



Damage to Syria's Heritage

26 March 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.

Updates on Damage



World Heritage Castle Crac des Chevaliers taken by Syrian Regime Troops

- On 20th March, the Crac des Chevaliers Crusader fortress was taken by Syrian regime troops after a long aerial bombardment of the Castle and the surrounding town. Apparently some 700 rebels were living in the castle, of whom at least 93 died in the fighting.
- According to The Daily Star, "A Homs-based activist who goes by the name of Beibares Tellawi told the Associated Press that the castle fell into the hands of government troops earlier Thursday, a day after rebels and the government agreed that opposition fighters would be given safe passage to Lebanon. He added that troops captured Al-Hosn, where the citadel is located, after an intense bombardment by the Syrian air force".
The full article, *Syrian troops capture Crusader-era citadel*, can be found [here](#).
- The most extensive discussion of the damage so far available can be found in an AFP article.
"Columns are blackened with soot and vaults have crumbled in one of the courtyards of Syria's the Krak des Chevaliers, a Crusader castle that is a Unesco World Heritage Site and a victim of the country's three-year civil war...
Most of the 11th century fortress and its external walls appear intact, but the damage is inside, in the lower courtyard.
Fires, apparently lit by the rebels who were entrenched inside the fortress, have ravaged ancient pillars, while some archways and vaults have collapsed.
Huge blocks of grey stone litter the ground, but it is not clear if the damage was caused during Thursday's capture of the fortress or in earlier bombardments.
The only bullet holes that can be seen are on a metal plate that was once inscribed with information for tourists who visited the Krak des Chevaliers, or Fortress of the Knights. "We acted in a way to preserve the Krak, to make sure it would not be damaged," said a colonel who escorted the journalists on their tour"
To read the full article by AFP in al-Hosn, *Syria's Krak des Chevaliers Crusader fortress charred and battered in war*, in the South China Post (in English) click[here](#).
- The clearest before and after photos can be found on the BBC website [here](#).
- A large number of media outlets have covered the story, a list of some of the best can be found on the [Archaeologik blog](#), by Rainer Schreg.



(Photo: Red-listed Syrian objects ranging from pre-history to the Ottoman period, Copyright: ICOM / the Art Newspaper)

Syria expresses concern about Turkey's failure to address the looting of their heritage

- "The Turkish government has shown no interest in controlling its borders or co-operating to restitute what was taken away," says the [Syrian] antiquities department's website.... In Idlib, in north-western Syria, looters are stealing from archaeological sites "in an orderly fashion", the local community has told the department. "Antiquities dealers and smugglers, Syrians and non-Syrians, Turkish in particular, are in the region," the report says. Lebanese antiquities dealers are said to be active in Damascus. ... [Cheikmous] Ali says that he was in Mardin, a Turkish city near the Syrian border, last month and saw hundreds of objects being seized by the Turkish police from Syrian and Turkish looters. The police force in Mardin says in a statement that it has seized 335 ancient objects... Mamoun Fansa, a Syrian-born, Berlin-based archaeologist and the author of a book about the destruction of Aleppo's heritage, says he has heard that a mosaic from the museum in Hamma, central Syria, has been spotted in the Gulf".
To read the full article in The Art Newspaper, *Turkey Turns a blind eye to plunder, says Syria* (17 March 2014), click [here](#).



(Photo: Palmyra 2005. Copyright: [Eustache Diemert / karo. Wikimedia Commons](#))

Details released of the damage to Palmyra World Heritage Site

- A video made by the Sham News Network and shared by the Association to Protection Syrian Archaeology shows that heavy weapons and tanks are located within the archaeological area (18 March 2014). The video can be viewed [here](#).
- AFP interviewed residents and a member of the Antiquities department from Palmyra and obtained details of the damage and the looting.

"[Palmyra] retains its majesty today, despite the tall-columned Temple of Baal suffering damage from shrapnel during artillery exchanges between rebels and forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

The Hellenistic building's eastern wall, its most imposing, now bears whitened slashes where the stone has been gouged by shell blasts. Mortar fire has damaged one entrance and its lintel resting on eight columns with fluted shafts. The perimeter wall has been damaged in several places. The Corinthian capitals of three pillars of the colonnade to the south of the temple have crashed to the ground.

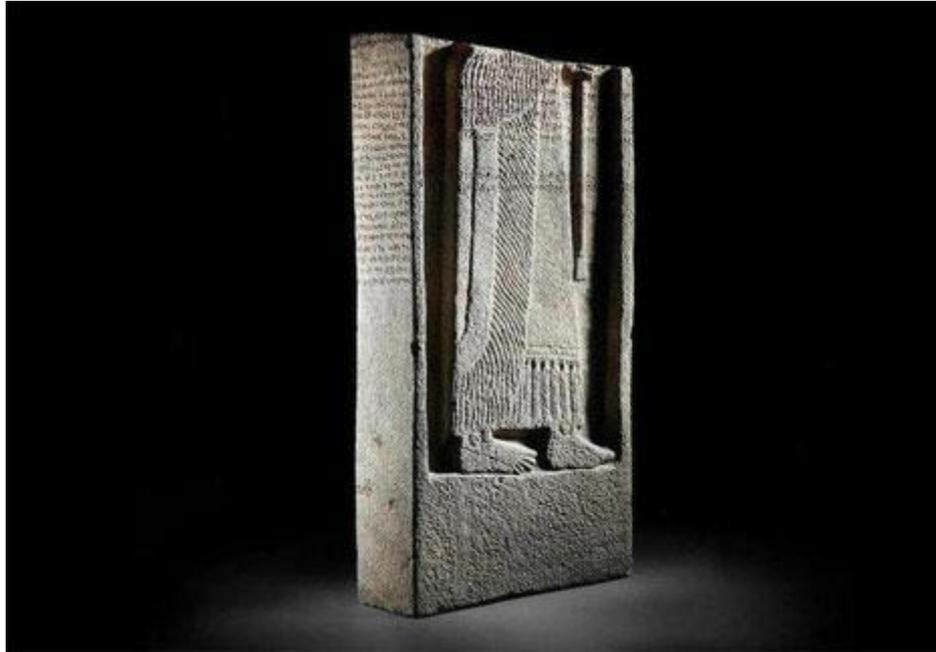
"Armed groups arrived in February 2013 and set up in the huge palm groves to the south until the army chased them out last September," the antiquities department's Mohammed al-Assad, 44, told AFP. "They opened fire on the town from the groves, and the temple which was in the line of fire was damaged by shelling," he added...

"Of Palmyra's 85,000 residents, 5,000 worked in hotels, restaurants, shops, as drivers and guides or organisers of desert excursions under canvas," he said. Tourist establishments are now shuttered.

The legendary Zenobia Palace Hotel, built on the site by a French adventurer in the 1920s and named after Palmyra's famous queen, is a ransacked and half-burned

.. . .

To read the full AFP article - *War, the latest visitor to Syria's fabled Palmyra*, click [here](#). Details of the looting are available in the section Updates on Looting.



(Photo: Auction Lot 99, Bonhams Auction House)

Potentially looted relief up for sale at Bonhams

- According to a recent article in Al-Akhbar (17 March 2014), a new lot at Bonhams Auction House, due to be sold on the 3rd April in London, may have been looted. The article publishes a video entitled "Stop the Theft and Sale of Antiquities in Syria", by the Saadeh Cultural Foundation. The video is addressed to UNESCO, the Syrian Government and Bonhams. The video claims that Auction Lot 99, which is apparently from Tell Shiekh Hamad, in Haseke province, is looted, despite Bonhams claim is was excavated in the 1970s. The upper section of the stele was discovered in 1879 by Hormuzd Rassam, and is now in the British Museum. Rassam's notes comment he was unable to fund the lower half. There is also no evidence that Layard, who also excavated the site, found it. The site was excavated by Kuhne in 1975, but his excavation records also do not mention it. Therefore, the foundation argues, it must be looted. Looting has certainly been reported at the site since at least September 2012. To read the full article (in arabic) and see the video (arabic with English subtitles) in Al-Akhbar, click [here](#).



(Photo of damage to the Mosque, 28 December 2012. Photo copyright: [Lens Young Homs!](#))

Photos of damage to Al-Fadael Mosque released

- Photos released by the Association to Protect Syrian Archaeology show extensive damage to the historic al-Fadael Mosque in Homs (also known as the Al-Fda'el, Mosque, the al-Fadaael mosque, and the Mosquée al-Fedaail). The album builds on previously released information and can be seen [here](#) on Facebook. (No account should be necessary to view the photos).

Updates on Looting



(Photo: Tell Brak, July 2010, Copyright: E. Cunliffe)

Looting reported at a number of sites

- The DGAM have reported looting at a number of sites. At the site of **Mohammed Diab** in Hasseke province, vandalism and illegal digging have been reported and the dig house has been looted. Looting is continuing at **Tell Hamoukar**, also in Hasseke. At **Tell Taban** some mud brick walls have collapsed in the rain, as maintenance cannot be carried out. Illegal digging has also been reported in the northern side of the hill. Illegal looting is also confirmed at **Tell Brak**, (the site by the town where [recent fighting](#) occurred at the start of the month. The digging is reportedly focussed on the sides of the hill of the temple and the Mitanni palace. The dig house has also been looted. The full report (in arabic) can be found [here](#).
- APSA have shared a series of photos showing looting at the site of **Tell al-Sen**, in Hasseke province (16 March 2014). Photos can be viewed [here](#) on Facebook.
- APSA have also shared a series of photos and a video of looting at the site of **Tell A'yn Ali**, at al-Mayadin, near Deir Ez-Zor (22 March 2014). Photos can be viewed [here](#) on Facebook, and the video can be found [here](#) on You-Tube. (No account should be needed to view the images).



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

Further details released of the looting of Palmyra World Heritage Site

- "The [Antiquities department] official said the antiquities building next to the temple was ransacked, but worse than that was the pillaging of ancient burial sites. West of Palmyra lies the kilometre-long Valley of the Tombs where rich merchants built their lavish funerary monuments thousands of years ago. Palmyra Museum director Khalil al-Hariri shows AFP three limestone stelae and parts of a sculpted sarcophagus depicting people including children carved in high relief. "They were sliced away with a chainsaw," he said. "We recovered them two days ago in the basement of a house." He does not know how many burial sites have been plundered. "There are around 500 tombs, and only about 200 have been excavated so far by archaeologists," Hariri said. "It's in the ones that haven't yet been excavated that the looters did their dirty work." He is grateful that at least some of the tomb robbers' booty has been recovered. "Since the army took control of the region, I have got 130 pieces back. But I can't say how many tombs they came from because the thieves made sure they closed them up again," he said. In addition to parts of stone coffins, recovered items include busts of people long dead, showing them in Greco-Roman costume, and typical Palmyrene wall decorations. The official line is that the "armed groups" and "terrorists" want to "sell off our culture and our roots". However, it is clear that some residents have taken advantage of the turmoil in the country to turn a profit, knowing the value of such antiquities. And Hariri admits that.

country. Fifteen pieces were even recovered at Beirut airport, ready to be flown out," he said."

To read the full AFP article - *War, the latest visitor to Syria's fabled Palmyra*, click [here](#). Details of the damage to the site are in the section Updates on Damage.

- The Department of Antiquities in Palmyra has received another set of looted tomb reliefs, in addition to the 9 reliefs already returned this month. Four more limestone funerary sculptures have been returned, probably dating to the 2nd or 3rd century BC, and taken from the tombs around the site. To read the full DGAM article (in arabic), click [here](#).

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

Shrine at Tell Taban Attacked

- According to information received by the DGAM, the shrine on the top of Tell Taban has been attacked. Whether this was conducted by the looters at the site, or others, is unknown. Read the DGAM report (in arabic), 16 March 2014, [here](#).

Policy Changes and Updates from Syria

People's Assembly briefed on the damage to the tourism sector and archaeological sites

- "Tourism Minister Bishr Yaziji said because of the ongoing events in the country 98% of tourism in Syria was affected. 371 hotels became out of service, 400 tourist projects stopped and 258 thousand workers in the tourism sector became without job. He estimated the direct and indirect damage at (SYP) 330 billion. Yaziji affirmed that the ministry spared no effort to restore recovery to the sector as soon as possible through implementing

a comprehensive strategy for tourism development. For her part, Minister of Culture Lubana Mushaweh also reviewed the damage caused to the Syrian cultural heritage as a result of terrorist attacks on historical and archeological places in Syria. She stressed that "the ministry has been keen to fortify all archeological museums in Syria and has made continuous coordination with the UNESCO, the Foreign Ministry, the International Interpol, the international Customs and the concerned parties in Lebanon to restore the stolen artifacts to the homeland."

To read the full article (in English) in the Syrian Times (19 March 2014), *Damage Caused by Terrorists to Syrian Tourism Sector and Cultural Heritage Discussed at PA Session*, click [here](#).

- This was also picked up by SANA (20 March 2014), [People's Assembly briefed on damage to the tourism sector and archeological sites](#).

International Activity

News Updates

(Not covered in other sections)

- None

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- Al Jazeera English released a news report on the damage to Syria's heritage on 19 March 2014. The video, *Syria's civil war lays waste to heritage city*, can be seen [here](#) (in English)
 - Picking up on the briefing to the People's Assembly, the British Newspaper The Telegraph ran an article, *Syria three years on:*

what for the future of tourism, on 19 March 2014, which can be read [here](#).

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

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Heritage for Peace
Hotel d'Entitats
Rutlla, 20-22
Girona, catalonia 17002
Spain

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