

Deir Semaan (Telanissos) دير سمعان

Aleppo Governorate





FIGURE 37. Overview of Deir Semaan and locations where damage has occurred and is visible.

Site Description

This area is part of the World Heritage Property known as The Ancient Villages of Northern Syria, inscribed in 2011 and added to the World Heritage in Danger List in 2013. The site encompasses eight archaeological parks, including parts of Archaeological Park 1—Qal'at Sem'an in Jebel Sem'an—and Park 3—Sinkhar, also in the Jebel Sem'an. The main feature in Park 1 is the colossal pilgrimage centre of Qal'at Sem'an, also known as Saint Simeon's Basilica, and its supporting town at the foot of the ridge, the settlement of Telanissos, later called Deir Semaan. The area also covers the Byzantine villages of Refade and Sitt al-Rum (also called Sitt ar-Roum) and the ruins of Qatura in Park 1, as well as Sinkhar and Sheikh Suleiman in Park 3, all of which are part of UNESCO World Heritage List. The region mostly consisted of agricultural settlements, but the area flourished from the late-fifth century AD due to the fame of the pilgrimage to the Church of Saint Simeon and Deir Semaan in particular flourished as a result.

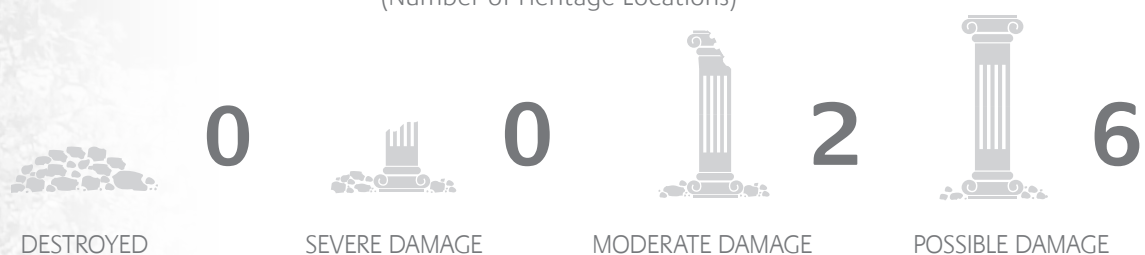
Deir Semaan was originally a Greek agricultural settlement called Telanissos, and was transformed at the beginning of the fifth century AD by the establishment of a monastic complex. Upon the death of one of its members, Saint Simeon, at the end of the fifth century AD, a new basilica was built on the hill and the village supported the pilgrimage centre with hostleries, a church and three major monasteries. The ruins are extensive, covering almost two thirds of a square kilometre⁽ⁱ⁾:

"The great cruciform church [of St. Simeon's] is unique in the history of architecture and is not only the most beautiful and important existing monument of architecture between the buildings of the Roman period of the second century and the great church of Santa Sophia of Justinian's time, but also... is the most monumental Christian building earlier than the masterpieces of the eleventh and twelfth centuries in northern Europe."⁽ⁱⁱ⁾



Deir Semaan Damage Level

(Number of Heritage Locations)



Status Overview

A review of the satellite imagery indicates that Saint Simeon’s Basilica experienced looting by 2013. A number of distinct small holes (no more than a couple of metres wide) are visible in four locations across the site, with other potential holes visible in two more locations. No further damage is visible to the complex.

New construction and resettlement are evident or likely in all of the other Byzantine villages with the exception of Qatura, the ruins of which appear undamaged. These activities have damaged some of the ancient structures. Looting is also possible at several of the ancient villages, although it appears to be of limited extent. Stone robbing may be occurring at Sitt al-Rum, though this cannot be confirmed. These activities have also been reported in Refade,⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ but it is either too limited to be visible or cannot be distinguished from the construction activities occurring (see figure 37).

DEIR SEMAAN DAMAGE ASSESSMENT SUMMARY	
LOCATION NAME	DAMAGE LEVEL
Large Pandocheion	Possible damage
Pandocheion and Bazaar	Possible damage
Refade	Possible damage
St. Simeon’s Basilica & Baptistery	Moderate damage
Sheikh Suleiman	Moderate damage
Sinhar	Possible damage
Sitt al-Rum	Possible damage
Southwest Monastery	Possible damage

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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 19 November 2013 and 08 October 2014 was used for this report.

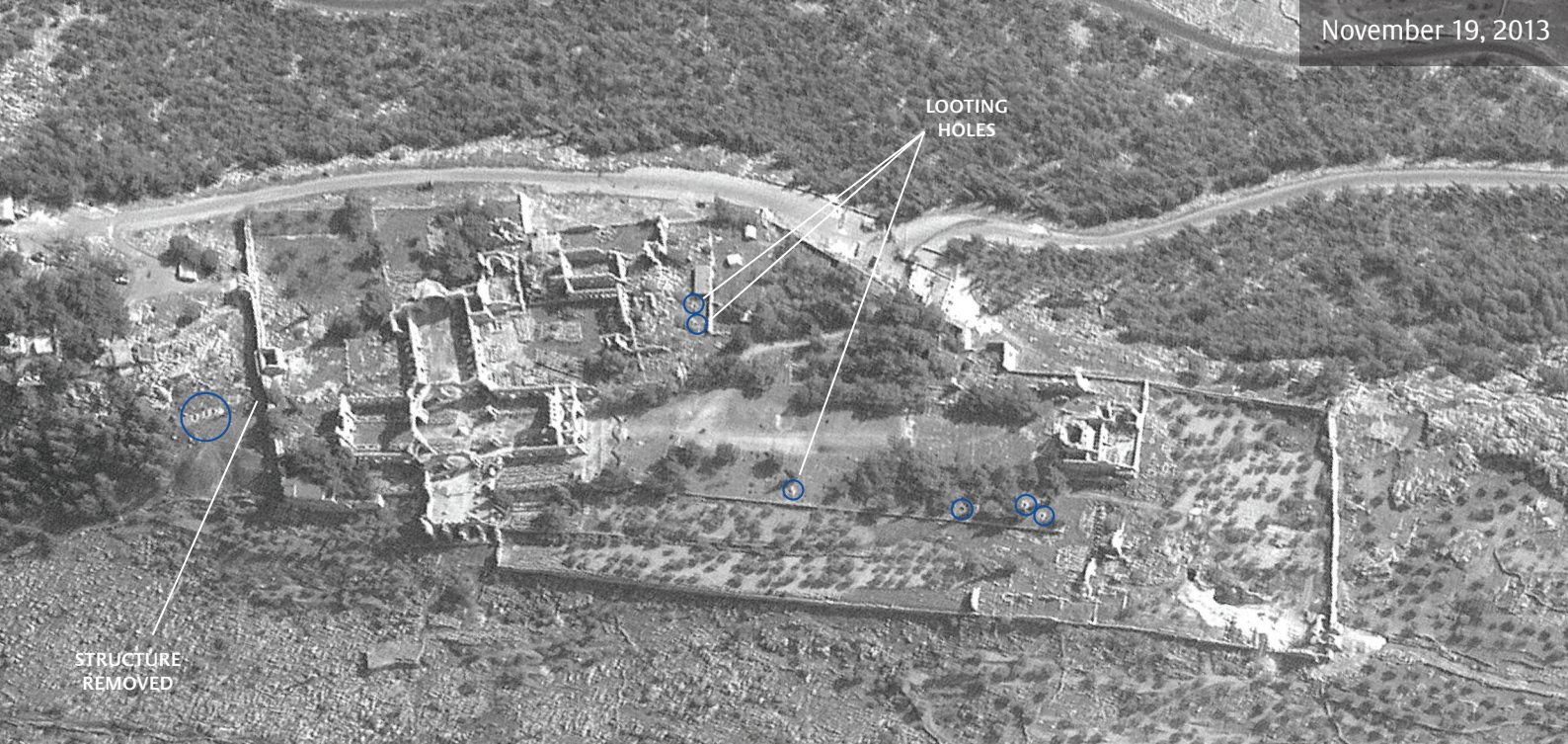


FIGURE 38. Qal'at Sem'an.



Visible looting holes

QAL'AT SEM'AN

(ST SIMEON'S BASILICA/CHURCH OF SAINT SIMEON STYLITES)

Description

Construction of the great cruciform complex began shortly after Simeon's death, spanning approximately from 476 to 491 AD, with additions until approximately 525 AD. The complex consisted of four basilica buildings meeting around a central octagonal courtyard, a monastery complex, the baptistery and its annexes. A ceremonial way, marked by a commemorative arch, joined the monastic collectives to the great complex on the hill. The area was damaged by earthquakes in 526 and 528 AD, and was fortified during conflicts in the tenth century AD, before being abandoned after further conflict in the eleventh century AD.^(iv)

Damage Assessment

A number of small holes (no more than a couple of metres wide) are visible across the site, particularly in the ancillary buildings, which provided accommodation for pilgrims to the west and southwest of the baptistery, in the grounds between the basilica complex and the baptistery, and the area north of the north wall. Other possible holes are visible in the eastern chapel as well as the monastery and cloister. The looting was first reported in February 2013^(v) (see figures 38 and 39). No other damage was visible on either the 2013 or the 2014 imagery.^(vi)



FIGURE 39. Qal'at Sem'an.



Damage to St Simeon Stylites/Photo: Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums DGAM, 2014.



Moderate Damage

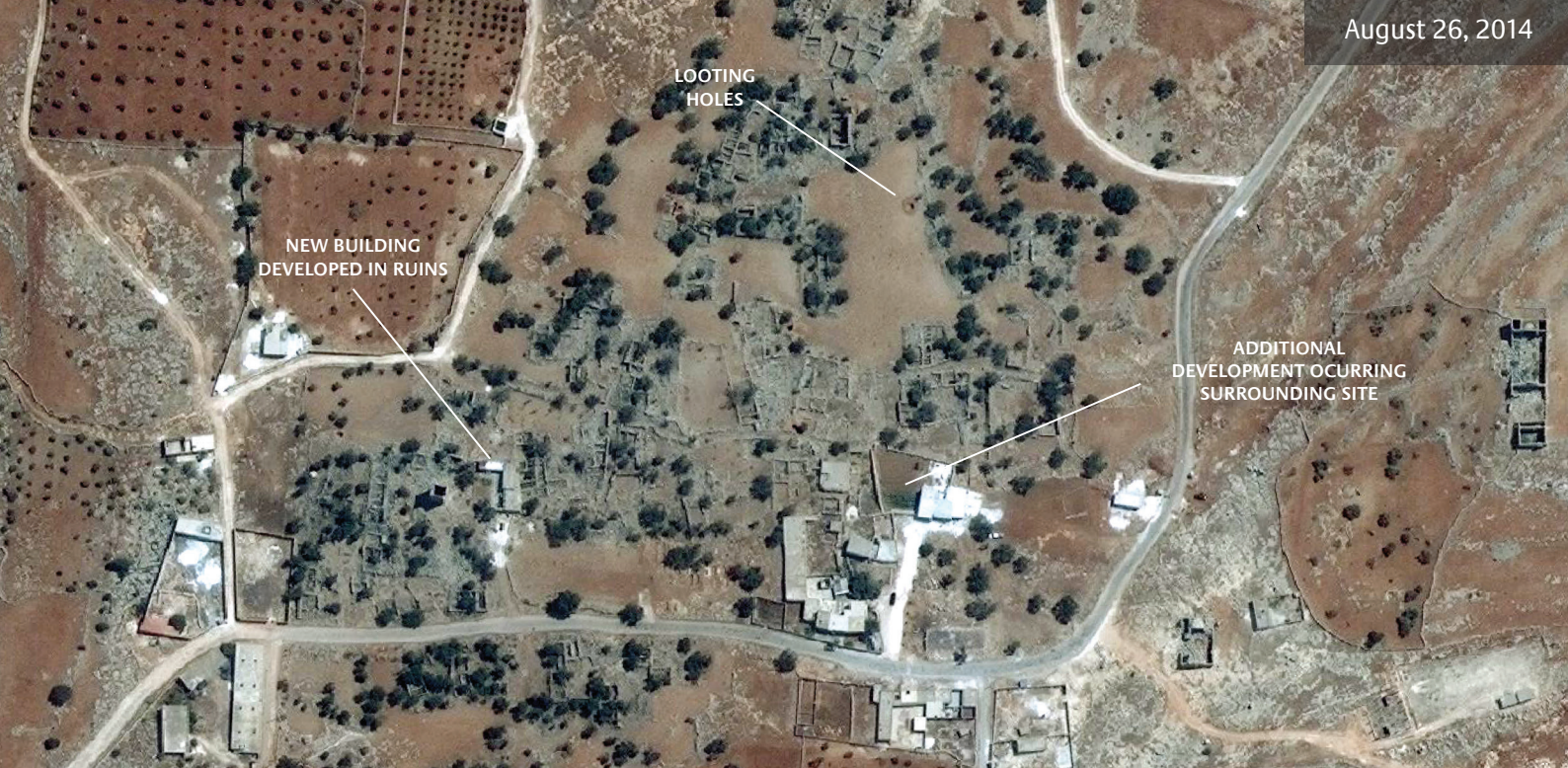


FIGURE 40. Sheikh Suleiman.

SHEIKH SULEIMAN

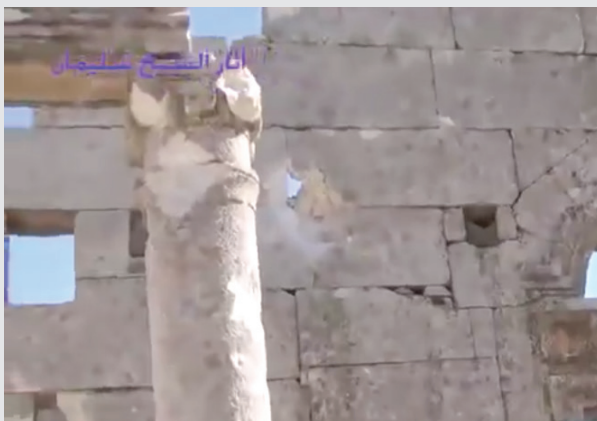
Description

Sheikh Suleiman sits amidst a modern village; three beautiful churches, one of which dates the village to 602 AD, remain.

Damage Assessment

Prior to the conflict, several new buildings had been erected within the ruins. A review of the imagery demonstrates that between 2012 and 2014, two of the buildings have been extended, and further development has occurred around the ruins, threatening them. In addition, a looting hole (approximately 3 m across) is visible in a clearing in the centre of the ruins (see figure 40). No other damage was visible, however artillery damage was reported.^(vii)

Moderate Damage



Artillery damage at Shiekh Suliman village ruins/Photo: Flash News Network.



FIGURE 41. Deir Semaan (Southwest Monastery).

DEIR SEMAAN (THE LARGE PANDOCHEION)

Description

The large pandocheion is a monastery with a major accommodation complex for pilgrims. Large parts of the complex are still intact. It comprises two unusually large buildings with a tomb chapel hewn into the rock. It was presumably built to support the monastic complex on the hill at the end of the fifth century AD/beginning of the sixth century AD.

Damage Assessment

By 2013, several new structures had been built adjacent to the tomb complex of the large pandocheion. It is unknown whether these have damaged the building.

DEIR SEMAAN (THE SMALL PANDOCHEION AND BAZAAR)

Description

The pandocheion complex and adjacent bazaar are dated to 479 AD.

Damage Assessment

By 2013, several new structures had been built adjacent to the complex. The walls of the complex are not clear and, in some places, are not visible suggesting the structures have been damaged, but this cannot be confirmed.

DEIR SEMAAN (THE SOUTHWEST MONASTERY)

Description

The complex dates to the sixth century AD and consists of three buildings grouped together, forming a courtyard. They also formed pilgrim accommodations and a chapel.

Damage Assessment

The 2013 satellite image appears to show damage to the southern building, the monks' accommodation. The walls are no longer clearly defined, suggesting they have sustained damage (see figure 41).



Possible Damage

SINKHAR

Description

Sinkhar, also known as Sinhar, is a beautiful Byzantine village built between the second and seventh centuries, with houses, a chapel and tombs.

Damage Assessment

Prior to the conflict, the periphery of the village had been cleared for agricultural use. Examination of the 2014 satellite image shows several small new structures have also been erected on the edge of the ruins, possibly damaging them. It is also possible more land could be cleared for agriculture. There is no evidence of the wider resettlement like that seen at other Dead Cities. However, three potential holes are visible that may indicate looting is occurring on the site.

REFADE

Description

Refade is a notably picturesque Byzantine village with a large number of relatively intact and lavish domestic houses, predominantly dating back to the sixth Century AD, although some date to the first century.

Damage Assessment

A review of the satellite imagery indicates that several new buildings have been erected in the southeast of the ruins, although it is not clear to what extent they have affected the ancient village. In addition, a cluster of structures in the centre of the village suggest that either the ruins have been resettled or new structures have been built—both resettlement and construction would threaten the Byzantine structures. The nature of the structures and the extent of the damage cannot be determined from the imagery available at this time. However, an area of soil disturbance visible on the 2013 satellite image may indicate an area of looting or stone robbing,^(viii) but this cannot be verified.

SITT AL-RUM (SITT AR-ROUM)

Description

The ruins consist of a fourth-century AD church and a Roman tomb that dates to 152 AD.

Damage Assessment

A review of the imagery shows that two new structures have recently been built adjacent to the church. It is unknown whether the construction activities have affected the ruins. A ruined structure to the west of the church is much more difficult to identify on both the 2013 and 2014 imagery when compared to its 2011 appearance; this may indicate stone robbing is occurring on the site.^(ix) Alternatively, the area may have been cleared for agricultural purposes.

(i) Burns, R. 2010 [1]

(ii) Butler, H. C. 1969: 98, [2]. In: *République arabe syrienne* 2010: 55 [3]

(iii) DGAM report of stone robbing, 2013 [4]. Available at: <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1062>

(iv) Burns, R. 2010 [1]

(v) Looting was first reported in a newspaper article in the *Washington Post* by Luck, 2013 [5], and was later also reported by *Aleppo Archaeology* [6], and in the *UNESCO State of Conservation Report*, 38th Session [7]. Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/syrian-rebels-loot-artifacts-to-raise-money-for-fight-against-assad/2013/02/12/ae-0cf01e-6ede-11e2-8b8d-e0b59a1b8e2a_story.html, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=671052706286587&set=a.480200765371783.107575.459668177425042&type=1&relevant_count=1, and <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2014/whc14-38com-7A-Add-en.pdf>

(vi) Shelling and military occupation were reported in an article in *DNA* [8], October 2012, and in a DGAM report, 2013 [4]. The use of heavy construction machinery was reported by the DGAM [9]. Available at: http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report_aleppo-s-ancient-souk-ablaze-as-war-destroys-syria-s-heritage_1747471, <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1062>, and <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=239&id=1169>

(vii) A video report [10] showed soldiers at Sheikh Suleimann in October 2012 and reported that, as a result, the site had sustained heavy damage, although the video gave no evidence of this. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKkGeKYVoU>

(viii) Stone robbing was reported here by the DGAM, 2013 [4]. Available at: <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1062>

(ix) Stone robbing was reported here by the DGAM, 2013 [4]. Available at: <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1062>



Sitt er-Rum, near Church of Saint Simeon Stylites, Syria/Photo: Wikimedia Commons.



View of the Column (from East to West) in the Church of Saint Simeon Stylites, Syria/Photo: Wikimedia Commons.