

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

NEA PSHSS 14 001

Weekly Report 47–48 — July 7, 2015

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Executive Summary

During the reporting period in Syria, ISIL militants in the northern town of Manbij intercepted an individual(s) transporting Palmyrene funerary sculptures removed from tombs at the archaeological site and/or from the collections of the Tadmor Museum. ISIL sentenced this individual to public lashing and deliberately destroyed the sculptures. ISIL later released a video of these acts on social media sites. Media and social media sources variously identified this individual(s) as an antiquities trafficker(s), presumably unaffiliated with ISIL's own antiquities trafficking network, or an activist(s) attempting to save the sculptures. ISIL also released a video showing the mass execution of 25 SARG military personnel in the Palmyra Roman era Theater (probably built in the late 2nd–early 3rd Century CE and partially a modern reconstruction). This execution occurred May 27, 2015 and the video was released on July 4. The use of a well known heritage site as the backdrop for this horrific act has numerous ramifications regarding ISIL's use of heritage in propaganda and future perceptions of this heritage site and its intangible associations.

In western Syria, ASOR CHI sources have reported damage to archaeological sites caused by intense military clashes in the area of Zabadani. In southern Syria, the **DGAM** reports that the **Daraa Museum** suffered minor damage to the interior of the building and the exterior garden courtyard during military combat. The museum collection had been removed prior to the incident.

In Iraq, ASOR CHI received and verified reports of the intentional destruction of the Shrine and Tomb of Imam Ismail south of Kirkuk. The exact date(s) of this destruction and the number of damage incidents are not clear. A 2014 destruction by ISIL has been alleged.

Key Points

- ISIL militants destroyed Palmyrene funerary sculptures in the northern town of Manbij (Aleppo Governorate) and released a video of the act on social media ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15 0105](#)).

This report is based on research conducted by the “Syria Preservation Initiative: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria.” Weekly reports reflect reporting from a variety of sources and may contain unverified material. As such, they should be treated as preliminary and subject to change.

- ISIL released a video of its mass execution of SARG military personnel in the Palmyra Theater (ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15 0104).
- In western Syria, ASOR CHI sources have reported damage to archaeological sites caused by intense military clashes in the area of Zabadani (ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15 0107).
- The DGAM reported the Daraa Museum suffered minor damage during military combat (ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15 0106).
- In Iraq, ASOR CHI received and verified reports of the intentional destruction of the Shrine and Tomb of Imam Ismail south of Kirkuk (ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15 0087).
- Recent satellite imagery reveals damage to two mounds in northern Syria near the border with Turkey in Aleppo Governorate linked to military use and looting (ASOR CHI Incident Reports SHI 15 0108 and 0109).

Heritage Timeline

July 7, 2015

Rudaw published an article titled “**4 killed as ISIS destroys another Mosul church**” ASOR CHI Incident Report IHI 15 0087
<http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/070720151>

July 5, 2015

Al Jazeera published an article titled “**ISIL video shows mass killings in Syria's Palmyra**”
[http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/isil video shows mass k](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/isil-video-shows-mass-k)

<http://www.france24.com/en/20150704-isis-is-group-video-mass-shooting-palmyra>

<http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/07/isis-slaughters-a-soldier-and-executes-25-others-in-the-roman-theater/>

July 3, 2015

The Guardian published an article titled “**Looted in Syria – and sold in London: the British antiques shops dealing in artefacts smuggled by Isis**” (by Rachel Shabi).

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/03/antiquities-looted-by-isis-end-up-in-london-shops>

Reuters published an article titled “**Islamic State looting Syrian, Iraqi sites on industrial scale: UNESCO**” (by Andrew Osborn).

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/02/us-mideast-crisis-unesco-idUSKCN0PC1OU20150702>

SkyNews published an article titled “**IS Looting Ancient Sites On 'Industrial Scale'.**”

<http://news.sky.com/story/1512356/isis-looting-ancient-sites-on-industrial-scale>

International Business Times published an article titled “**Unesco terms Isis's destruction of heritage sites 'cultural cleansing'**” (by Vasudevan Sridharan).

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/unesco-terms-isis-destruction-heritage-sites-cultural-cleansing-1509109>

Al Jazeera published a video about the site of Samarra titled “**UNESCO World Heritage site in Iraq under the threat of destruction**” (narrated by Jane Arraf).

<http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/live-news/2015/7/unesco-world-heritage-site-in-iraq-under-the-threat-of-destruction>

CNN

July

The Guardian published an article titled “**Unesco impotence takes shine off world heritage status**” (by Oliver Wainwright).
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/02/unesco-impotence-world-heritage-status>

BBC posted a video titled “**Civilisation under attack**” (narrated by Dan Cruickshank).
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b0615mxc/dan-cruickshanks-civilisation-under-attack>

July 1, 2015

ASOR and the **Archaeological Institute of America (AIA)** released a statement regarding **HR. 1493** in response to an open letter the organizations received
http://www.asor.org/news/2015/07/HR_1493.html

UNESCO inscribed the World Heritage Site of Hatra to the List of World Heritage in Danger due to damage inflicted to the property by armed groups.
<http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1309>

UNESCO published a press release announcing its collaboration with **UNITAR UNOSAT** to protect cultural heritage using geospatial technologies.
<http://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-and-unitar-unosat-team-protect-cultural-heritage-geo-spatial-technologies-0>

Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO presented a talk titled “Cultural Heritage: Extremism's New Target” at the Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs.
<http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/cultural-heritage-extremisms-new-target>

The New York Times published an article titled “**The Islamic State's Advantage at Historic Sites**” (by Sarah Almukhtar).
<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/29/world/middleeast/isis-historic-sites-control.html>

The Guardian published an article titled “**Unesco to use satellites to monitor ancient sites threatened by Isis**” (by Ewin MacAskill).
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/01/unesco-to-use-satellites-to-monitor-ancient-sites-threaten-by-isis>

APSA posted an update on the state of the **Altounbougha Mosque** in Aleppo, which remains in good condition.
<http://apsa2011.com/apsanew/alep-actual-state-of-the-altounbougha-mosque/>

... posted photographs and a video of damage to the ... Nasr
... mammal Almag ...
<http://apsa2011.com/> ... mboug
... mosque/

30, 2015

The DGAM states that looted community at Palmyra ... that **ISIL militants destroyed the Antonian statue** which was located in the front of the entrance hall of the Museum of Palmyra.
http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=173

June 2015

Illicit Cultural Property published a blog post titled **The lack of options to combat heritage loss in Syria** (by Derek Fincham).
<http://illicitculturalproperty.com/2015/06/02/the-lack-of-options-to-combat-heritage-loss-in-syria/>

The Financial Times published an article titled **How antiquities are funding terrorism** (by Andrea Burnes).
<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/fbecb8a2-09df-11e5-a6a8-00144feabdc0.html>

June 2015

Bloomberg published an article titled **Islamic State is Selling Looted Art Online for Needed Cash** (by Sangwon Yoon).
<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-06-28/isis-has-new-cash-cow-art-loot-it-s-peddling-on-ebay-facebook>

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June 25, 2015

Metro News published an article titled "**Toronto man defies ISIS, using neo Assyrian tablets.**"

<http://metronews.ca/news/canada/1408981/toronto-man-takes-on-isis-using-neo-assyrian-tablets/>

June 24, 2015

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Le Figaro published an article titled “**Michel al Maqdisi: ‘Daech veut anéantir l’identité syrienne’**” (by Alicia Paulet and Sophie Vincelot).

http://www.lefigaro.fr/culture/2015/06/22/03004_20150622ARTFIG00252_michel_al_maqdisi_daech_veut_aeantir_l_identite_syrienne.php

USA Today published an article titled “**Rebels, Syrian government work together to protect antiquities**” (by Riham Kusa).

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/06/22/syria-archaeology/28977009/>

June 21, 2015

Conflict Antiquities published a blog post titled “**Is it plausible that this is the Islamic State’s plan to blow up the Temple of Bel?**” (by Sam Hardy).

<https://conflictantiquities.wordpress.com/2015/06/21/syria-palmyra-islamic-state-destruction-plan-temple-of-bel/>

Military and Political Context

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

1. Kobani, Aleppo Governorate

On Thursday, June 25, ISIL carried out two offensives in the town of Kobani on the Turkish border. Reports said that ISIL set off a truck bomb, engaged in clashes with local Kurdish forces, killed and took citizens hostage, and set off multiple suicide bombs. The death toll is unclear, but all sides — ISIL and civilians along with Kurdish fighters — suffered substantial losses.² One of the targets of the attack appeared to be the leader, Abu Issa, of the main Syrian rebel battalion fighting alongside the Kurds, Thuwar al Raqqa or Raqqa Revolutionaries.³

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Violence extended into Friday, June 26 as ISIL fighters continued to infiltrate Kobani and kill citizens. Early reports indicated that over one hundred residents were killed. If this death toll is confirmed, the attack would be one of the largest mass killings by jihadists in Syria since ISIL started claiming territory in the country.⁵ On Saturday, June 27, Kurdish forces reportedly cleared Kobani and residents began to return from Turkey.⁶

2. Aleppo Governorate

Late on Thursday, July 2, two insurgent coalitions launched an offensive on government held areas in the city of Aleppo that lasted into Friday. Fighting took place on the ground and in the form of airstrikes; many civilians have been killed in addition to fighters. Turkey sent reinforcements to its borders in case fighting seeped across the border.⁷

As part of the Aleppo offensive, the al Qaeda affiliated al Nusra Front and its close ally Ahrar al Sham formed a new coalition called Ansar al Sharia with the aim of the "liberation of Aleppo and its countryside" and eventually ruling the city in a "joint covenant...according to the rules of Sharia."⁸

3. Raqqa Area, Raqqa Governorate

On Tuesday, June 23, Kurdish YPG fighters, backed by Syrian rebel fighters and U.S. coalition led airstrikes, captured the town of Ain Issa, just 30 miles/ 50 kilometers north of ISIL's headquarters in Raqqa. This advance comes after the YPG captured Tel Abyad last week.⁹

On Wednesday, June 24, the Kurds said that ISIL had dug trenches around the city of Raqqa. Other reports alleged increased vehicle convoys were headed into the city and key supply routes were being cut.¹⁰

On Saturday, July 4 and Sunday, July 5, the U.S. led coalition launched a series of intensive airstrikes on the city of Raqqa, killing a number of ISIL militants and wounding others.¹¹

4. Hasakah, Hasakah Governorate

The United Nations stated that clashes in Hasakah have displaced around 60,000 people, and warned that as many as 200,000 may eventually flee.¹²

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/27/world/middleeast/mass-killings-by-isis-fighters-in-syrian-kurdish>

5 as 200,000

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On Saturday, July 4, Syrian government forces and their allies from the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah began an offensive against insurgents in Zabadani, Lebanon. The attack was seen as part of an ongoing effort for the Syrian government to maintain control of the Damascus Beirut highway.²²

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

1. Baghdad Area, Baghdad Governorate

On Saturday, June 27, a bomb exploded near a crowded market in the Obeidi District of eastern Baghdad; a second bomb exploded in the Doura district of southern Baghdad;²³ a third bomb exploded in the western neighborhood of Baiyaa, all resulting in a number of casualties.²⁴

On Monday, June 29, drive by shooters killed a pro government Sunni tribal sheikh along with his three guards in Tarmiyah, 50 kilometers/30 miles north of Baghdad. A number of citizens were wounded the same day in a bomb explosion in Baghdad's western Ghazaliyah neighborhood.²⁵

2. Baghdad Governorate

On Sunday, July 5, a number of people were killed by a bomb in the mainly Shiite district of Shulaa, and additional people were killed by a bomb in Hussainiya. ISIL was the presumed aggressor.²⁶

On Monday, July 6, an Iraqi fighter jet accidentally dropped a bomb over the eastern neighborhood of New Baghdad. Numerous people were killed and many injured. Additional attacks in Arab Jabour, Abu Ghraib, and Ghazaliyah neighborhoods killed and injured more civilians.²⁷

3. Al Anbar Governorate

ISIL spokesman Abu Mohammed al Adnani called for those still fighting against ISIL in the Anbar Governorate to put down their weapons on Tuesday, June 23. He singled out the Jughhaifa tribe in the town of Haditha.²⁸

On Thursday, June 25, ISIL fighters launched an assault on Iraqi army forces that were guarding the Nathim al Taqsim Dam, northeast of Fallujah. The Iraqi army then chased the ISIL fighters, and later in the day a suicide car bomb and another attack by a gunmen occurred in the region.²⁹

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/05/world/middleeast/syria-forces-and-hezbollah-attack-insurgents-near-lebanon.html>

²³ <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKBNOP70HG20150627>

²⁴ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB11871130314313103897904581073871078323898>;

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2015/0627/Baghdad-bomb-blasts-targeting-public-places-kill-12-people>

²⁵ AP, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iraq-attacks-inside-baghdad-kill-people-32097977>

²⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/05/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-idUSKCNOPFOEA20150705>;

<http://www.newshour.com.bd/2015/07/05/islamic-state-suicide-bombers-strike-in-iraqi-refinery-town/>
<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/945fcb468c244c73926b730c45d143fc/iraqi-fighter-jet-drops-bomb-over-baghdad-kills-9-people>

²⁸ AFP, <http://news.yahoo.com/calls-jihad-martyrdom-during-ramadan-192227321.html>

²⁹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/iraq-hit-deadly-attacks-150625125805023.html>

On Saturday, June 27, Prime Minister Haider al Abadi stated that Iraqi forces made an "unauthorized" withdrawal from Ramadi last month, which led to ISIL's takeover of the city. He maintains that the orders were for Iraqi forces to resist ISIL.³⁰

Early on Sunday, July 5, the Iraqi Army's Anbar Operations Command launched air strikes in Ramadi, killing and injuring numerous people thought to be involved with ISIL while they were playing soccer.³¹

On Sunday, July 5, Iraqi government forces shelled areas in northern Fallujah, killing a number of people, including citizens. That afternoon, ISIL launched an attack against an Iraqi Quick Reaction Force that was protecting the Nathim Il

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Incident Reports: Syria

SHI 15 0104

Report Date: July 5, 2015

Site Name: UNESCO World Heritage Site of Palmyra

Date of Incident: May 27, 2015

Location: Roman theater at the archaeological site of Palmyra, Tadmor, Homs Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Roman amphitheater (See [CHI Incident Report SHI 15 0096](#) for additional details for all of ancient Palmyra).

Site Date: Roman

Source of Destruction: Militarization — used as a site for mass executions

Pattern: On May 27, 2015 the Syrian Organization for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that ISIL militants executed “Rawafed and Nusayriya (Sunni and Alawite) regime forces and allied militiamen” in the Roman amphitheater of the World Heritage Site of Palmyra.³⁷ These executions took place shortly after ISIL militants captured the town of Tadmor on May 21, 2015.

On July 4, 2015 ISIL social media accounts posted a video showing a man in military uniforms being executed in the Roman amphitheater at the archaeological site of Palmyra. The public execution was conducted by young boys in front of an ISIL flag before a crowd of civilian men and children, some of whom appear upset and some are crying.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHS issued a critical alert to the condition of all al Z f Ž Ž , f ‡ ap E ‡ ... - < •

VICE News:

<http://news.vice.com/article/islamic-state-releases-gruesome-video-showing-mass-execution-of-syrian-soldiers-in-palmyra>

VOA News:

<http://www.voanews.com/content/islamic-state-video-shows-mass-execution-palmyra/2848998.html>

France 24: <http://www.france24.com/en/20150704-isis-is-group-video-mass-shooting-palmyra>

Syrian

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ISIL militants driving near the archaeological site of Palmyra (Video still; July 4, 2014)³⁸

³⁸ Out of respect for the victims and their families, ASOR CHI will not reproduce images of the execution.

SHI 15 0105

Report Date: July 5, 2015

Site Name: Palmyrene objects removed from Palmyra

Date of Incident: July 2, 2015

Location: Manbij, Aleppo Governorate, Syria

Site Description: —

Site Date: Statues appear Palmyrene in style

Source of Destruction: Intentional performative destruction.

Pattern: On July 2, 2015 ISIL social media accounts released photographs depicting militants destroying funerary busts from the archaeological site of Palmyra. ISIL militants are shown displaying the statues to a crowd gathered in the central town square and then breaking the statues el ch mc a.

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

Sources:

Online Reporting:

NYTimes:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/04/world/middleeast/isis-destroys-artifacts-palmyra-syria-iraq.html>

CNN: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/07/02/world/isis-syrian-artifacts/index.html>

UNESCO:

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/irina-bokova-condemns-latest-destruction-of-cultural-property-from-the-site-of-palmyra-in-syria>

Telegraph:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11714448/Islamic-State-takes-sledge-hammer-to-irreplaceable-ancient-Palmyra-ruins.html>

BBC: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33369701>

USA Today:

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/07/03/islamic-state-palmyra/29661517/>

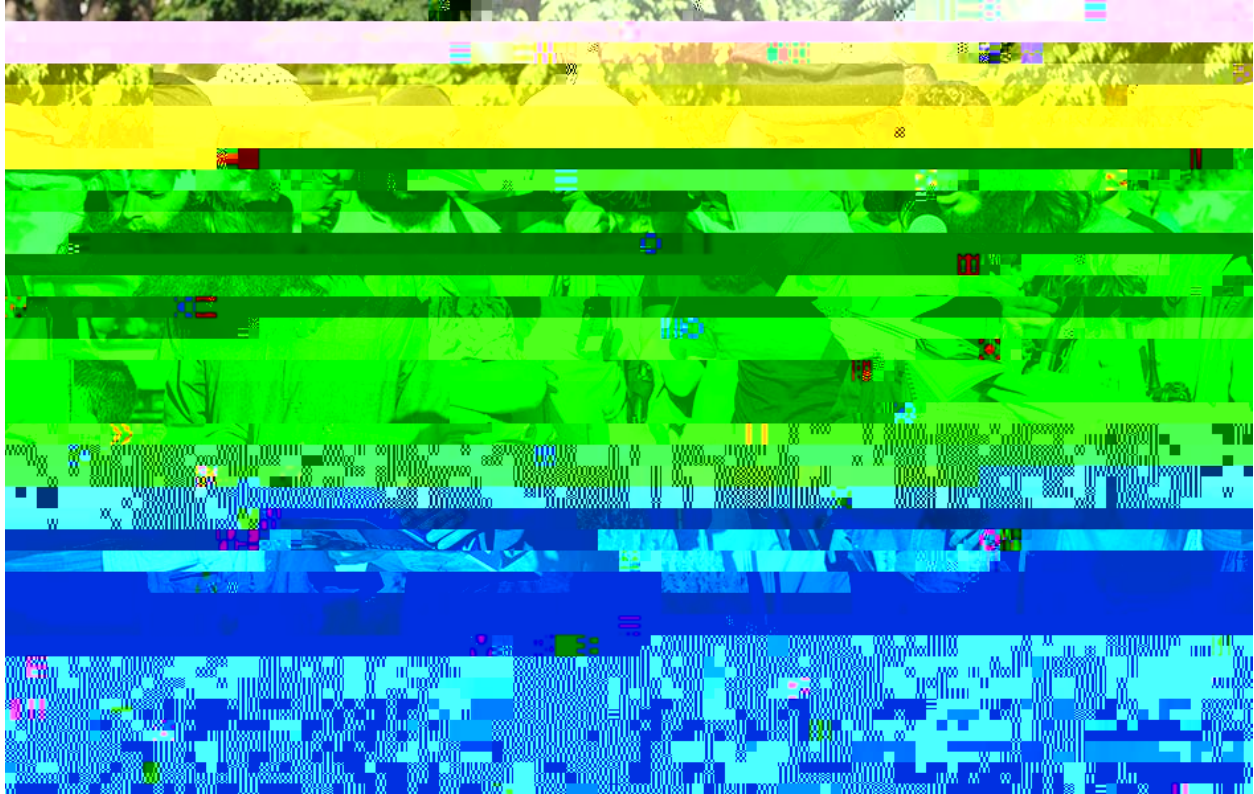
Halab News: <http://halabnews.net/news/67827>

Channel 4 News: <http://www.channel4.com/news/palmyra-statues-destroyed-by-isis-militants>

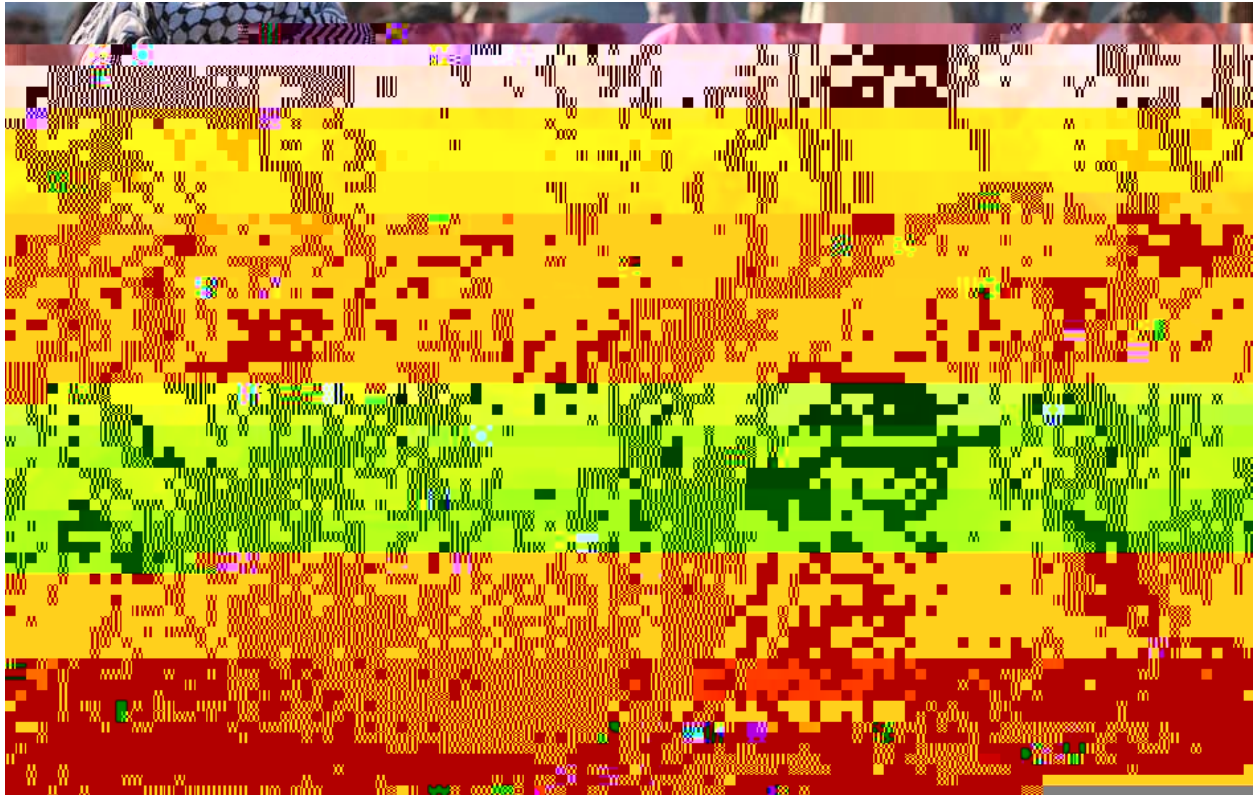
Alwafd: http://alwafd.org/_____i_____874392/_ç_

The Guardian:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/02/isis-militants-destroy-palmyra-stone-lion-al-lat>



ISIL militants passing judgement (APSA; July 3, 2015)



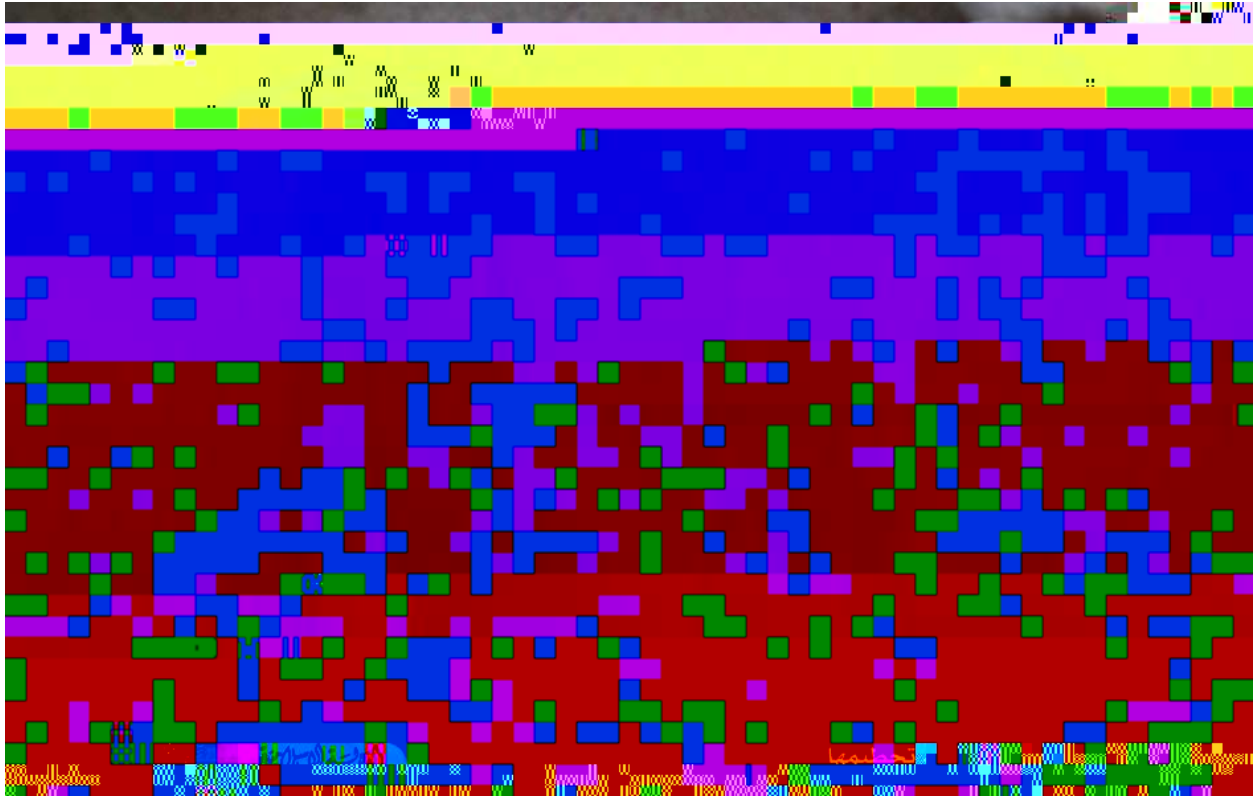
ISIL militants flogging “smuggler” (APSA; July 3, 2015)



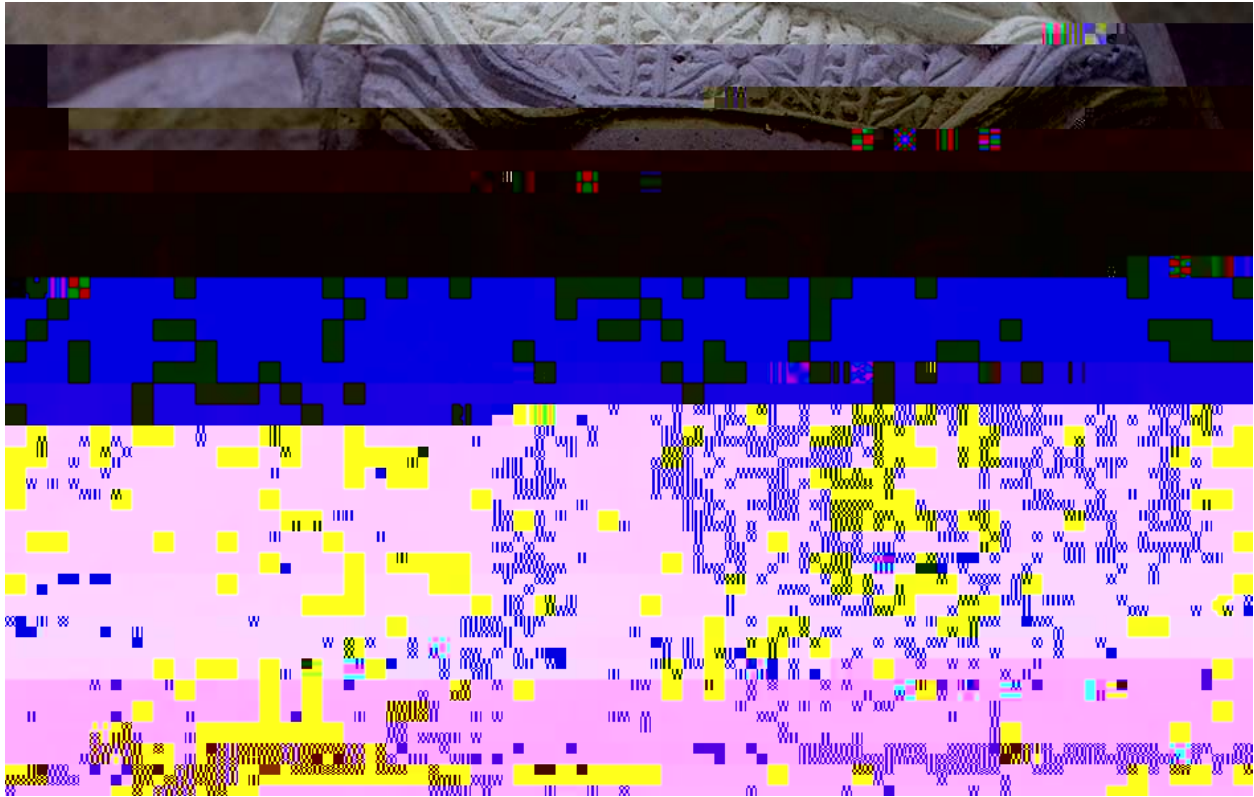
Palmyrene statuary destroyed by ISIL militants (APSA; July 3, 2015)



Palmyrene statuary destroyed by ISIL militants (APSA; July 3, 2015)



Palmyrene statuary destroyed by ISIL militants (APSA; July 3, 2015)



Palmyrene statuary destroyed by ISIL militants (APSA; July 3, 2015)



Palmyrene statuary destroyed by ISIL militants (APSA; July 3, 2015)

SHI 15 0106

Report Date: July 5, 2015

Site Name: Daraa National Museum

Date of Incident: July 3, 2015

Location: Daraa, Daraa Governorate, Syria

Site Description: Regional museum that houses archaeological finds from the area; regional headquarters for the DGAM were also located in this facility.

Site Date: —

Source of Destruction: Combat related damage.

Pattern: On July 3, 2015 the Directorate General of Museums and Antiquities stated that the museum suffered non structural damage to the building and garden due to nearby military operations. Windows and doors in the museum were blown out and cracks appeared in walls, and the pool on the garden grounds was damaged. The Daraa antiquities department was able reach the museum and temporarily close the damaged areas. The DGAM reported that the museum's collection had been recently relocated prior to the damage, and exhibit cases appear empty in photographs following the incident. Large stone artifacts (i.e. dark basalt sarcophagi and fragments of column capitals) do appear present in the background of images of the museum's garden.

Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures: ASOR CHI is monitoring the condition of the Daraa Museum, given its significance as a cultural repository.

Sources:

Online Reporting

DGAM:



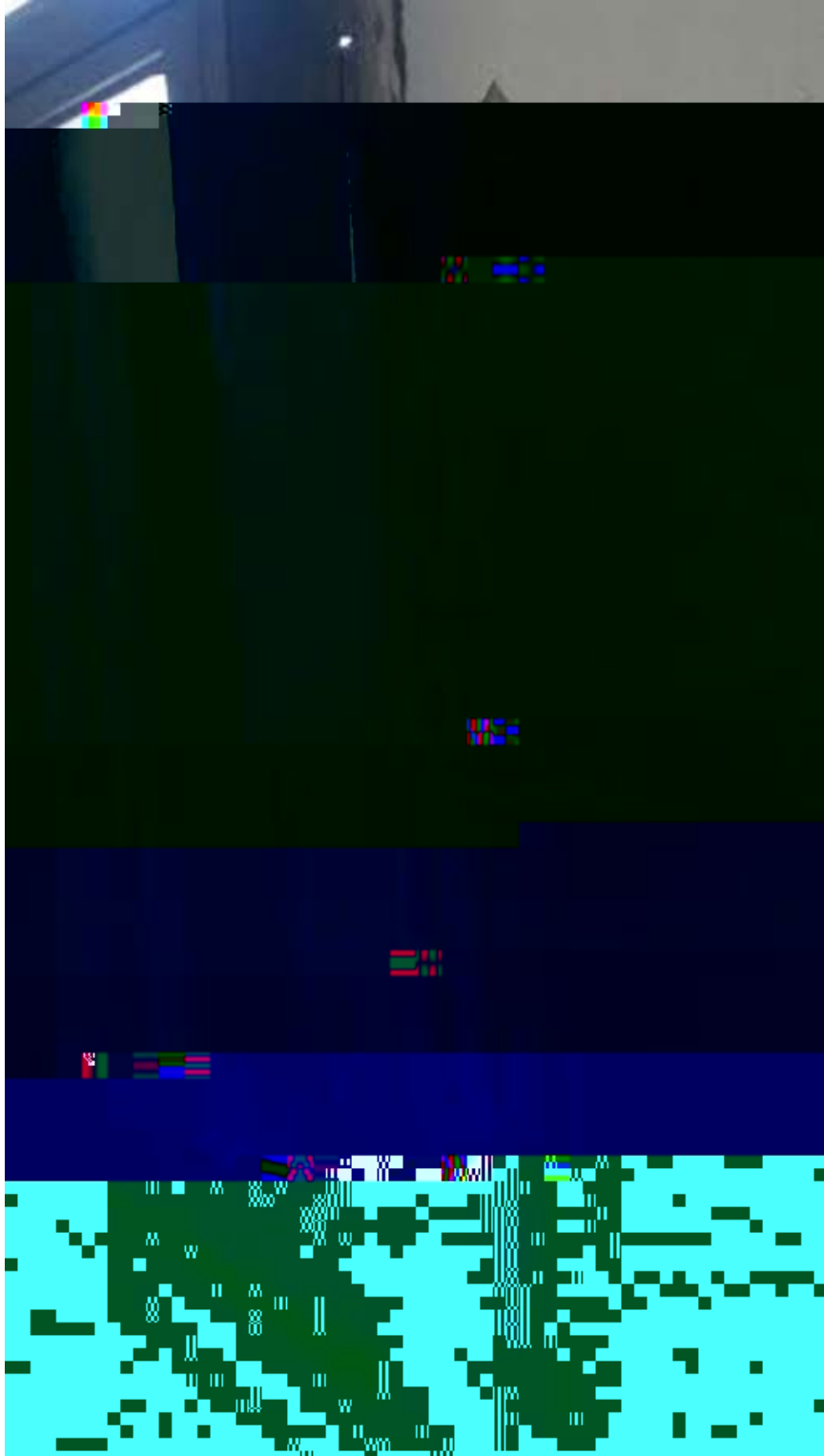
Museum of Daraa, interior damage (DGAM; July 3, 2015)



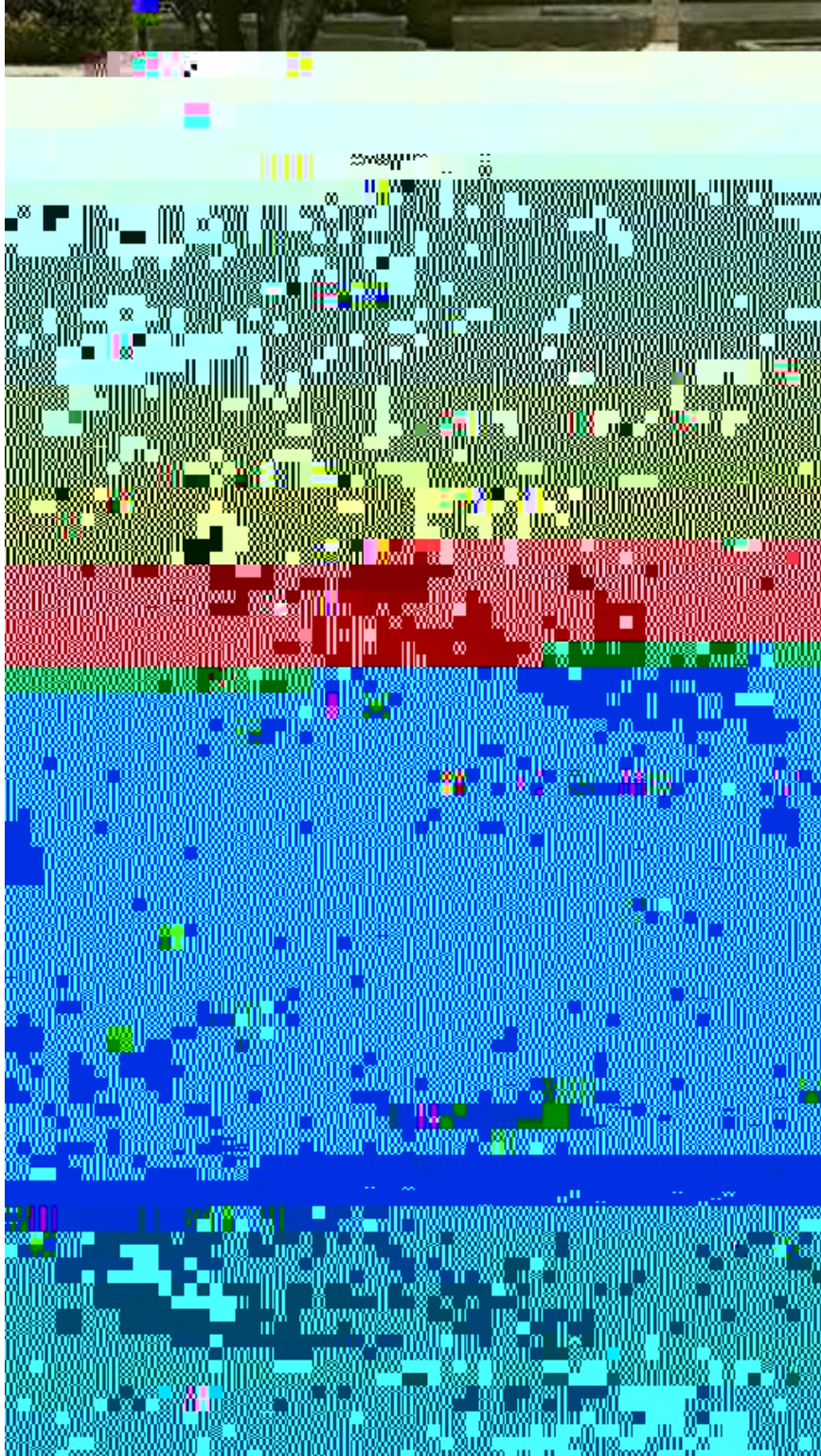
Museum of Daraa, interior damage (DGAM; July 3, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, interior damage (DGAM; July 3, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, interior damage (DGAM; July 3, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, exterior damage (DGAM; July 3, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, exterior damage (DGAM; July 3, 2015)



Museum of Daraa, exterior damage (DGAM; July 3, 2015)

Sources:

Online Reporting:

Al Masdar News:

<http://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-armed-forces-and-hezbollah-suffocate-al-qaeda-in-al-zabadani/>



DigitalGlobe image of Qal'at al Tall (Citadel al Koukou) (DigitalGlobe; July 5, 2015).

SHI 15 0108

Report Date: July 1, 2015

Site Name: Ger Senli

Date of Incident: Mechanized earthmover damage first appears on the southwest corner of this mound in a DigitalGlobe image dated June 28, 2015. The damage occurred so



Ger Senli, showing damage to the mound's southwest quadrant (DigitalGlobe; June 28, 2015).

SHI 15 0109

Report Date: July 1, 2015

Site Name: Archaeological complex — Names Unknown

Date of Incident: Since November 2014

Location: Immediately south of the Turkey Syria border in Aleppo Governorate northwest of the modern village of Al Haluwaniyeh.

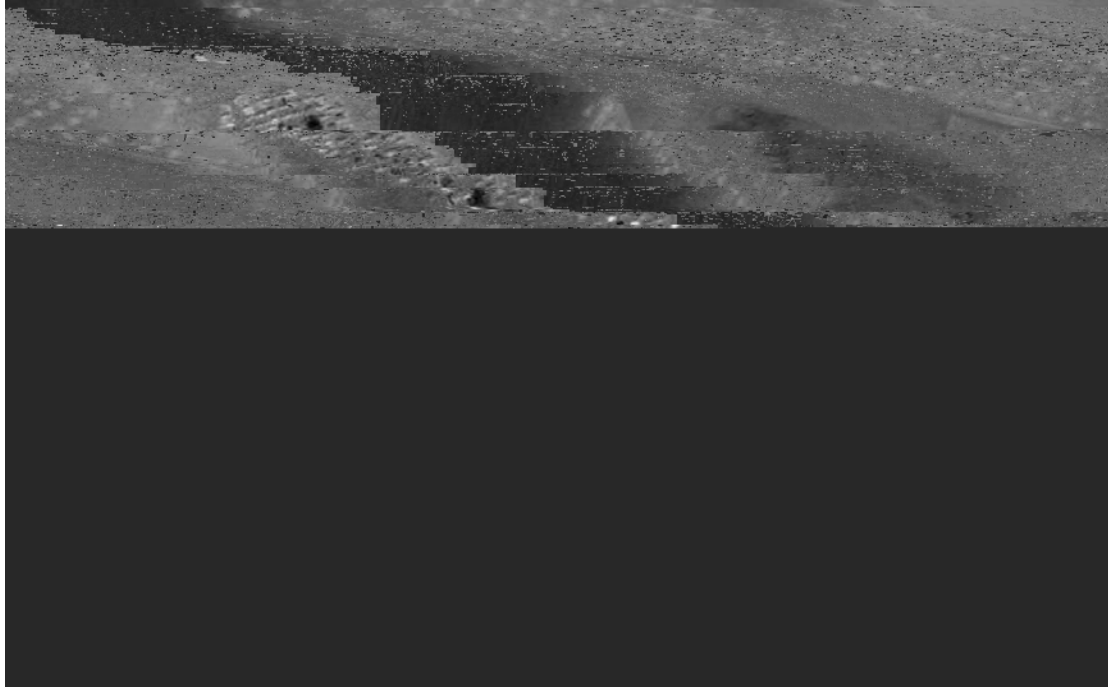
Site Description: Medium sized high mound in the west with surrounding lower tell (especially to the east) and a low mounded area to the east possibly covered by a modern cemetery,

Site Date: Unknown

Source of Destruction: Trenching road and berm construction, and flattening of the top of the western high mound and the low mound starting on or after November 2014. Small pits are visible on the western high mound. Pre conflict damage is also discernible. Archaeological deposits removed from the western high mound have been dumped at the southwest slope of the lower

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Unnamed mound including high tell and low surrounding mounds near modern Al Haluwaniyeh to the east, looting activity is visible on the northwest lower slope of the high mound (DigitalGlobe; July 18, 2010).



Unnamed mound including high tell and low surrounding mounds near modern Al Haluwaniyeh, looting activity is visible on the northwest lower slope of the high mound (DigitalGlobe; September 6, 2014).



Unnamed mound (high tell in the west, surrounding low mound, and a low mounded area in the east) near modern Al Haluwaniyeh, the summit of the high mound has been levelled and a protected road and trench lead up to this area from the village in the east and earthmoving activities and trenching are visible on the southwestern low mound – this disturhe –

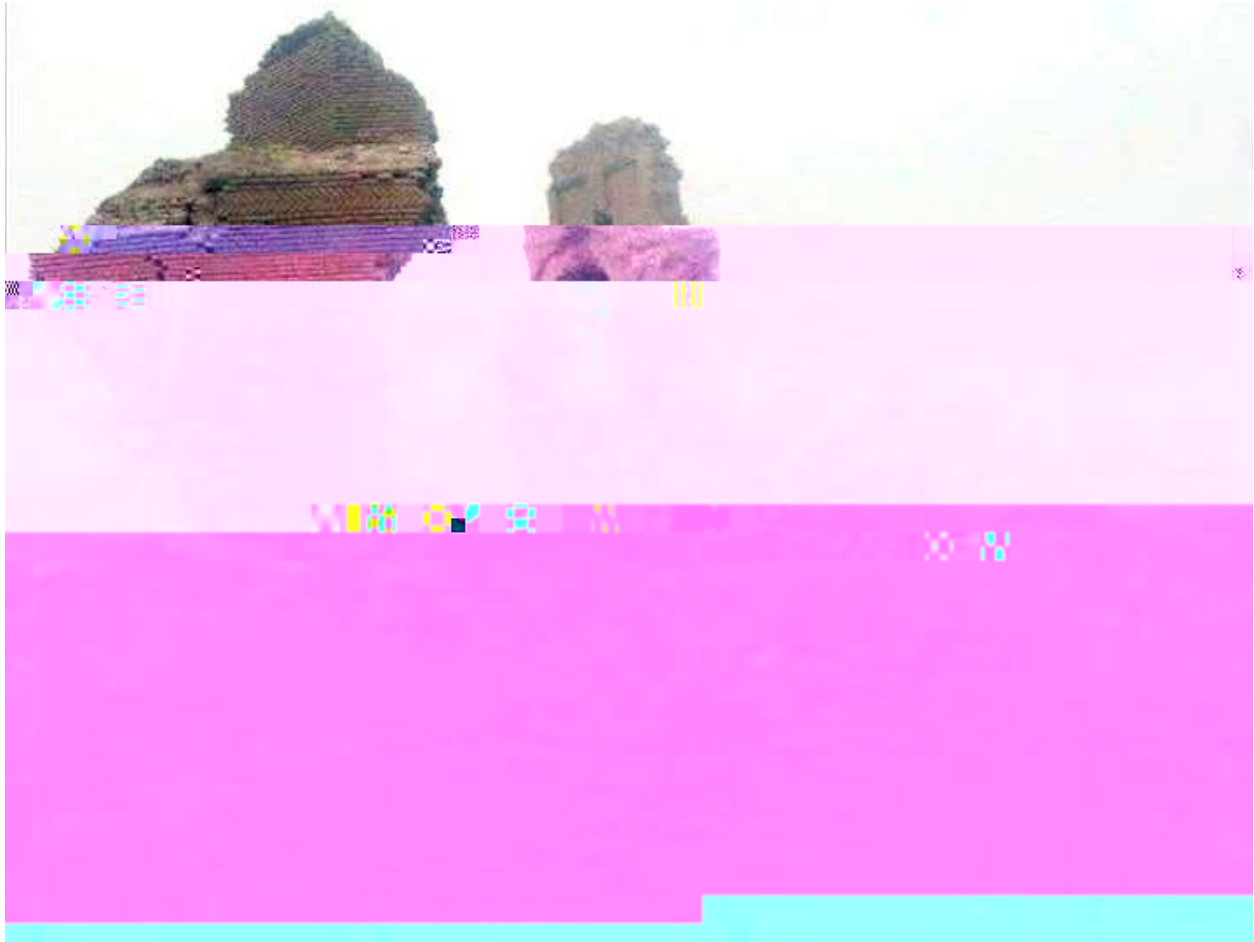
Incident Reports: Iraq

IHI 15 0087

Report Date: July 5, 2015

Site Name: The Tomb of

New York Times:



The Tomb and Shrine of Imam Ismail after destruction (Anonymous source; Date unknown)