Bosra

Dar’a Governorate

Citadel of Bosra/Photo: Wikimedia Commons
Site Description

The main feature of this area is the World Heritage Property of Bosra (inscribed in 1980 and added to the list of World Heritage in Danger by UNESCO in 2013). Bosra has been occupied since the fourteenth century BC. It was the northern capital of the Nabataean Kingdom, capital to the Roman province of Arabia, an important site on the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, and an important trade post. There are a large number of extraordinarily intact remains, including one of the oldest surviving Islamic mosques and a second-century Roman theatre:

*Bosra survived about 2,500 years inhabited and almost intact. The Nabataeans, Romans, Byzantines and Umayyad all left traces in the city, which is an open museum associated with significant episodes in the history of ideas and beliefs.*

The Roman/Byzantine ruins of Jmarrin were also examined.

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**Bosra Damage Level**

(Number of Heritage Locations)

- **1** destroyed
- **0** severe damage
- **5** moderate damage
- **1** possible damage

![Figure 18. Overview of Bosra and locations where damage has occurred and is visible](image)
Status Overview

A review of satellite imagery indicates extensive fighting has occurred in the area. Shelling damage appears to be concentrated in the area of the historic residences, some of which are still occupied today. More than 50 structures showed holes in the roofs or roofs that have partially or completely collapsed (see figure 18).

A total of 30 notable historical structures/features have been reviewed on the imagery: one structure has been destroyed, four have sustained moderate damage, and three have possibly sustained damage. Most show little damage in the imagery indicating a majority of the damage may be within the structures themselves and so not detectable with satellite imagery. Most damage appears to be from shelling or military-related activities. However, one location—the Roman Central Baths Complex—has clearly been disturbed; this was the only potential evidence of looting seen at the site. Several new structures are visible in the western area of the site; the DGAM reports these are illegal constructions. In general, while the main features of the site appear largely undamaged, the high levels of structural damage to the historic houses and private properties suggest other structures may be effected. No damage was observed at Jmarrin.

NOTE
This report provides a detailed analysis of significant changes to the cultural heritage of this site resulting from the ongoing conflict in Syria. World View 1 and 2 satellite imagery acquired on 24 October 2010, 29 April 2014 and 04 August 2014 was used for this report.

### BOSRA DAMAGE ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCATION NAME</th>
<th>DAMAGE LEVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amphitheatre</td>
<td>Moderate damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Baths Complex</td>
<td>Moderate damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citadel and Theater</td>
<td>Possible damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosque Al-Omari/Mosque of Umar</td>
<td>Moderate damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nymphaeum (historical houses)</td>
<td>Destroyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Residence</td>
<td>Moderate damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Serge Cathedral</td>
<td>Moderate damage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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NYMPHAEUM

Description

Second-century AD building.

Damage Assessment

Satellite imagery indicates the structure has been destroyed and the surrounding buildings are severely damaged—the roofs have partially or completely collapsed (see figures 19 and 20). This is thought to have occurred during or shortly before October 2012.(iv)
AMPHITHEATRE

Description

Not to be confused with the theatre inside the citadel, this excavated Roman amphitheatre is adjacent to the southwest section of the citadel. It probably dates to between the first and third centuries AD and perhaps predated the more famous theatre in Bosra that dates to the second century AD.

Damage Assessment

A dirt road, 164 m in length, has been dug through the south of the amphitheatre, avoiding most of the excavated structure (see figures 21 and 22).
ROMAN RESIDENCE

Description

A large building ascribed to the governor of the province of Arabia, or possibly to the seat of the Christian Bishop in the fifth and sixth centuries AD.

Damage Assessment

A hole approximately 7 m$^2$ is visible in the roof of the northern rooms around the courtyard (see figures 23 and 24).
ROMAN CENTRAL BATH COMPLEX

Description

A large Roman bath complex containing the largest set of latrines discovered in the Middle East, perhaps dating back to the mid-second century AD.

Damage Assessment

The soil in the northern end of the complex appears to have been disturbed; parts of the excavation at this site have been covered with dirt between the acquisitions of the two satellite images from 24 October 2010 and 24 January 2014. This is a potential sign of looting (see figures 25 and 26).
OMARI MOSQUE

Description

A foundation stone dates this restored early mosque to 720 - 24 AD, although it was rebuilt in 1112 - 23 AD and again in 1221 - 22 AD.

Damage Assessment

The buildings around and next to the mosque have suffered severe structural damage and collapse (see figures 27 and 28). There is a hole on the roof of the mosque visible as of August 2014. It is highly likely the mosque has sustained other damages, however, damage may be internal or to the facade and not visible on imagery.\(^{vi}\)

ST. SERGIUS, BACCHUS AND LEONTIUS CATHEDRAL

Description

This cathedral to Sts. Sergius/Serge, Leontius and Bacchus was built in 511 - 12 AD and was an important early-Christian structure.

Damage Assessment

The eastern wall and part of the roof have collapsed; this likely occurred during or shortly before March 2013.\(^{iv}\)
THE CITADEL/THEATRE

Description
A huge Roman amphitheatre, constructed during most of the second century AD, with an Arab castle/citadel built around it in a superb state of preservation. Although the initial Arab fortifications are older, the surviving construction mostly dates to the first half of the thirteenth century AD.

Damage Assessment
Satellite imagery shows that four dirt barriers/embankments have been built at the entrance to the Citadel indicating potential military use of the building (see figures 29 and 30).

NOTE
Damage has also been reported on the Al-Fatemi Mosque, the Mabrak al-Naqa Mosque, the Madrasa Dabbagha/Madrasat Abu al-Fidaa, the Eastern Cistern, and looting at the Cemetery. No damage was visible, however the damage may also be internal and so not visible in the imagery.
Satellite-based Damage Assessment to Historical Sites in Syria

Inside Roman Amphitheatre/Photo: UNESCO

(i) UNESCO Site of Bosra World Heritage Inscription [1]
(iv) Damage reported in State of Conservation report [2] and also in this blog report by Arab Saga [4], which includes a picture of the damage and dates it more precisely to before 25 October 2012 (note, in that report, the kalbey is the nymphaeum). Available at: http://arabsaga.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/assad-forces-bury-craddle-of-kings.html
(v) Videos released by the The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology, 07 June 2013 [8] and 20 October 2013 [9], appear to show that the Al-Omari Mosque was shelled, but the damage cannot be seen on imagery. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgF2xiCl-qY and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mURK07-eRUI&list=ULAWKoCUI4VF1A31C3G5Q
(vi) A video released by the The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology, 04 March 2013 [5], shows damage to St. Serge Cathedral, apparently from shelling. Damage is most likely to have occurred shortly before this. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yo24wKmcOY&list=ULAWKoCUI4VF1A31C3G5Q
(vii) Several reports have been released of military use of the citadel and of fighting occurring inside, including the UNESCO State of Conservation Report, 38th Session [2], and a photo [6] and video [7] released by the Facebook group The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology, April 2013 and May 2013 respectively. Others are available. However, none of the combat reported would cause more than shrapnel scarring. Available at: http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2014/whc-14-38com-7AAdd-en.pdf, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=409215639185553&set=a.331090846998033.78508.324869057620212&type=1&ref=nf, and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8I1I7o-Qr8
(viii) Video released by the The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology, 16 November 2012 [10], showing damage to the minaret of the Al-Fatemi Mosque. Damage is most likely to have occurred shortly before this. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ip43SY78k&feature=youtu.be
(x) Photo released by the The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology, April 2013, showing shell damage to the walls of the Madrasa Dabbagh/Madrasat Abu al-Fidaa. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=405596926214091&set=a.331090846998033.78508.324869057620212&type=1&src=https%3A%2F%2Fbcn-hphotos-a.akamaihd.net%2Ffbcdn-hphotos-a.akamaihd.net%3Fhphotos-a \k\p%262011%2F96265287192-405596926214091_1044169672_n.jpg&size=645x2362
(xi) The DGAM State Party report to the World Heritage Commission, January 2014, listed the Eastern Cistern as damaged—no further details were available (second link from the bottom), P25 [3]. Available at: http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/22/documents/
(xii) DGAM State Party report to the World Heritage Commission, January 2014, listed the Cemetery as looted—no further details were available (second link from the bottom), P25 [3]. Available at: http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/22/documents.