walls of Abbasid al-Rafiqa (eighth century) of which two thirds of the length survive (the exception being the south side parallel to the river). The walls were originally of double thickness, strengthened every 35 m by more than 100 semi-circular towers."⁴⁵

Uwais al-Qurani and Ammar Bin Yasser: "The huge modern shrine to Uwais al-Qurani replaces a modest but historic tomb honouring the early Muslim ascete. Raqqa's importance in the Shiite tradition stems from the burial there of many of the followers of Ali who fell nearby at the Battle of Siffin."⁴⁶

Site Dates: Founded by Alexander the Great (c. 300 BCE) and inhabited to modern day.

Incident Summary: Satellite imagery shows multiple sites partially or completely destroyed and an embankment constructed around the northern edge of Raqqa and Tell Bi'a.

Incident Source and Description:

Great Mosque: DigitalGlobe satellite imagery dating between October 22, 2013 and Feb 12, 2014, shows that the small Ottoman shrine at center of the Great Mosque of al-Rafiqa was destroyed and the debris was cleared away. This damage was previously reported in the AAAS report.⁴⁷ Images

⁴⁴ Burns, Ross, *The Monuments of Syria*. p. 259

⁴⁵ Burns, Ross, *The Monuments of Syria*. p. 259

⁴⁶ Burns, Ross, *The Monuments of Syria*. p. 260

⁴⁷ <http://www.aaas.org/page/ancient-history-modern-destruction-assessing-status-syria-s-tentative-world->

dating to April 8, 2011 show this interior building more clearly and there is no visible damage, and the most recent imagery from September 5, 2015 show that .

Bab Harran: DigitalGlobe satellite imagery shows that Bab Harran, the North Gate, was destroyed and the debris removed between February 7, 2015 and September 5, 2015.

City Wall: DigitalGlobe satellite imagery from September 5, 2015 shows that the city wall located directly across the street from the Bab Harran was completely destroyed. Previous damage along the eastern part of the city wall occurred sometime between April 17, 2013 and October 22, 2013. Debris was left on site with no attempts to repair the wall. This previous damage occurred near a bastion and was reported in the AAAS report⁴⁸, which dates the destruction between October 2011 and October 2014.

Shrine to Uwais al-Qurani and Ammar Bin Yasser: DigitalGlobe satellite imagery shows that the Shrine to Uwais al-Qurani and Ammar Bin Yasser was destroyed between February 12, 2014 and September 9, 2015. On February 12, 2014th all buildings associated with the shrine were intact. A video posted on May 14, 2014 shows the destruction of smaller shrines on the southeastern corner, a shrine on the northwestern corner, and a small building on the northeastern corner.⁴⁹ DigitalGlobe imagery from June 19, 2014 confirms this video and shows the debris being removed. On October 10, 2014, imagery shows trucks continuing to clear the debris, and large pieces have been cleared away from the southeastern corner of the site. The cleared debris shows slight damage to the mosque, and the pool is no longer being used. This satellite imagery also shows growing dirt piles on the northeastern part of the site. DigitalGlobe imagery from January 1, 2015 shows more clearance of debris, as well as some debris appearing on top of a building, showing a possible dismantling of the structure. On February 7, 2015, there is slight cloud cover, and the eastern side of the mosque was destroyed. Imagery from September 9, 2015 shows the complete destruction of all buildings on site. The debris have been removed from the site, as well as one of the dirt piles that appeared October 2014. Only the foundations of a building remain.

DigitalGlobe satellite imagery also shows that embankments were built around the northern edge of Raqqa and around the neighboring Tell Bi'aa between February 2, 2015 and September 5, 2015. For more information on Tell Bi'aa, see **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0131**.

Pattern: Military Activity: Earthworks, Intentional Destruction.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI has designated the Raqqa are as a high priority for monitoring and future remediation efforts, and will attempt to gather further information on these reports via in country sources as well as DigitalGlobe satellite imagery as it becomes available, and is continuing to monitor the condition of cultural heritage sites in and around Raqqa and Tell Bi'aa.

[heritage-sites-7](#)

⁴⁸ <http://www.aaas.org/page/ancient-history-modern-destruction-assessing-status-syria-s-tentative-world-heritage-sites-7>

⁴⁹ http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=c88_1401464558

Sources:

Online Reporting:

AAAS: <http://www.aaas.org/page/ancient-history-modern-destruction-assessing-status-syria-s-tentative-world-heritage-sites-7>

LiveLeak: http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=c88_1401464558

Scholarly:

Burns, R. (2010) *The Monuments of Syria: A Guide*. I.B. Tauris: London.



ASOR DigitalGlobe®
Great Mosque, Raqqa, with no visible damage (DigitalGlobe; April 8, 2011)



ASOR DigitalGlobe®
Great Mosque, Raqqa, with no visible damage (DigitalGlobe; September 5, 2015)



Bab Harran northern gate, Raqqa, without visible damage (DigitalGlobe; February 7, 2015)



Bab Harran northern gate, Raqqa, with visible damage and debris cleared (DigitalGlobe; September 5, 2015)



City wall directly across the street from Bab Harran, Raqqa, with visible damage (DigitalGlobe; September 5, 2015)



Shrine to Uwais al-Qurani and Ammar Bin Yasser, Raqqa, with no visible damage (DigitalGlobe; February 12, 2014)



Shrine to Uwais al-Qurani and Ammar Bin Yasser with visible damage to the southeast corner (DigitalGlobe; June 19, 2014)



Shrine to Uwais al-Qurani and Ammar Bin Yasser with visible damage to the center (DigitalGlobe; January 9, 2015)



Cleared site of the Shrine to Uwais al-Qurani and Ammar Bin Yasser (DigitalGlobe; September 9, 2015)



Embankments around the northern edge of the city and around neighboring Tell Bi'aa (DigitalGlobe; February 2, 2015)



Construction of embankments on the northern edge of the city (DigitalGlobe; September 5, 2015)

SHI 15-0133

Report Date: September 24, 2015

Site Name: Bosra — Ayyubid Citadel

Date of Incident: September 17, 2015

Location: UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of Bosra, Daraa Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Busra al-Sham (Bosra) is located approximately 140 km south of Damascus, and 10 km from Jordan. In recent years, the town has become a center of rebellion against the Assad Regime, mainly because of its geographic location. Bursa al-Sham was first mentioned in the Amarna Tablets dating to the 14th century BCE, and rose to prominence in the late first century CE as the capital of the Nabatean Kingdom. Most of the standing archaeological structures date to the Roman period. It was once the capital of the Roman Province of Arabia and was an important stopover on the ancient Caravan Route to Mecca. One of Bosra's principle features, a well-preserved Roman Theater constructed from regional black basalt, dates to this period. The ancient city also contains significant properties from the early Christian era including two churches dating to around the 4th century, CE. In the 7th century CE, the city came under Islamic rule and several mosques can be seen from this period, including the al-Omari Mosque and Madrasah Mabra al-Naqua, which are among the oldest and most celebrated in Islamic history. Between the 5th and 13th centuries, the Roman Theater was fortified and became a major defensive structure.⁵⁰ It also holds significant historical importance due to the varying types of cultural properties found within the core of the ancient city area, which is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

According to Ross Burns:

“The theatre owes its exceptional state of preservation (from both the ravages of earthquakes and the building programs of later centuries) to its conversion into an Ayyubid fort guarding the southern approaches to Damascus.⁵¹

In plan, the Ayyubid fortifications fit like a jacket around the half-circle of the Roman building, with major towers at the northeast and northwest corners, a central bastion along the diameter (north) and give subsidiary towers around the arc of the semi-circle. The first use of the theatre as a fortification dates back to the Umayyad and Fatimid eras and the first three towers (east and west of the stage and on the southeast rim of the theatre) were constructed under the Seljuk governors, Gumushtakin (1089) and Altuntash (mid 12th century). However, the major work, including the encircling ditch, dates from the Ayyubid response to the Crusader threat after 1200, particularly under Adil (sultan in Damascus 1196–1218) and his son, al-Salih Imad al-Din, who alternated as governor of Bosra and sultan of Damascus between 1218 and 1238. The later work relies less on smaller recycled stone and more on massive blocks up to 4.5 m long, particularly in the central tower of the north face.

The Ayyubid upper ramparts now house, on the upper terrace, a collection of sculptures from the Roman period as well as Roman and Arabic inscriptions. Al-Salih established a palace complex and mosque within the Roman auditorium, remains of which were removed during the reconstruction

⁵⁰ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/22>

⁵¹ Burns, Ross. *The Monument of Syria: A Guide*. London: I. B. Tauris. p. 79

program. One surviving remnant is the water basin of the palace hammam which has been transferred to the ethnographic (folklore) collection in the southwestern tower.”⁵²

See also **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0057** for further information.

Site Date: 14th century BCE to Ayyubid periods

Incident Summary: Explosions from barrel bombs caused partial collapse of the northern wall surrounding the citadel.

Incident Source and Description: On September 16, 2015, reports indicated damage to the citadel of Busra al-Sham (Bosra) by barrel bombs. These explosives were dropped from airplanes onto the courtyard and the moat of the castle.⁵³ ASOR CHI in-country sources (via HRS) contacts confirmed that two bombs were dropped in the vicinity of the citadel and that the incident took place on approximately September 6, 2015. One bomb exploded approximately ten meters to the west of the citadel while the other hit the northern wall surrounding the historic structure directly, resulting in partial collapse as seen in images posted on social media.⁵⁴ During this most recent conflict the Busra Sham Hotel and the nearby historic souq were also reportedly destroyed.⁵⁵ Other archaeological sites in the area have been looted by various armed groups over the past two years.⁵⁶

ASOR CHI has previously reported in March 2015 on damage to the citadel and surrounding areas caused by military activities (see **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0057**).

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will attempt to gather further information on these reports via in country sources and is continuing to monitor the condition of cultural heritage sites in and around the Ancient City of Bosra.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

All4Syria: <http://all4syria.info/Archive/251587>

Facebook:

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1679387025637790&id=1642112122698614

Hurriyet Daily News: <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/barrel-bombs-kill-21-civilians-near-syrias-daraa-monitor-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=88671&NewsCatID=352>

⁵² Burns, Ross (2009) *The Monument of Syria: A Guide*. London: I. B. Tauris, pp. 82

⁵³ <http://all4syria.info/Archive/251587>

⁵⁴ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1679387025637790&id=1642112122698614

⁵⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/25/syria-rebels-bosra_n_6938442.html

⁵⁶ <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/barrel-bombs-kill-21-civilians-near-syrias-daraa-monitor-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=88671&NewsCatID=352>

ARA News: <http://aranews.net/2015/09/dozens-killed-in-renewed-barrel-bomb-attacks-in-syrias-daraa/>

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Scholarly:

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UNESCO: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/22>



Busra al-Sham Citadel Courtyard showing bomb damage. (All4Syria; September 16, 2015)



Busra al-Sham Citadel Courtyard showing bomb damage (Facebook; September 16, 2015)



Busra al-Sham Citadel Courtyard showing bomb damage. (Facebook page; September 16, 2015)

SHI 15-0134

Report Date: September 29, 2015

Site Name: Qalaat Shirkuh or the Citadel of Palmyra, UNESCO World Heritage Site of Palmyra

Date of Incident: September 28, 2015

Location: Homs Governorate, Syria

Site Description: From Ross Burns *The Monuments of Syria*⁵⁷:

“The castle has for long been attributed to the Lebanese Maanite amir, Fakhr al-Din (1590-1635), who tested the limits of ottoman flexibility in the early 17th century ... Recent Polish research has confirmed, however, that Fakhr al-Din simply briefly occupied an earlier Ayyubid castle built by the Homs amir, al-Mujahid Assad al Din Shirkuh II (r 1186-1240) who was also responsible for Qalaat al-Shmemis and Qalaat Rahba.

Relatively small in size, the fortifications are based on an original triangular fortress of seven towers (1230), extended later in the 13th century with curtain walls to the east and west, the whole ringed by a deep ditch. The effect is spectacular. You enter from the south via a metal bridge that brings you to a landing between two towers. Like many Muslim castles, the internal arrangement of chambers and defences is compact, with a steep passage taking you up to the internal court. This is surrounded by battlements with a substantial thickening of the defences on the south side.”

Site Date: 1230 CE

Incident Summary: SARG airstrikes against ISIL targets have damaged the walls of the Citadel of Palmyra.

Incident Source and Description: On May 15, 2015, APSA published images (dated May 14) and video footage (dated May 15) showing combat centered on the citadel of Palmyra.

On May 17, 2015, APSA posted footage to YouTube showing “damage caused to the Citadel at Palmyra.” The video footage is taken at a great distance and is somewhat unclear but seems to show major damage to the citadel architecture.

On May 26, 2015, APSA published video footage to YouTube showing various views of the site of Palmyra and labelled “posted by Daesh.” The footage includes shots of the citadel (Qalaat Shirkuh) filmed from within the modern city, as well as shots taken walking around the ancient site. Monuments shown include the Temple of Bel, the colonnaded street, and the Roman theatre.⁵⁸

On July 15, 2015, APSA published pictures of the Palmyra Citadel said to have been taken by ISIL. These photos show minor damage from explosives to the citadel. It is unknown when this damage occurred.

On September 28, 2015 the DGAM reported “The Syrian armed forces are still working to restore the historic city of Palmyra from the terrorist militants of ISIS. Accordingly, a report is spread

⁵⁷ Burns 2010, *The Monuments of Syria: A Guide*, I.B. Taurus; London. pp. 243

⁵⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHCACFD0pOY>

among several media speaks that some damages have happened to the Citadel of Palmyra during this battle.”⁵⁹ News outlets report that 13 bombs during three days of bombardment following the reception of new Russian weapons by the Assad regime. Activist Khaled al-Homsi reports that almost a third of the walls of the citadel had been damaged.⁶⁰ SARG forces began airstrikes in the Palmyra region on Friday, September 18 and have killed more than 100 people, including both civilians and fighters.⁶¹

Pattern: Military activity: explosives.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will attempt to gather further information on these reports via in country sources as well as DigitalGlobe satellite imagery for the Tadmor region as it becomes available. 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 its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Sources:

Online Reporting:

APSA (May 15, 2015): <http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/homs/palmyra/1218-palmyra-14-05-2015-a.html>

APSA (May 17, 2015): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nEof-4Tcok>

APSA, Facebook page (May 27, 2015): <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1362975580476216.1073741901.324869057620212&type=1>

APSA (July 15, 2015): <http://apsa2011.com/apsanew/palmyra-pictures-of-the-citadel-posted-by-isis-on-15-07-2015/>

DGAM: <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1810>

The Times: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/article4566934.ece>

⁵⁹ <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1810>

⁶⁰ <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/article4566934.ece>

⁶¹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/residents-flee-palmyra-syrian-government-bombs-isis-150923200307921.html>



Palmyra, bombardment in the area of the citadel (APSA; May 15, 2015)



Palmyra, bombardment in the area of the citadel (APSA; May 15, 2015)



Palmyra, bombardment in the area of the citadel (APSA; May 15, 2015)



Palmyra, bombardment in the area of the citadel (APSA; May 15, 2015)



Citadel (Qalaat Shirkuh), Palmyra, footage attributed to ISIL (APSA; May 26, 2015)

Incident Reports: Iraq

IHI 15-0095

Report Date: September 21, 2015

Site Name: Nineveh and surrounding area

Date of Incident: Ongoing

Location: Mosul, Ninawa Governorate, Iraq

Site Description: Nineveh was the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the area was settled about 6000 BCE. The mound is located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River inside the city of Mosul. By 3000 BCE it had become an important religious center for the worship of Ishtar and during the Neo-Assyrian period (900-600 BCE), Nineveh was the capital of the vast empire, until it was sacked by a coalition of Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Chaldeans, Scythians, and Cimmerians in 612 BCE. Nineveh was abandoned after this destruction.

Nineveh is made up of two mounds, Kouyunjik and Tell Nabi Yunus. Kouyunjik rises about 20 m above the surrounding plain of the ancient city. It measures 800 by 500 meters. Its layers contained several Neo-Assyrian palaces and temples, as well as habitation stretching to 6000 BCE. Nebi Yunus is the smaller mound with a palace built by Esarhaddon, and a later church and mosque constructed on top. The ruins of Nineveh are surrounded by a massive stone and mudbrick wall dating to about 700 BCE. This city wall was fitted with fifteen monumental gateways.

Site Date: 6000 BCE at the earliest occupation levels, with largest architectural expansion beginning 700 BCE, modern habitation also in proximity to the site.

Incident Summary: New construction observed on site in satellite imagery between March 7, 2015 and August 29, 2015.

Incident Source and Description: DigitalGlobe satellite imagery reveals multiple new constructions built immediately outside the perimeter walls of the archaeological site of Nineveh between March 7, 2015 and August 29, 2015.

South Building: The earlier imagery dating to March 7 shows a large structure outside the southwestern corner of the site to the south of the river as some smaller buildings along the western edge of the site. The imagery shows that this larger building is expanded by August 29, 2015.

Western Buildings: The August 29, 2015 imagery also shows the construction of multiple smaller buildings along the western edge of the archaeological site. These buildings are also located outside the perimeter wall along the edge of the site

Northwestern Building: August 29, 2015 imagery shows the expansion of another unknown structure located outside the northwestern corner of Nineveh.

Northern Area: A large building complex was constructed to the east of the existing building on the northeastern part of Nineveh, just south of the northern site wall. This is the only building which has expanded within the walls of the archaeological site at some point between May 7, 2015 and August 29, 2015. The Spring Festival stadium, where politicians, high ranking members of the military, and other high-ranking Iraqi officials sat for military parades in the 1980s and 1990s, was completely destroyed. On June 24, 2015 social media posts reported and documented the demolition of the stadium.⁶² ASOR CHI in-country sources claim that this real estate is assessed at a high commercial value and allege that the stadium was removed intentionally by ISIL affiliates to make way for the construction of retail properties for rent through a pre-paid, multi-year lease. This same source claims that ISIL affiliates are profiting from rented commercial properties, forcing lessors to pay upfront and years in advance to fund the local organization, further stating that the demolished sites of Nebi Yunus (see **ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15-0028**) and the Bab Altob, the oldest police station in central Mosul, are also slated for commercial development. While the stadium was originally located to the north outside the site walls, new building could negatively affect the previously unrecorded subsurface archaeological remains.

Pattern: Development threats/disturbances.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI will attempt to gather on-the-ground information on these new constructions via in-country sources and determine if this activity is affecting exposed and subsurface archaeological remains. ASOR CHI will also continue to monitor the condition of ancient and historical cultural heritage at the site of Nineveh on the mounds of Kouyunjik and Tell Nabi Yunus.

Sources:

Scholarly:

R. Campbell Thompson and M E L Mallowan (1933) "The British Museum excavations at Nineveh 1931-32," *Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology*, vol. 20, pp. 71-186.

A. H. Layard (1894) *Nineveh and Its Remains*, John Murray, 1849

Tariq Madhloom (1969) Excavations at Nineveh: The 1968-69 Campaign, *Sumer*, vol. 25, pp. 43-49.

⁶² <https://www.facebook.com/mosulyoon/posts/830155053746894>



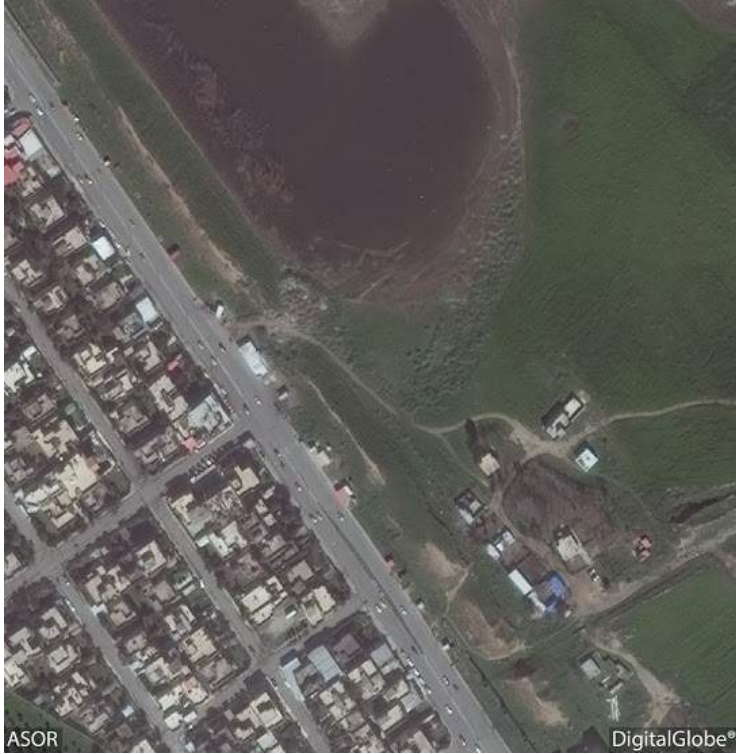
Nineveh, areas of interest outlined in red (DigitalGlobe; August 29, 2015)



South Area (DigitalGlobe; March 7, 2015)



South Area, construction of large building in the south western corner (DigitalGlobe; August 29, 2015)



Western Area (DigitalGlobe; March 7, 2015)



Western Area, new construction along edge of Nineveh (DigitalGlobe; August 29, 2015)



Northwest Area (DigitalGlobe; March 7, 2015)



Northwest Area, construction of new enlarged building (DigitalGlobe; August 29, 2015)



ASOR DigitalGlobe®
North Area with Spring Festival Stadium (DigitalGlobe; March 7, 2015)



ASOR DigitalGlobe®
North Area with stadium demolished and a new large complex south of the northern wall (DigitalGlobe; August 29, 2015)



Demolition of the stadium (Facebook; June 23, 2015)



Demolition of the stadium (Facebook; June 23, 2015)



Demolition of the stadium (Facebook; June 23, 2015)



Demolition of the stadium (Facebook; June 23, 2015)