

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

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Executive Summary

During the reporting period, violence continued in Rif Dimashq Governorate as SARG and pro-regime forces wrested control of Eastern Ghouta from Syrian opposition forces, including Islamist opposition groups. A chemical weapons attack in the city of Duma in early April, attributed to the Syrian regime, killed at least 35 people and injured hundreds more.² In response, US, UK, and French airstrikes targeted a scientific research facility in Damascus, a chemical weapons storage facility west of the city of Homs, and a chemical weapons equipment storage site and command post near Homs.³ Duma was also the site of sarin chemical attacks that killed hundreds of civilians in 2013. The long-term impact and deterrence factor of recent airstrikes against the Assad regime remains unclear, and the use of “conventional” weapons by the regime and its allies continues to have a horrific effect on civilian populations, critical infrastructure, and cultural resources. With indiscriminate airstrikes ongoing, Syrian civilians are likely to experience little relief.⁴ Although members of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have gained access to Duma, they had yet to conduct a thorough investigation of the chemical weapons attack site at the close of the reporting period.

The airstrikes on Duma occurred as Syrian opposition forces prepared to evacuate, after agreeing to a Russia-brokered ceasefire and evacuation deal with the Syrian regime. The capture of Duma, the largest city in Eastern Ghouta, brings the Assad regime close to securing the entirety of Rif Dimashq Governorate, as well as the areas surrounding the capital of Damascus. Duma and other towns in

¹ This report is based on research conducted by the “Cultural Preservation Initiative: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq.” Weekly reports reflect reporting from a variety of sources and may contain unverified material. As such, they should be treated as preliminary and subject to change.

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/11/world/middleeast/syria-chemical-attack-douma.html> ; <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2018/04/11/open-source-survey-alleged-chemical-attacks-douma-7th-april-2018/>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-explosions/explosions-rock-damascus-reuters-witness-idUSKBN1HL02U> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-43762251> ; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/04/14/the-u-s-just-bombed-3-sites-in-syria-heres-what-we-know-about-why-states-choose-airstrikes/>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/15/world/middleeast/syria-us-airstrike.html>

Eastern Ghouta were among the first to protest against the Assad regime in 2011. The area had been under siege since early 2013, when Syrian opposition forces forced SARG forces from the Damascus suburbs.⁵

Following the recapture of Eastern Ghouta by the Syrian regime, SARG forces began targeting areas south of Damascus that remain under the control of ISIS. Heavy aerial bombardment by Syrian and Russian forces has been reported. On April 20, ISIS fighters reportedly agreed to evacuate their areas of control, including the Palestinian Yarmouk refugee camp.⁶ As the reporting period ended, fighting was ongoing in Yarmouk, as well as in the district of Hajar al-Aswad, south of Damascus.⁷

The Wall Street Journal published an article focusing on the rise of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Idlib Governorate. According to the article, thousands of HTS fighters have reportedly “dug in around Idlib,” while military operations continue around Syria. In February 2018, HTS successfully forced out the remaining ISIS pockets from Idlib Governorate, and seized more villages in both Idlib and Aleppo Governorates. Idlib Governorate is also the relocation site of many Syrian opposition forces (including Islamist forces) and civilians, as territories around Aleppo and Rif Dimashq have fallen to the Syrian regime. In April 2018, HTS fought SARG and pro-regime elements in Homs, Hama, and Aleppo Governorates. HTS has formed a system of government that it now tries to use in controlling administrative sectors. HTS has also formed a religious police force that has started implementing strict rules, including the banning of smoking—reminiscent of ISIS policies in Syria and Iraq. US officials have expressed concern about the rise of groups such as HTS, which may replace ISIS in Syria.⁸

Displacement of civilians continues in Syria, with thousands relocated to opposition-held Idlib Governorate. UN officials have repeatedly raised concerns regarding any future military operations in Idlib, due to the presence of IDPs.⁹ The Syrian regime has vowed to recapture the territory. Airstrikes have continued over Idlib Governorate since the start of 2018, resulting in damage to vital infrastructure, cultural heritage sites, and a rise in civilian casualties.

In Deir ez Zor Governorate, ISIS militants have taken advantage of US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces leaving formerly-held ISIS territory in the governorate in order to support operations by the YPG against Turkey and the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army by further entrenching themselves in the area. In response, US officials have changed tactics to observing ISIS targets and carrying out airstrikes only when the risk of civilian casualties is low.¹⁰ Aerial bombardment by the US-led Coalition has declined significantly in the governorate since the February 2018 operation launched by Turkey that resulted in the capture of YPG territory in Aleppo Governorate by Turkish and FSA forces. ISIS remains concentrated in two main areas in Deir ez Zor Governorate, namely the town of Hajin along the Euphrates River and Dashisha near the Syria-Iraq border, from which ISIS continues to plan surprise attacks in the country.

⁵ <http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-syria-ghouta-2018-story.html>

⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria/insurgents-south-of-syrian-capital-surrender-says-state-tv-idUSKBN1HR00B>

⁷ <https://www.irinnews.org/news/2018/04/23/civilians-trapped-yarmouk-face-unimaginable-end-siege>

⁸ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-islamic-state-fades-in-syria-another-militant-group-takes-root-1524064045>

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/25/top-un-officials-voice-fears-of-new-aleppo-in-syrias-idlib-province>

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/24/world/middleeast/american-warplanes-isis-syria.html#click=https://t.co/dMFZnpZEnf>

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported ongoing instability in the area of Afrin in Aleppo Governorate following its seizure by Turkish and FSA forces, including ongoing looting and property seizure. The SOHR also noted the arrival of 700 displaced Syrian families from areas of Eastern Ghouta.¹¹ Turkey's next steps in Syria remain unclear, though Turkish officials have threatened to continue from Afrin to Manbij.

Rebuilding efforts continue in Raqqa, but at a pace frustrating to former Raqqa residents. An estimated 100,000 residents have returned to the city despite poor infrastructure and devastating destruction. Civilians have also arrived from other provinces in Syria looking for work. According to some residents, there are fears that ISIS members remain in their midst. Criminal gangs have also targeted newly arrived residents, kidnapping at least one for ransom.¹²

During the reporting period, the EU police agency Europol conducted an international operation targeting ISIS internet propaganda. The operation retrieved data that Europol says might identify the "administrators behind [ISIS] media outlets," as well as potentially radicalized individuals.¹³ Several social media platforms, including Telegram and Whatsapp, have been used by ISIS members to sell illicit antiquities from areas under ISIS control. Any such disruption to ISIS' online presence may be successful in interrupting the group's revenue channels.

At the end of the reporting period, unidentified missiles struck a Syrian military base near the city of Hama, killing 16 people including Iranian forces.¹⁴ Israel was almost immediately suspected as the actor behind the strike. Israel has carried out dozens of airstrikes in Syria over the last few years, reportedly to counter the growing Iranian influence in the country.

The ASOR CHI reporting team continues to follow rebuilding efforts in eastern Aleppo, including the Ancient City of Aleppo, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This area was heavily damaged during the Syrian conflict. The area experienced a sharp uptick in destruction during intense SARG, pro-regime, and Russian military campaigns that culminated in the recapturing the old city of Aleppo in December 2016. Local residents have shared hundreds of photographs over the last year illustrating both large-scale damage and small-scale reconstruction efforts in historic neighborhoods. Former merchants of Aleppo's souk, for example, have returned and begun clearing out debris, rescuing old stone, and using their skills as craftsmen to rebuild their shops.¹⁵ UNESCO has stated that the old city can be rebuilt, citing "detailed plans" from previous restorations that could now be reused.¹⁶ However, the cost of rebuilding will likely be in the hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars. Any money sent by the international community will face ethical concerns, as it will require engagement with the Syrian regime.¹⁷

There are other major concerns related to rebuilding efforts in Aleppo. First, who or what entity will be tasked with rebuilding? Researchers and experts warn that the rebuilding of cities can be

¹¹ <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=90320>

¹² <https://apnews.com/fc9da57f2c15465abab7a40f868e7bdf>

¹³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43921120> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-43738953>

¹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/30/world/middleeast/strikes-syria-iran-israel.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-aleppo-revival-20180205-story.html> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42755045>

¹⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-aleppo-antiquities/aleppos-old-city-can-be-rebuilt-unesco-official-says-idUSKBN1AJ1V0>

¹⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/03/world/middleeast/syria-war-rebuilding-homs.html>

used as a way to consolidate power. Rebuilding and the restoring of services can also be used to reward supporters of the regime and punish those accused of supporting opposition forces during the battle to recapture Aleppo.¹⁸ These actions will become apparent based on areas selected for rebuilding and service restoration. Funding for reconstruction also opens the way to international influence. For example, a charitable foundation run by Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov is currently funding the rebuilding of the Umayyad Mosque in the Old City of Aleppo, as well as an additional historic mosque in the Old City of Homs.¹⁹ Iranian and Lebanese companies have also reportedly offered rebuilding plans.

In addition, the vast majority of residents of eastern Aleppo have yet to return and the question remains whether they will ever be able to without fear of persecution from the Syrian regime. Some returning residents have discovered their property has been seized, at times by foreign pro-regime forces that have remained in the city following military operations. Keeping former residents from their homes also allows the Syrian regime to change the demographics of strategic towns and cities in Syria. Similar issues related to rebuilding are likely to arise in areas recaptured by the Syrian regime, including the recently recaptured areas surrounding Damascus.²⁰

Finally, there does not appear to be any official rebuilding plan for eastern Aleppo. Organizations such as the Aleppo Project have used crowdsourcing methods, interviewing both residents of Aleppo and reconstruction experts, to discuss future rebuilding in Aleppo. However, the extent to which heritage and reconstruction experts are providing advisement for this World Heritage Site remains unclear.

Iraq

During the month of April, events involving cultural heritage in Iraq centered on the preservation and reconstruction of cultural property in areas recaptured from ISIS. On April 4, *The New York Times* published an article detailing how ISIS administered portions of northern Iraq after it seized the area from the Iraqi government in 2014.²¹ This reporting was based on more than 15,000 internal ISIS documents gathered by Rukmini Callimachi predominantly from ISIS administrative buildings in recently recaptured areas. Iraqi security forces that accompanied Callimachi and her associates near the front lines reportedly gave permission to remove the documents.

Following the publication of this report, a debate began over the ethics and legality of the removal and publication of the documents by Callimachi and *The New York Times*. Some argued that the removal of the documents from Iraq represented an act of plunder of Iraq's cultural heritage.²² *The New York Times* has stated that it is "working to make the trove of ISIS documents publicly available to researchers, scholars, Iraqi officials and anyone else looking to better understand the Islamic State." Others have called for the immediate return of the archive to the Iraqi authorities.²³

¹⁸ <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/community/2018/04/11/expert-views-beyond-a-top-down-approach-to-aleppos-reconstruction>

¹⁹ <https://abcnews.go.com/amp/International/wireStory/chechnya-major-player-rebuilding-war-torn-syria-48700084>

²⁰ <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2018/04/06/after-decree-66-some-residents-fear-reconstruction-means-eviction> ; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/26/10m-syrians-at-risk-of-forfeiting-homes-under-new-property-law>

²¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/04/world/middleeast/isis-documents-mosul-iraq.html>

²² <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/nyt-partook-plunder-iraq-180424100839509.html>

²³ <https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2018/05/02/acquisition-and-unethical->

Debates concerning control over access to cultural heritage also occurred within Iraq. On April 2, the Gilgamesh Center for Antiquities and Heritage Protection announced the discovery of a new carved stone lamassu sculpture in a tunnel beneath the remains of the Nebi Yunus Mosque.²⁴ ISIS had previously dug a series of tunnels in this area in search of antiquities, exposing similar stone sculptures and reliefs.²⁵ The announcement of the discovery surprised the local archaeological community, which was unaware that any official permission had been given for work at the site. Some archaeologists challenged the legality of the excavation and the publicizing of the findings on the basis of Antiquities and Heritage Law no. 55 from 2002.²⁶

The Iraqi government strengthened cultural partnerships with other nations and multinational organizations during the reporting period. On April 23, Iraq, UNESCO, and the United Arab Emirates announced a 50.4 million dollar partnership to stabilize and reconstruct al-Nouri Mosque and al-Hadba Minaret in Mosul.²⁷ This activity is a major component of the larger “Revive the Spirit of Mosul” project, which was announced by UNESCO in February. On April 17, Faryad Rawanduzi, the Iraqi Minister of Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities, met with Abbas Salehi, his Iranian counterpart, to discuss cultural ties between the two countries.²⁸ The ministers discussed cooperation between their countries on the preservation of monuments damaged during the past two decades.

Throughout the reporting period, ISIS continued its attacks on military forces and civilians. On April 12, insurgents detonated explosives at the entrance of a cemetery during a funeral procession for five PMU members who were killed the previous day.²⁹ In a press release, ISIS spokesman Abu Hassan al-Muhajir called for more attacks on Arab nations and threatened violence against people and places connected to the upcoming Iraqi election on May 12.³⁰ By the end of the month, three candidates had been killed and others had survived assassination attempts.³¹ Individuals connected to the activities of different political parties were also targeted.³² The perpetrators of most of these attacks have not been identified.

Iraqi and US-led Coalition forces continued to conduct counterinsurgency operations, particularly in the countryside south of Kirkuk and in the area west of Mosul. On April 9, Iraqi security forces reported that they had killed Abu Walid al-Shishani, known as the “right hand of al-Baghdadi,” outside of Kirkuk and captured files related to ISIS activities.³³ On April 30, the Combined Joint Task

[use-of-documents-removed-from-iraq-by-rukmini-callimachi](#)

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/1735672493328869/photos/a.2094070954155686.1073741829.1735672493328869/2147660522130062/?type=3>; https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2161730980723016&id=1735672493328869

²⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-antiquities/tunnels-under-ancient-mosul-mosque>

[-show-islamic-states-focus-on-loot-idUSKBN16H1V5](#)

²⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/omar.azawy/posts/1958553610835008> ; <http://www.iraq-lg-law.org/ar/content/قانون-الاثار-والتراث-رقم-55-لسنة-2002-0>

²⁷ <https://en.unesco.org/news/uae-unesco-and-iraq-conclude-historic-50m-partnership-reconstruct-mosul-s-iconic-al-nouri>

²⁸ <https://www.farhang.gov.ir/en/news/339592/Iranian-and-Iraqi-culture-ministers-discussed-expansion-of-cultural-ties>

²⁹ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/attack-funeral-anti-fighters-kills-16-iraq-1544471953>

³⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/22/world/middleeast/isis-arabs-attacks.html>

³¹ <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/86f29537-a571-4e21-ae11-eea0830a30ad>

³² <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/0af38f22-612d-4cf0-b6da-b6cf73c252d2>

³³ <http://iraqnewsapp.com/1/Article/2244/158078490>

Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) announced the deactivation of the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command Headquarters in Baghdad, which signifies the end of major combat operations against ISIS in Iraq.³⁴ CJTF-OIR now has command authority for the ongoing combat operations in Iraq.

Over the course of April, non-governmental organizations called attention to ongoing abuses or questionable practices in Iraq. On April 17, Amnesty International published a report that details the many difficulties faced by women and children with ties to ISIS who now live in refugee camps.³⁵ Due to their past associations, Amnesty reports that these individuals are targeted for collective punishment, including the denial of humanitarian aid or permission to return home. These women are also subjected to high levels of rape and sexual exploitation.

On April 20, Human Rights Watch reported that Iraqi authorities had removed 80–100 bodies from a building in Mosul's Old City without any attempt to document the site for use as evidence in future war-crimes trials.³⁶ The house was in an area reportedly used by Iraqi forces to detain, torture, and kill ISIS suspects during July 2017. A few days after the removal of the bodies on March 29, the house was burned. Human Rights Watch suggested that the entire incident was a possible cover-up of war crimes by Iraqi forces. The organization called on the Iraqi government to make public the results of its investigation into abuses committed during the recapture of Mosul and to cease the removal of bodies from places where a crime may have been committed until a forensic investigation is conducted.

Libya

During the reporting period, unrest continued in Libya, with military operations ongoing in the southern city of Sabha. As security vacuums remain in Libya, looting and antiquities trafficking continue to be concerns. However, Libyan antiquities authorities are working to protect cultural heritage sites, including by halting urban encroachment and addressing offenders. ASOR CHI remains committed to supporting Libyan antiquities authorities as they work to better protect and preserve Libyan heritage.

Spanish authorities who arrested two men in Barcelona at the end of March for trafficking Libyan antiquities had attributed the origin of the recovered sarcophagus and seven mosaics to groups linked to ISIS.³⁷ However, in an interview with *Paris Match*, Morgan Belzic, the French doctoral student who assisted the police in their investigations, appeared to dispute this purported link between the looting of Cyrenaican archaeological sites and financing ISIS.³⁸ Because ISIS does not hold territory between Shahat and Benghazi (the likely geographical provenance of the recovered archaeological material), a direct link between this material and ISIS is difficult to establish.

³⁴ <https://twitter.com/OIRSpox/status/990917481517731840>

³⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/04/iraq-women-children-with-perceived-ties-to-is-denied-aid-sexually-exploited-trapped-in-camps/>

³⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/20/iraq-officials-dispose-potential-war-crime-evidence>

³⁷ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/life-style/art-and-culture/2018/03/28/Antiques-looted-in-Libya-by-ISIS-sold-in-Spain-two-experts-arrested.html>

³⁸ <https://parismatch.be/actualites/132073/exclusif-traffic-dart-demantele-en-espagne-recherches-interview>

On April 10, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar reportedly suffered a stroke, and was flown first to Jordan and then to France for medical treatment.³⁹ He was treated at the Val-de-Grace military hospital in Paris, and returned to Benghazi on April 27, having recovered enough to walk down the steps from a private plane and speak briefly with the assembled crowd.⁴⁰ While in France, little public information was available concerning his health. During this period of uncertainty, speculation about a Libya without Haftar included scenarios in which further violence and political fragmentation would ensue, as well as scenarios for the UN-backed peace process to make headway without further obstruction by Haftar.⁴¹ Given the April 18 assassination attempt on General Abdelrazek al-Nadhuri, Haftar's chief of staff, the former scenario seems more likely.⁴²

During hearings of the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee held on April 18, Frederic Wehrey of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace described reports of Russian special operations forces stationed on the border between Egypt and Libya in order to facilitate weapons deliveries to Haftar's Libyan National Army and, according to Wehrey, to undercut US influence in Libya.⁴³

Nevertheless, diplomatic engagement with Libya continued to make strides this month as Tunisia reopened its consulate in Tripoli.⁴⁴ On April 27, US Charge d'Affaires Stephanie Williams and Libyan Under Secretary for Political Affairs Lutfi al Mughrabi signed a Memorandum of Intent for airport security and a Letter of Agreement to support Libyan policing, corrections, and justice sector development.⁴⁵

Key Points

- The Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums in Syria published a new report about Mari in Deir ez-Zor Governorate. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 17-0224 UPDATE**
- Satellite imagery reveals ongoing damage due to illegal excavations and military occupation at Ebla, Idlib Governorate. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0083**
- Heavy shelling damaged Palestinian Mosque in Damascus, Damascus Governorate. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0087**
- Natural impacts and lack of maintenance caused the collapse of historic buildings in Ghadames, Tripolitania. **ASOR CHI Incident Report LHI 18-0002 UPDATE**
- Ongoing fighting in Sabha damaged the Sabha Castle in Sabha, Fezzan. **ASOR CHI Incident Report LHI 18-0016 UPDATE**
- Thieves allegedly stole bells from the Anglican Church of Christ the King in Tripoli, Tripolitania. **ASOR CHI Incident Report LHI 18-0019**

³⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/11/libyan-military-boss-khalifa-haftar-severely-ill-after-stroke-reports> ; <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/libya-warlord-khalifa-haftar-suffers-stroke>

⁴⁰ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/27/khalifa-haftar-makes-triumphant-return-libya-rumours-death/>

⁴¹ <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2018/4/25/after-haftar-what-next-for-libya> ; <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/can-libya-survive-without-haftar>

⁴² <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/4/18/libya-strongmans-chief-of-staff-survives-assassination-attempt>

⁴³ <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/04/23/isis-al-qaida-regrouping-in-libya-whats-us-strategy-congress-asks/>

⁴⁴ <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/north-africa/2018/04/21/Tunisia-reopens-consulate-in-Libyan-capital-Tripoli.html>

⁴⁵ <https://ly.usembassy.gov/the-united-states-and-libya-sign-several-civilian-security-agreements/>

Report

Syria

Archaeological sites in Syria continue to be at risk from continued instability and lack of protection, including from natural impacts. During the reporting period in Daraa Governorate, the Roman Theater in Bosra was flooded (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0091** on pp. 68-71). Syria has been facing heavier than normal rains and snow in 2018, leading to large floods in the south of the country. ASOR CHI is committed to monitoring damage due to flooding and rising waters. During April, there were reports of illegal excavation at the archaeological site of Cyrrhus in Aleppo Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0090** on pp. 65-67). This site has also been affected by airstrikes and the construction of military installations.

In opposition-held territories of Syria, heritage sites continue to be damaged by ongoing aerial bombardment, military operations, and suspected intentional destruction. In Homs Governorate, an alleged SARG airstrike hit the al-Omari Mosque, resulting in the collapse of a wall of the mosque and significant damage to the exterior facade (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0098** on pp. 94-96). In Idlib Governorate, alleged SARG airstrikes reportedly damaged two mosques (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0080**, **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0082** on p. 30). Alleged Russian airstrikes damaged two mosques (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0079**, **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0097** on pp. 86-93). An explosion, likely a car bombing, damaged another mosque (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0084** on pp. 36-38).

Heritage sites have also been damaged by suspected intentional destruction, illegal excavation, and militarization. DigitalGlobe satellite imagery shows ongoing damage to archaeological material at the site of Ebla (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0083** on pp. 31-25). Illegal excavations at the site have been ongoing since before May 31, 2012 and is concentrated on the acropolis area the (high mound), as well as around and within areas exposed by previous archaeological excavations. Since 2016, illegal excavations at Ebla have increased. Between February 21, 2017 and April 13, 2018 the remains of the Resheph Temple and the Early Bronze Age Palace disappeared due to unknown actions. Satellite imagery also shows there was an expansion of bulldozing at the base of the acropolis mound and around the northern corner of the mound near the Aleppo Gate. Ebla has also been militarized, reportedly by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militants, which has led to its targeting by SARG and Russian airstrikes.

In Idlib Governorate, alleged HTS militants destroyed an ancient Roman column in the town of Banabel (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0086** on pp. 43-50). This damage was confirmed by a video showing the collapse of the column, and DigitalGlobe satellite imagery indicating the destruction occurred between March 17 and April 24, 2018.

The Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) published a report on the condition of Mari in Deir ez-Zor Governorate (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 17-0224 UPDATE** on pp. 8-16). According to the DGAM, the site has been heavily damaged by natural impacts and illegal excavations conducted by terrorists. The DGAM also noted that the Palace of Zimri-Lim has suffered extensive damage. ASOR CHI examined DigitalGlobe satellite imagery that shows this damage occurred between November 13, 2017 and December 2, 2017 (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 17-0208** in the **November 2017 Monthly Report**). Recent satellite imagery shows there is no visible evidence of increased illegal excavation in late 2017, although the walls of the Palace of Zimri-Lim are in poor condition as a result of a lack of maintenance.

In Deir ez-Zor Governorate, the Authority of the Shrines of the “People of the House,” which is allegedly supported by Iran, built a shrine at the spring of Sayyid Ali bin Abi Talib (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0088** on pp. 56-61). Before-and-after photographs of the site indicate that earlier remains, including a standing tower, may have been damaged or destroyed during the construction of the shrine (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0089** on pp. 62-64). DigitalGlobe satellite imagery indicates that the construction of the shrine began between November 10 and December 2, 2017 and continued until at least December 31, 2017, the date of the most recently available image. While it was reported that the new construction destroyed earlier remains, the DigitalGlobe satellite imagery shows that the earlier tower was actually destroyed between March 20, 2013 and September 28, 2016. Illegal excavations along the western slope and bulldozing to the north of the mound also occurred during this time period.

Ongoing military activity around Damascus resulted in damage to heritage sites. The capture of new territories has also allowed the ASOR CHI research team to gather new evidence of damage to heritage sites via open source media, as well as satellite imagery. In Rif Dimashq Governorate, possible SARG shelling damaged two mosques in Hajar al-Aswad (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0093**, **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0094** on pp. 79–80). DigitalGlobe satellite imagery indicates the damage to the mosques occurred between April 20 and April 27, 2018. From April 20 to April 27, 2018 SARG and pro-regime forces carried out aerial bombardment and shelling over Hajar al-Aswad in an attempt to force Syrian opposition forces from the area.

In Damascus Governorate, SARG forces captured Ali Bin Abi Talib Mosque in Damascus and released photographs of the site via social media (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0085** on pp. 39–42). SARG forces also damaged a mosque and a cemetery in Damascus (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0095**, **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0096** on pp. 83-85). Heavy shelling by unknown perpetrators damaged the Palestinian Mosque in Yarmouk (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0087** on pp. 51-55).

General insecurity and attacks have also resulted in damage to at least two heritage sites in Aleppo Governorate. In Aleppo Governorate, a car bomb damaged al-Kabir Mosque in al-Bab (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0081** on pp. 22-29). No one has claimed responsibility for this attack, and the damage was minimal. Turkish forces reportedly damaged the Kurdish Martyr Seydo Cemetery near Afrin (**ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 18-0092** on pp. 72–76). ASOR CHI is committed to monitoring damage to sites due to airstrikes and military conflict.

Iraq

There were no incident reports from Iraq during this reporting period.

Libya

During the reporting period, ongoing fighting between the Government of National Accord-aligned 6th Brigade and armed tribal groups resulted in damage to Sabha Castle in Fezzan (**ASOR CHI Incident Report LHI 18-0016 UPDATE** on pp. 179-184). Shelling caused the partial collapse of a watchtower on the western side and a section of the wall on the southern side of the castle. ASOR CHI is committed to monitoring damage to sites due to military conflicts.

Recent heavy rains caused the collapse of several historic buildings in the Old Town of Ghadames. The Department of Antiquities (DoA) is documenting the aftermath of the storms (**ASOR CHI Incident Report LHI 18-0002 UPDATE** on pp. 161–178). DoA employees report that they expect more damage in the future as temperatures continue to rise in Ghadames during the transition from spring to summer. Neither the DoA nor the Historic Cities Authority, which is nominally in charge of the site, have been able to provide assistance due to the lack of an operating budget. ASOR CHI is committed to assisting the DoA and monitoring damage to sites due to natural impacts.

In Tripoli during the reporting period, thieves stole two copper bells from the Anglican Church of Christ the King and sold them for scrap (**ASOR CHI Incident Report LHI 18-0019** on p. 185). The Tripoli Security Directorate (TSD) arrested two people suspected of carrying out the theft. One of the two bells was subsequently recovered but the other remains missing. ASOR CHI is committed to monitoring incidents of looting in Libya.

In Cyrenaica during the reporting period, a fire broke out in the storeroom of Sidi Khrebish (**ASOR CHI Incident Report LHI 18-0020** on pp. 186–189). The cause of this fire is unknown. In recent months, Department of Antiquities staff had transported most of the artifacts from the storeroom to a more secure location. ASOR CHI is committed to assisting the DoA and monitoring damage to archaeological sites.