

Dura Europos (Tell al-Salilhiye) دورا أسوبورو

Deir Ez-Zor Governorate



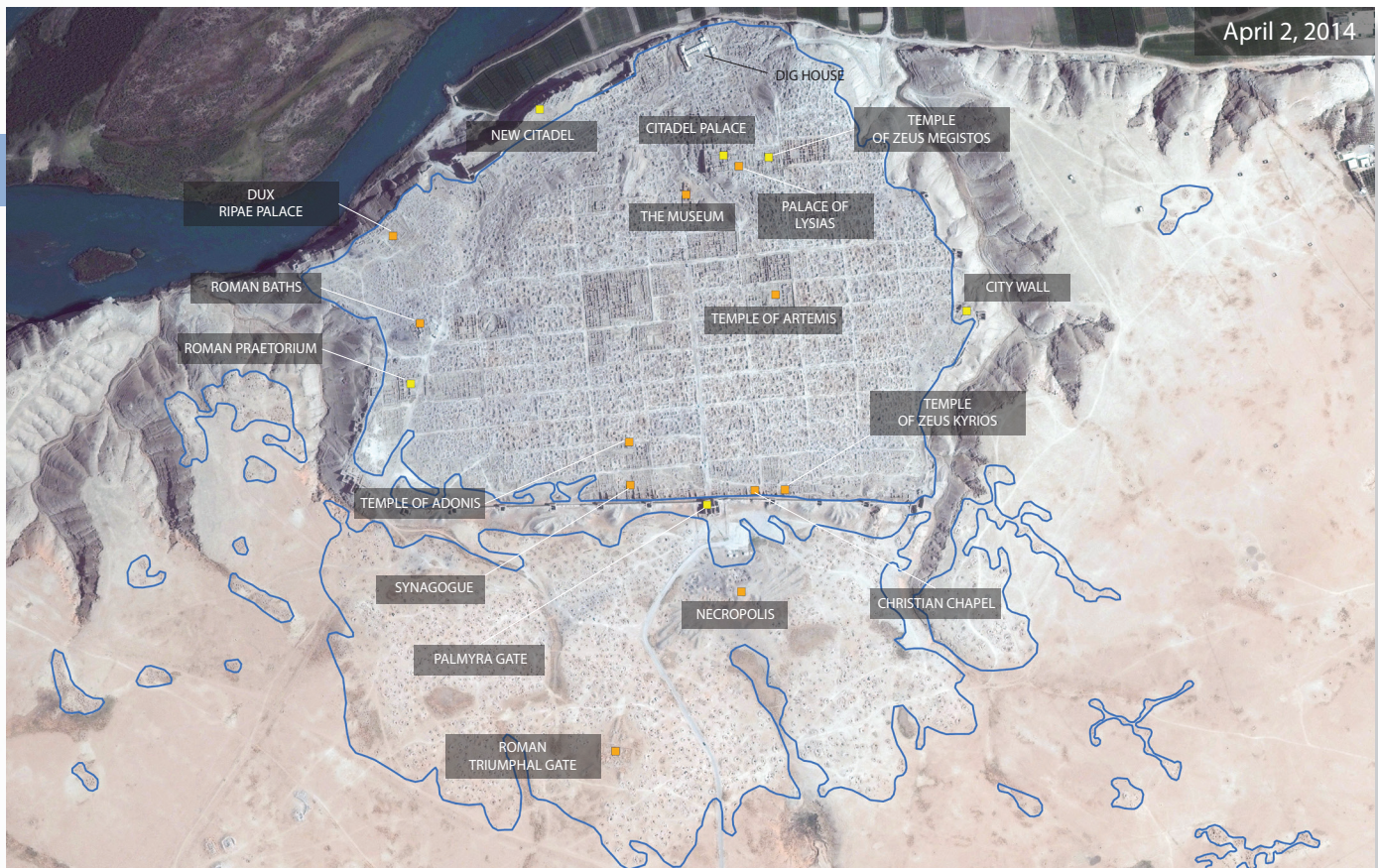


FIGURE 42. Overview of Dura Europos and locations where damage has occurred and is visible.

 Area with visible looting holes

Site Description

This is a property included on World Heritage Tentative List of Syria (also known as Tell Salahiye). Located on the frontier of the East and the West, this extensive, Hellenistic/Roman, walled city was founded in 303 BC, and was part of a series of military colonies securing control of the area. Excluding the necropolis, the city alone covers some 75 ha and parts of it are well preserved. The site retained its original grid layout and its numerous buildings, some of which have been reconstructed. Under the Romans, pagan, Jewish and Christian architecture thrived and was particularly notable for the remarkable state of preservation of some of the stunning wall paintings (now on display in the National Museum of Damascus and elsewhere), and evidence of early warfare, such as one of the first uses of chemical weapons (poison gas).



Dura Europos Damage Level

(Number of Heritage Locations)

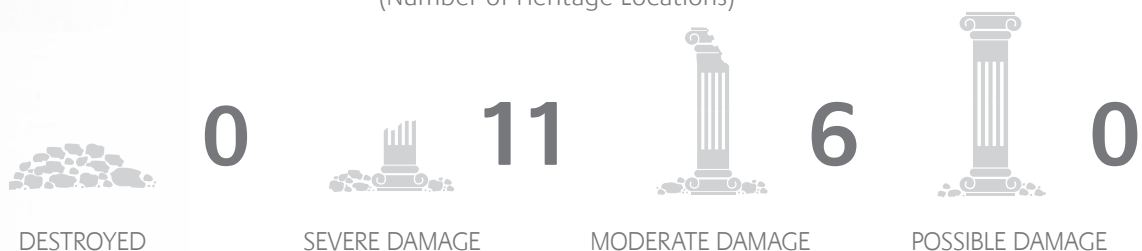




FIGURE 43. This image shows the damage in the area of the Palace of the Strategion/Old Citadel. Some ruins are completely removed and there are many looting holes around and inside the buildings. The looting holes have even removed the track. There is evidence of earth-moving machinery being used to excavate some areas (see Citadel Palace section). The damage to the museum is also visible (see The Museum section); one room has collapsed and most of the roof has been removed.

The site was submitted to the Tentative World Heritage List in 1999, but was resubmitted as a joint property with the site of Mari in 2011. Less than a third to a half of the city has been excavated so far.

Dura Europos represents "...a mixture of influences which has created a unique architecture, culture and townscape, with exceptional buildings, such as Palaces, and public and religious buildings of different faiths, which reflect on urbanism and fine arts, and were based on a prosperous trading economy."⁽ⁱ⁾

Status Overview

In addition to a general examination of the site, a sample of 15 key buildings, the dig house, the museum and the city walls were analysed. While looting has historically been a problem at this site (seen in the satellite image from 06 January 2009),⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ the comparative imagery analysis demonstrates the site has now been subjected to extensive looting; thousands of holes between 2 – 4 m in diameter cover both the city and the surrounding necropolis outside the walls (see figures 42, 43 and 44). Reports⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ estimated the holes to be approximately 3 m deep in 2013, but 5 – 6 m deep in 2014, particularly in the western part of the site and in the cemetery—possibly made using earth-moving equipment and drilling machinery which has also been reported on the site. The looting has caused severe damage to the necropolis and to buildings within the city, thus devastating the site.

While the looting was initially attributed, at least in part, to the local people, the ongoing extensive looting has more recently been attributed to an armed gang of approximately 300 people (though some reports estimate closer to 1,000 people are involved), who are not thought to be Syrian.^(iv) The types of objects removed include wall frescos, tiles, pottery, glass, silver and bronze coins, stone statues and gold jewellery.^(v)



FIGURE 44. This image shows the area of the Palace of the Strategos/Old Citadel and the museum before extensive damage occurred.

Large sections of the ruins have been removed, although rarely on the major features, destroying all traces of previous excavations (see figure 40). A small section of the city walls has collapsed. Some areas are now almost unrecognisable; for instance, some paths have been dug to such an extent that they are no longer visible (see figures 41 and 42). Unfortunately, no area of the site is unaffected.^(vi) A small museum containing replicas was present on the site; the roof has been removed and some walls are damaged). No damage was visible at the dig house,^(vii) but the ground around it has been heavily disturbed. Several vehicles were also visible on the site. It should be noted that the city is largely made of mud-brick which requires regular conservation to prevent degradation. This has not been possible during the conflict, so degradation of the structures is likely.



This image shows illegal excavations at Dura Europos/
Photo: Endangered Antiquities of Syria.

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 04 September 2011, 02 April 2014 and 03 June 2014 was used for this report. Two other reports have examined this site using satellite imagery, that of Casana and Panahipour (2014) and the Cultural Heritage Centre of the American Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the DGAM (2014). In the former case, this report uses more recent imagery, and in the latter case, no detailed analysis was provided. Their findings support this report, which provides a far more detailed analysis.

HOUSE OR PALACE OF LYSIAS

Description

This site is thought to be the private residence of the governor, though it is fragmentary. It may date back to the Greek formation of the city in the fourth/third century BC, or perhaps slightly later.

Damage Assessment

Although the outline can still be discerned on imagery, not all of the original walls are visible. Whether this is because they have been buried by soil removed from looting holes or removed as part of the looting of the site is unknown.

DUX RIPAE PALACE

Description

This palace was built for the Roman Garrison Commander, sometime after 227 AD.

Damage Assessment

Although the outline can still be discerned on the imagery, not all of the original walls or columns are visible, particularly on the southern section. Whether this is because they have been buried by soil removed from looting holes or removed as part of the looting of the site is unknown. The entire building has also been heavily disturbed. A new track, perhaps worn by looters, is visible in this area and cuts through the southern section of the palace.

ROMAN BATHS

Description

Part of the Roman military quarter dating back to the early third century AD.

Damage Assessment

Although looting holes are visible all around the site, none are visible in the building. However, several walls are no longer present. It is unknown whether this is a result of their being buried by moved soil or their removal altogether. In addition, the row of columns behind the baths, which lead to the city walls, have been heavily damaged. The 26-meter-long row of columns is severely damaged in two sections, now split by a new track. A section roughly 8 m long has been damaged, buried or removed from the northern length, and a section approximately 18 m long has been damaged, buried or removed from the southern length.

ROMAN TRIUMPHAL GATE

Description

This gate was built between 115 - 17 AD in honour of the III Cyrenaica legion, though little remains.

Damage Assessment

Looting holes are apparent all over the site; almost no features remain. It is unknown whether they have been destroyed by looting holes or buried by disturbed soil.



Part of the fresco at the Dura-Europos synagogue. This image illustrates a scene from the Book of Esther/
Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

SYNAGOGUE

Description

The synagogue's walls were covered with exceptional paintings, now in the National Museum of Damascus. The building was buried in 256 AD as part of the construction of the defences to protect the city against an invading army and must, therefore, predate this event.

Damage Assessment

A large number of looting holes are visible on the imagery, both around and within the building, and are causing severe damage to it. However, the walls are still visible, so the synagogue has not been completely destroyed.

TEMPLE OF ADONIS

Description

This Temple dates back to some point between the Greek founding of the city in 303 BC and the Roman occupation, which ended in 256 AD.

Damage Assessment

Imagery indicates the Temple has been severely disturbed. The soil heap, which once covered part of the site, has been removed and holes are visible. In addition, many of the chambers along the northwest wall are no longer visible. This may be due to reburial from disturbed soil or their removal.

TEMPLE OF ARTEMIS

Description - This temple served as the centre of the official cult of the city throughout its history. It dates back to 40 - 33 BC, though the layout is older.

Damage Assessment

The Temple has been heavily disturbed. Many of the walls, particularly in the northern/western end, are no longer visible and those in the other half are less clear, suggesting soil has been piled around them. The two temples next to this—the Temple of the Gaddé and the Temple of Atargatis—appear largely undisturbed.

CHRISTIAN CHAPEL

Description - This house was converted into a Christian chapel and dates back to 232 AD. It is the earliest, recognisable, Christian cult centre in Syria.

Damage Assessment

A large number of looting holes are visible around and within the building and are causing severe damage. However, the walls are still visible, so the chapel has not been completely destroyed.

TEMPLE OF ZEUS KRYIOS

Description - Temple dating back to some point before 28 AD.

Damage Assessment - A large number of looting holes are visible around and within the building and are causing severe damage, but the walls are still visible, so the temple has not been completely destroyed.

THE MUSEUM

Description

The Museum is known as “The Roman House” because it was based on the model of an ancient Roman house built between the first century BC and its fall in 256 AD, though the museum itself was completely modern and contained only replicas.

Damage Assessment

The building has been severely damaged; most of the roof has been removed with the possible exception of one room, and the walls of one room that joins the two sections of the building have collapsed.

NECROPOLIS

Description

The necropolis (primarily located outside the western wall of the site) contains numerous graves, several tower tombs, and some funerary temples. It dates back to some point between the founding of the city in 303 BC and the fall of the city in 256 AD.

Damage Assessment

Although looting has been known to go on here since the excavations in the 1930s, the scale has vastly increased and the area is now covered in thousands of looting holes. The looted area covers approximately 67.6 ha.



Severe Damage

PALMYRA GATE

Description

The Greco-Roman 'Great Gate,' or Palmyra Gate, is comprised of two substantial bastions linked by a passageway over the arch. It dates back to some point between the Greek founding of the city in 303 BC and the Roman occupation, which ended in 256 AD.

Damage Assessment

Imagery indicates that, while the structure of the main bastion is clear, the small reconstructed walls at the front are no longer present or are heavily disturbed, as are the outer walls around the gate. The presence of vehicles inside the site, just beyond the gate, suggests that it is being used as a vehicular entrance, which may have caused further damage.



Image of the Palmyra Gate/Photo: Emma Cunliffe.

CITY WALL

Description

The present alignment of the 3-meter-thick walls probably dates to the second half of the second century BC. A series of stone towers are spaced along them (26 of which remain). They are made from stone topped with mud-brick and, in places, remain 9 m high.

Damage Assessment

While, in general, the walls appear relatively intact, two sections totalling just under 15 m in length appear to have collapsed on the eastern side. It is unknown whether this is a result of the extensive earth moving on the site or a lack of maintenance. In addition, a section of the siege ramp next to one of the towers.

CITADEL PALACE

Description

The Greek citadel, built sometime after the founding of the city in 303 BC, is also known as the Palace of Strategion. Under the Romans, who took control of the city in the first century BC, it became an administrative building, possibly the Governor's residence. The northern end has been stabilised using a wooden frame and extensive reconstruction to prevent its collapse, and further reconstruction work has been carried out on the rest of the building.

Damage Assessment

Looting is still visible here, as indicated by numerous holes surrounding and within the site, but the walls appear to be intact. There are no signs of collapse at the northern end, despite the fact that the stabilisation (see description) has not been maintained.^(viii) However, the path leading up to the citadel is no longer visible and large sections of it have been removed. The extent of one area removed from the path (621 m²) suggests earth-moving machinery may have been used.

NEW CITADEL

Description

The 'new' Citadel is one of the more spectacular features of the site spread along the river bank. Although parts of it have been washed away by the river in antiquity, the remainder is on a massive scale, almost 300 m long with three towers over 20 m high. It dates back to the second century BC.

Damage Assessment

This is one of the least affected buildings, with little evidence of looting. Few holes are visible and the building walls are relatively clear. The small structure adjacent to the easternmost of the three towers has been removed, however.

TEMPLE OF ZEUS MEGISTOS

Description

The fragmentary remains of this temple date back to the first century AD, though it was rebuilt in 169 AD.

Damage Assessment

The building walls are relatively clear and no looting holes are visible within it, although the surroundings have been heavily affected by looting holes.

ROMAN PRAETORIUM

Description

Part of the Roman military quarter, dating back to the early-third century AD.

Damage Assessment

Although looting holes are visible all around the site, little damage is visible to this building, which appears relatively undisturbed. None of the columns in the courtyard are visible, and some of the walls appear slightly damaged.



Moderate Damage

- (i) UNESCO Tentative World Heritage Inscription (Translation E. Cunliffe) [1]. Available at: <http://eca.state.gov/cultural-heritage-center/syria-cultural-heritage-initiative/imagery-archaeological-site-looting>, and <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=239&id=1275>
- (ii) Looting has been a problem here for a long time; see Casana, J., and Panahipour, M. 2014. Satellite-Based Monitoring of Looting and Damage to Archaeological Sites in Syria [2]
- (iii) DGAM reports from June 2013 [5] and April 2014 [6]. Available at: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=899>, and <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=239&id=1207>
- (iv) DGAM reports, for example from April 2013 [11], compared to the New York Times [12] in March 2014. Available at: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=799> and http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/08/world/middleeast/among-the-wounded-in-syrias-war-ancient-history.html?smid=fb-share&_r=0
- (v) DGAM report from January 2014 [6]. Available at: <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=239&id=1139>
- (vi) Some examples of videos and photos of the damage can be seen here: a video [7] shared by the The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology in December 2012, and photographs shared by Le patrimoine archéologique syrien en danger [8] in April 2013. Many others are available on their Facebook pages. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=446264372108559&set=a.168560016545664.36383.168536393214693&type=1&relevant_count=1&ref=nf
- (vii) The dig house was reported to have been emptied by looters, as was the museum (right down to the window frames), according to photos and reports published by Le patrimoine archéologique syrien en danger [9] and Archaeo Life Blog [10] in September 2012. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.365349490200048.75316.168536393214693&type=1>, and [http://archaeolife.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/dura-europos-in-danger.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed:+ArchaeoLife+\(Archaeo+Life\)](http://archaeolife.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/dura-europos-in-danger.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed:+ArchaeoLife+(Archaeo+Life))
- (viii) A DGAM report from January 2014 [6] refers to the removal of a wooden frame or support that braces a wall; this suggests that some parts of the wall stabilising frame have been removed. This is not visible on the imagery and the occurrence and/or location of this event cannot be verified. Available at: www.dgam.gov.sy
- (ix) Casana and Panahipour, 2014 [2], the Cultural Heritage Center [3] and the DGAM, June 2014 [4]