



Damage to Syria's Heritage

11 April 2014

This newsletter provides a summary of the most recent reports on the damage to Syria's heritage. It should be stressed that much of this data cannot be verified, but it is hoped that it will assist in the documentation of the damage occurring, and help raise awareness.

Main Contents

[Updates on Damage](#) | [Updates on Looting](#) | [Reports and Updates from the Syrian DGAM](#) | [Policy Changes and Updates from Syria](#) | [International Activity](#) | [News Updates](#)

Stories

- [Archaeological sites used as military training camps](#)
- [Evidence of the damage around the Great Umayyad Mosque, Aleppo](#)
- [Looting at World Heritage Site of Bosra](#)
- [Potentially looted relief withdrawn from sale at Bonhams](#)
- [Return of more than 4000 smuggled artefacts](#)
- [Interview with Syria's looters](#)
- [New international campaign launched to protect Syria's heritage](#)
- [Reconstruction valued at 20-30 billion Euros: new conference will help preparations](#)
- [Suggestions for international action made](#)
- [Increasing international cooperation with Lebanon assists the return of stolen artefacts](#)
- [Television stories on the damage to Syria's heritage](#)

Updates on Damage



(Photo of World Heritage Site St Simeon's Basilica, July 2011. Photo copyright: Emma Cunliffe)

Archaeological sites used as military training camps

- "Director General of Antiquities and Museums Maamoun Abdul-Kareem told SANA Saturday on the situation of the Syrian antiquities during the past three years the ruins in the country have witnessed a new setback during the past few months when armed terrorist groups changed unique archaeological sites into training camps, while others were targeted like St. Simon Citadel and the sculptures placed on the façade of the valley of al-Qattora in the area of Barakat mountain."

The full article, *Antiquities and Museums: Terrorists changed some archeological sites into training camps*, is published by SANA, and available [here](#). However, the SANA article does not always open: the article has been reprinted by Syria 360° blog [here](#).



(Photo copyright: unclear)

Evidence of the damage around the Great Umayyad Mosque, Aleppo

- This photograph shows the damage to the area outside the Great Umayyad Mosque in Aleppo. Ownership of the photograph is unclear, as it has been shared by a number of Facebook groups. It is here taken from the page of the group [Aleppo Archaeology](#), and can be seen [here](#).

[Updates on Looting](#)

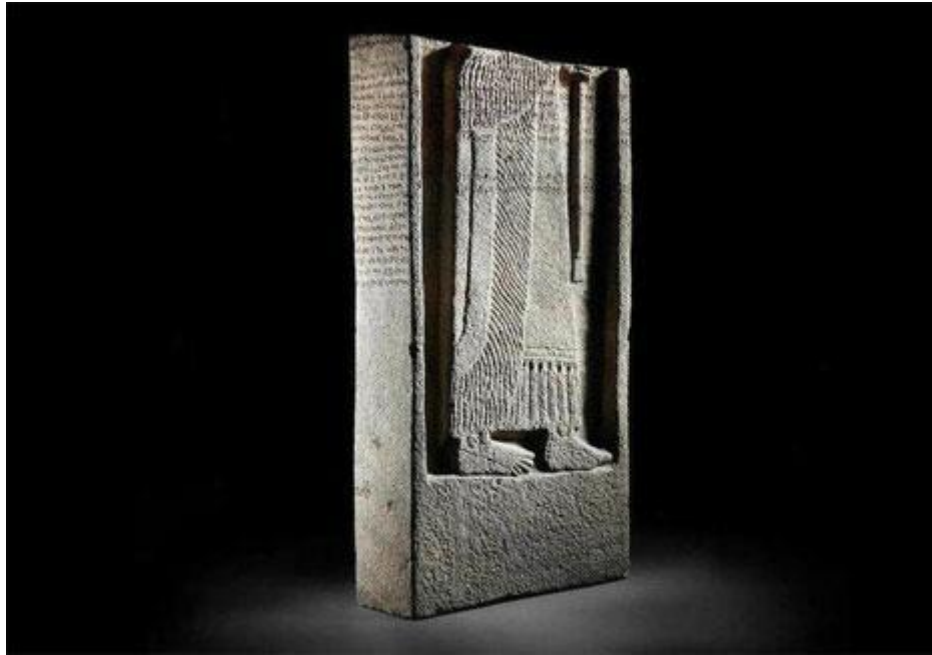


(Photo: Bosra, March 2011. Photo Copyright: [Ergo](#))

Looting at World Heritage Site of Bosra

- Due to the increasing damage to shops and places of work, looting at Bosra is ongoing as a way to raise money. Desperate local people look for coins, amulets, pottery and mosaics, and dig ancient graves.

This report came from the Al Jazeera article, *Syria's artefacts face new threats*, available [here](#).



(Photo: Auction Lot 99, Bonhams Auction House)

Potentially looted relief withdrawn from sale at Bonhams

- Our previous newsletters reported on a potentially looted relief that was due to be sold on the 3rd April in Bonhams, London. It is apparently from Tell Sheikh Hamad, and is the matching lower part to the upper part of the stele, which is in the British Museum. The original article (in Arabic) and the video (Arabic with English subtitles) is in Al-Akhbar, and can be read [here](#).

Additional attention was then raised by an unknown correspondent in Berlin "Exactly what happened next is a bit unclear, but the legal/political case was encapsulated in an urgent letter addressed to Dr. Maamoun Abulkarem, the indefatigable Director-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) in Syria's Ministry of Culture, from a correspondent in Berlin. The letter arrived at DGAM on March 23, 2014.

"Dear Dr. Maamoun,

In the attachment I send you documentation on the stele of Tell Sheikh Hamad which is being offered for sale at Bonhams Auction house in London for April 3, 2014. According to my information UNESCO has already informed your government about this case. The only way to prohibit it from being sold is that your government responds to UNESCO, addresses Interpol, and request an investigation by the London police.

May I urge you Sir to inform your government quickly and act respectively before April 3!

Please note also this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVucfdFWTdc>

.. . . .

(Privacy of signer respected)

...

On 25 September 1999, Prof. Kühne [the most recent excavator of the site] sent a report to DGAM stating that some unknown person excavated illegally on top of the mound, near the venerated grave, during the night of 14 September 1999. Prof. Kühne provided photos of the looter excavations and he opined that the looter pit is just large enough to have contained the lower part of the stele. Prof. Kühne notes that the German mission was not excavating on the mound in 1999, and in fact had not worked there since 1988.

Last but not least, the location of the 1999 looter pits on top of the mound is precisely where Rassam, back in the 19th century, wrote that the lower part was buried. The first announcement of the existence of the stele, as noted above, was at the 2000 Christie's sale—less than a year after the reported looting incident at Tell Sheikh Hamad!

These details are from an article, *Syria Victory at London Auction House to Accelerate Global Cultural Protections*, in [Almanar News](#). Further information on the success of the SAADE Institute, the creators of the original campaign video, was published by Al-Akhbar, in their article *How the Saade Institute saved an Assyrian King*, available [here](#). Confirmation the stele was withdrawn from sale was also covered by the Art Newspaper, available [here](#).



(Photo: Returned Palmyra Relief. Copyright: [DGAM](#))

Return of more than 4000 smuggled artefacts

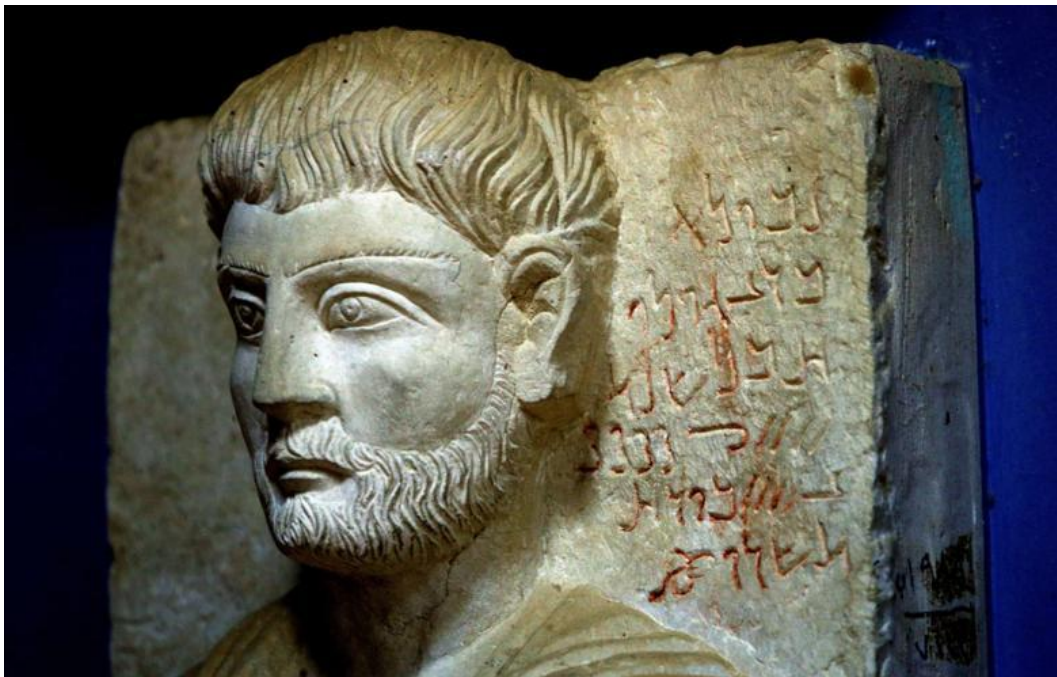
"General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums restored more than 4000 archeological pieces during the past years through operations handled by authorities in Damascus, Tartous, Palmyra, Homs, Hama and Deir-Ezzor.

A treasure containing 1600 silver-plated bronze coins [was] uncovered in the area of Jabal al-Shaer between Palmyra and Homs, in addition to tens of archeological pieces that [were] prepared for smuggling since June, 2013, were also restored."

The full article, *Antiquities and Museums: Terrorists changed some archeological sites into training camps*, is published by SANA, and available [here](#). However, the SANA article does not always open: the article has been reprinted by Syria 360° blog [here](#).

- Another set of tomb reliefs have been seized by the DGAM in Palmyra. Again, the reliefs are depictions of families, confiscated on the 30 March 2013. They date from the 1st to the 3rd Century AD and were placed inside cemeteries.

Details and photos of the reliefs are available [here](#) (in Arabic).



(Photo caption from article. Copyright: [Al Akhbar](#)

A picture taken on March 14, 2014 shows a sculpture found in the ancient Syrian oasis city of Palmyra, 215 kilometres northeast of Damascus, and now displayed at the city's museum. Syria's fabled desert Greco-Roman oasis of Palmyra saw its last tourist in September 2011, six months after the uprising began. Its most recent visitors are violence and looting. (Photo: AFP-Joseph Eid).)

Interview with Syria's looters

Syria's heritage. They say they will get your artefact for you if you can give them information on the location.

In addition, "Media outlets have already reported on archeological theft in Syria that is not restricted to the rebel-held north. It is also prospering in the south near the Jordanian border, and recently near the Lebanese border.

Unfortunately, we lack precise figures on the scope of these operations but a 2013 report estimated the value of smuggled artifacts at US\$ 2 billion."

To read the full article, How Syria's archaeological artifacts are smuggled out of the country, in Al-Akhbar English, click [here](#).

[Reports and Updates from the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums](#)

- Other than those covered in other sections, no additional updates are available.

[Policy Changes and Updates from Syria](#)

- None

[International Activity](#)



(Photo Copyright: [Almanar](#))

New international campaign launched to protect Syria's heritage

- According to an article in Almanar, a new campaign has been launched, although by whom is not clear.
"An international campaign is being launched to save our Global Culture Heritage in the custody of the people of the Syrian Arab Republic".
We are currently seeking further details.

The full article, *Syria Victory at London Auction House to Accelerate Global Cultural Protections*, is available in Almanar [here](#).

Reconstruction valued at 20-30 billion Euros: new conference will help preparations

- The former Director of the Museum of Nature and Man in Oldenburg, Germany thinks reconstruction may need 20-30 billion euros and take five-10 years. He and a group of technical experts are in the process of preparing for the conference for the reconstruction of Aleppo, ancient and modern. This will be supported by the German Foreign Ministry and the German Agency for International Cooperation and the "Association of Friends of the Old City of Aleppo". They are working on building a network of international experts and creating a communications network between them. There are several important locations to consider which have been damaged or destroyed: the Umayyad

Mosque where a large part of the courtyard burned in November 2012, and the minaret collapsed in April 2013; the Souq, of which about 60% of the 12km network collapsed in a large conflagration; the Passport Office, which had been reconstructed with the Agha Khan Foundation, and the Fatwa House. Approximately 35 mosques and old mosques are affected, including the minaret of the Al-Mahmandar Mosque (also called al-Qadi Mosque), which is unique and dates to the 13th Century. Also, nearly 50% of the old houses (which number about 6000) and date to between the 14th-18th Century are destroyed. The destruction of the Castle was confined to the entrance gatehouse and some damage to the garden – important artefacts were taken to the central bank in Aleppo."

The full article, *The city of Aleppo... the destruction of history and the present*, is available in Al Jazeera [here](#).

Suggestions for international action made

- In an interview, Professor Paolo Matthiae, excavator of Ebla, made the following suggestions for international action "The campaign launched by Francesco Rutelli includes[*], besides exhibition and reward, initiatives to support the surveillance of the sites and the museums using permanent and paid guardians. Some sites have been abandoned, and the mission places have been plundered with the loss of documentation. In Ebla, there were some clandestine and sporadic excavations but these were blocked immediately by the reaction of the inhabitants. And this is an important point: in the general chaos the local people try to assure a minimum of self-defence. They have understood that it is a question of defending their past and their identity but also their future economy through tourism. It is now necessary to organize an international collaboration and I am thinking especially of European countries to prepare and coordinate interventions of restoration and renovation as soon as the political situation allows it. It may not seem necessary today but it is necessary to prepare the rebirth of the Syrian patrimony."

The full article, *The city of Aleppo... the destruction of history and the present*, is available in Al Jazeera [here](#).

[*] Details of the campaign he discusses were released by ANSAMED on 11 February:

"The aim is to inform the public and support international programs already initiated on the model of an agreement between UNESCO and the European Union to work together to restore the damaged heritage. The campaign will include a European exhibition debuting in Rome on the 'Splendor and

Drama of Syria' and aims to "award the courageous" who ... struggle every day to save Syria's cultural heritage. Some 10,000 dollars are at stake for 2014, and the prize money will be awarded by a committee under France's former culture minister Jack Lang. Potential candidates include Syria's director general for antiquities, who Rutelli said "is able to engage in dialogue even with opposition groups". A documentary with background music by Ennio Morricone has been made by Matteo Barzini to help spread the message of the campaign. The images have a strong impact on viewers".

However the press release is no longer available online.

Increasing international cooperation with Lebanon assists the return of stolen artefacts

- According to a new article in Almanar News, Lebanon has provided extensive support in the seizure and return of artefacts "The past few weeks have seen commendable cooperation between Lebanon and Syria leading to hundreds of Syrian antiquities being returned to Syria. On Syrian and Lebanese roads these days, soldiers at the frequent checkpoints not only look for explosives, wanted persons, and weapons, but they have orders at Syrian-Lebanon borders to search for more than 4000 stolen Syrian antiquities. A few hundred objects were returned to Syria this past year, and some are back on display in the garden of the National Museum in Damascus, where this observer photographed them.

Unfortunately there has been little, if any, help in stopping the flow of stolen Syrian antiquities into Jordan or Turkey, whose governments reportedly continue to turn a blind eye, ignoring their international obligations for reasons of politics and profit. In the case of Jordan, it has been widely alleged that King Abdullah's government is condoning shipments of stolen Syrian artifacts, via Israeli drug and antiquities mafia operations. These international criminal enterprises then forward the global cultural treasures from Israeli ports and Tel Aviv airport to lucrative international markets—museums, auction houses, or private collectors in New York, London, Switzerland, Germany, Spain and elsewhere. With respect to Turkey, much of the 500 mile border is open to excavation teams sent in to strip Syria of her archeological treasures, again with widespread charges of Turkish government involvement".

Most recently (3/2014), a dozen Syrian antiquities were returned with the cooperation of the government of Lebanon.

The full article, *Syria Victory at London Auction House to*

Accelerate Global Cultural Protections, is available in Almanar [here](#).

[News Updates](#)

(Not covered in other sections)

Television stories on the damage to Syria's heritage

- News World TV. *Syrian Cultural Heritage Must Not be Overlooked, Says UNESCO*. 02 April 2014. Available [here](#).
- CNN. *Saving Syria cultural treasures*. 2 April 2014. Available [here](#).
- Press TV. *Archaeological sites at danger after war in Syria*. 10 April 2014. Available [here](#).

This mailing list was produced by Dr Emma Cunliffe, in association with Heritage for Peace

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