

Ebla (Tell Mardikh) إيبلا

Idlib Governorate



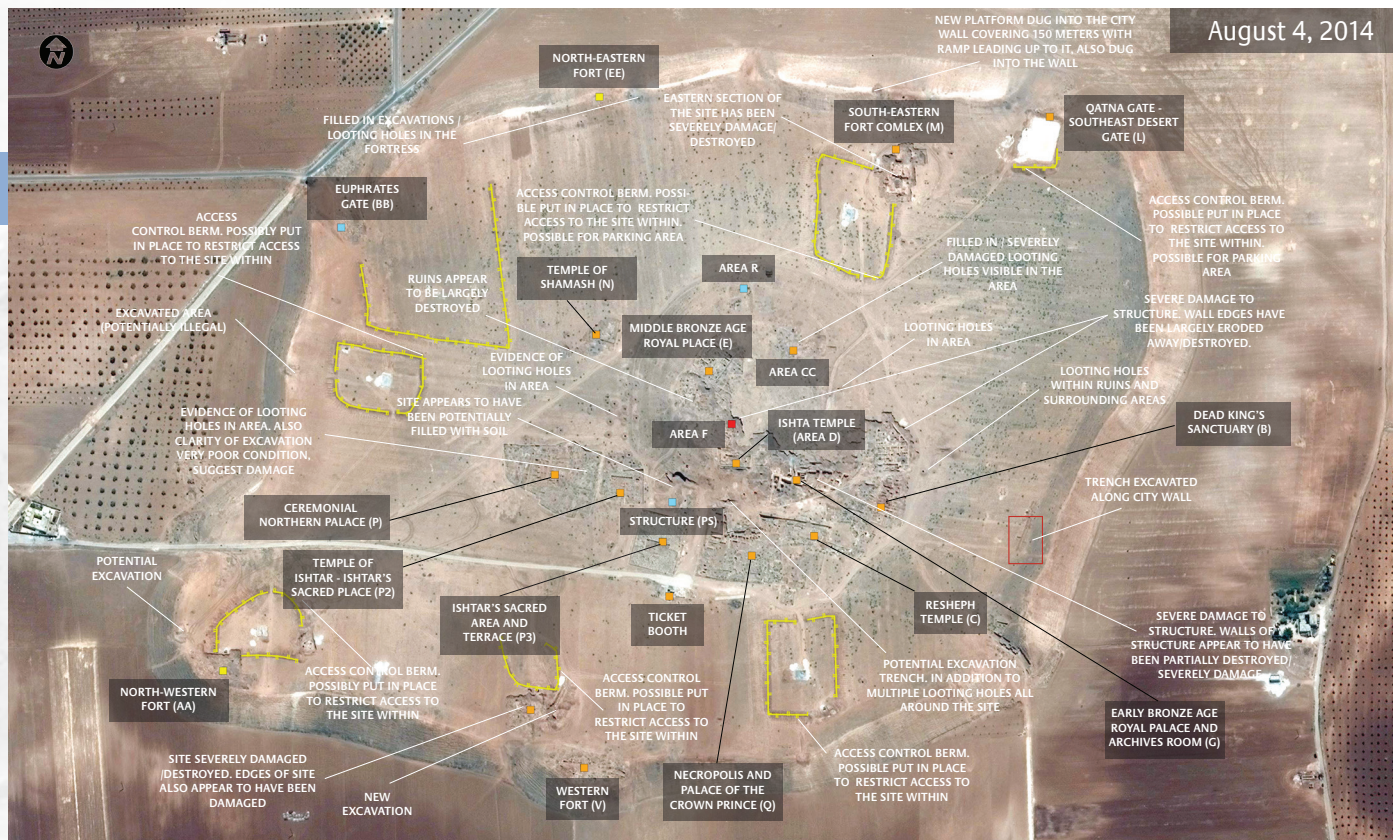


FIGURE 45. The Acropolis: The clarity of many of the excavated structures has significantly degraded, indicating heavy damage. Area F appears to have been removed and looting holes are visible in some structures. Areas R and CC have been infilled. Note the irregular edge of all the excavated structures within the acropolis; the excavated area has been illegally extended, causing heavy damage.

Site Description

The main feature of this area is the site of Ebla, also known as Tell Mardikh (submitted to the World Heritage Commission in 1999, and currently on the Tentative World Heritage List for consideration). Ebla is one of the most extensive Bronze Age cities, covering some 60 ha. The city was built on the remains of older structures; the earliest parts date to before 3000 BC. It saw its heyday in the third to second millenniums BC, and at times it exercised considerable control over large parts of northern Syria. Today the site consists of a high-walled citadel acropolis surrounded by an extensive, walled, outer town containing palaces, temples and private residences. Underneath many of the buildings around the central acropolis was a Royal Necropolis, utilising natural caves. Remains of building walls up to 7 m high and in good condition were found, and the citadel contained a library with more than 18,000 tablets, organised with their inventories, and even a dictionary and pronunciation guide.

Ebla Damage Level

(Number of Heritage Locations)

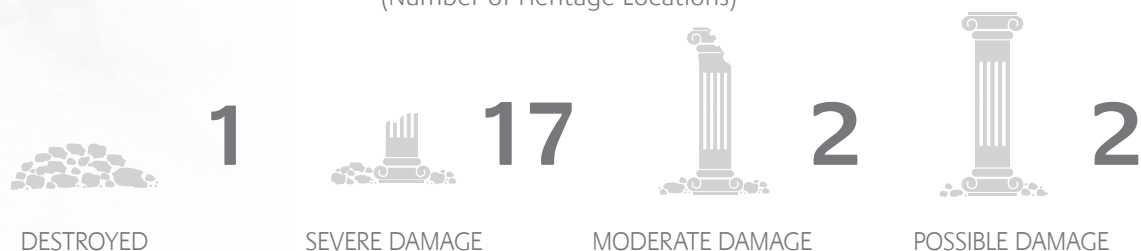




FIGURE 46. The Acropolis before damage.

The site was finally abandoned during the Roman imperial period. It has been excavated since 1965, and several sections have been reconstructed. A modern road bisects the site, running north-south, and a modern ticket booth, café and museum are located on the eastern part of the site.

“One finds significant economic and social information based on court records that put us in direct contact with the political reality and the central organisation of the palace.”⁽ⁱ⁾

Status Overview

A review of the satellite imagery indicates significant alterations have occurred at the site.⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ For instance, seven sets of embankments have been constructed within the site, and heavy, earth-moving machinery appears to have been used to construct them. Soil heaps are visible within and around the embankments, all disturbing the archaeological layers. Most of these sites are located in areas that were previously farmed in the outer town. Most also have a small, grey, square feature (either a structure or a parking area) in the centre. Several are also linked to a platform dug into the city walls.⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾

All of the legitimately excavated areas are heavily disturbed.^(iv) Most of the excavations have been extended, possibly with heavy, earth-moving machinery, and the clarity of many of the excavated buildings has significantly degraded between the acquisition of the two images (December 2008 and August 2014). This suggests they have been severely damaged or destroyed, or have been covered, perhaps with spoil from the illegitimate excavations. While in some cases, spoil seems likely, in many cases the level of soil disturbance suggests the walls have been destroyed. One report^(v) indicated that looters were digging under the walls in the Acropolis in order to reach unexplored levels, which would cause extensive damage to the walls as seen on the August 2014 imagery. In addition, a number of small looting holes are visible across the site, both within and outside excavated structures.

According to a report,^(vi) the looters search for artefacts they can sell by tunnelling into the site, but also come to the site to haul away carloads of dirt from inside the tunnels as it is ideal for making the ceramic liner for bread-baking ovens. If true, this could explain why so little spoil is visible in the excavations. Those occupying the mound “...say they also try to protect Ebla from full-on looting by thieves who want to sort through the place with earth-moving equipment” (Chivers, April 2013), suggesting heavy machinery had not been used on the site at this point. Unfortunately, later reports^(vii) recorded its use on the site—use of heavy machinery causes significantly more damage than other forms of digging. A large number of the expanded illegal excavations visible on the August 2014 imagery, particularly around the Acropolis, are substantial enough that the use of heavy machinery is a distinct possibility (see figures 45 and 46).

Dating the looting is problematic.^(viii) It has been reported since 2012, but the intensity has fluctuated, sometimes stopping altogether only to restart later. The use of heavy machinery reported in 2013 appears to have been the most intense phase of digging. The most recent DGAM visit to the site reported that the looting stopped in May 2014. In addition, many of the excavated buildings are made from mudbrick which requires regular maintenance, otherwise it degrades. It has not been possible to maintain the site since the start of the conflict, thus causing additional damage. Together, these disturbances have caused significant damage to the legitimately excavated parts of the site and are spreading into the rest of the site.

EBLA DAMAGE ASSESSMENT SUMMARY		EBLA DAMAGE ASSESSMENT SUMMARY	
LOCATION NAME	DAMAGE LEVEL	LOCATION NAME	DAMAGE LEVEL
Aleppo Gate	No visible damage	North-Eastern Fortress	Moderate damage
Area CC (Excavation)	Severe damage	North-Western Fortress	Moderate damage
Area F	Destroyed	Private Ishtar Temple	Severe damage
Area FF	No visible damage	Resheph Temple	Severe damage
Area R	Possible damage	Royal Palace and Archives Room (reconstructed)	Severe damage
Ceremonial/Northern Palace	Severe damage	South-Eastern Fortress & Fort Complex	Severe damage
City Walls	Moderate damage	Structure PS	Possible damage
Crown Prince's Palace	Severe damage	Temple of Ishtar	Severe damage
Damascus Gate	No visible damage	Temple of Shamash	Severe damage
Dead Kings' Sanctuary	Severe damage	Ticket Booth, Café, and Museum	Severe damage
Desert/South-Eastern Gate	Severe damage	Western Fortress	Severe damage
Euphrates Gate	Possible damage	Western Residence	Severe damage
Ishtar's Sacred Area	Severe damage		
MBA Royal Palace	Severe damage		

A review of the satellite imagery indicates significant alterations have occurred at the site [...] All of the legitimately excavated areas are heavily disturbed. Most of the excavations have been extended, possibly with heavy, earth-moving machinery [...] The use of heavy machinery reported in 2013 appears to have been the most intense phase of digging

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 16 December 2008 and 04 August 2014 was used for this report.



FIGURE 47. The excavated area has been significantly extended. Most of the uncovered ruins have been severely damaged or destroyed.

AREA F

Description

Excavated structure, possibly part of the palace complex G, dating originally to the Early Bronze Age (c. 3100 – 2150 BC), or linked to the Middle Bronze Age Palace (c. 2150 – 1600 BC).

Damage Assessment

This area of Ebla has been heavily damaged. A comparison of the satellite imagery from December 2008 and August 2014 indicates that only the faintest traces remain of legitimately excavated features in this area. Furthermore, substantial parts of the acropolis around this area and extending south have been dug up, most likely with heavy machinery (see figures 47 and 48).



FIGURE 48. Area F before damage.

DESERT GATE/ SOUTH-EASTERN GATE (L)

Description

Excavated gateway flanked by wide, mud-brick bastions in the city walls. It dates to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2150 – 1600 BC), replacing an earlier third-millennium BC structure.

Damage Assessment

Tracks visible on the satellite imagery indicate that this gate is still being used to access the site; the vibrations this causes could potentially damage the mud-brick remains. A large platform surrounded by an embankment has been constructed next to and over the gate. The area measures approximately 3,700 m². The platform appears to have been covered, perhaps with gravel or tarmac. The area to the north of it also appears disturbed.

WESTERN RESIDENCE (STRUCTURE Z)

Description

Excavated structure, perhaps from the second millennium BC.

Damage Assessment

The excavations appear to have been heavily disturbed, to the point at which they are now unrecognisable. The excavations have also been extended and embankments have been built adjacent to them.

WESTERN FORTRESS (V)

Description

Excavated fort that dates back to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2150 – 1600 BC).

Damage Assessment

A review of the satellite imagery indicates the excavations have been heavily disturbed, to the point of being barely recognisable. This indicates that the walls have either been severely damaged, destroyed or buried by soil from illicit excavations. As there is no evidence of large-scale soil removal in or around this structure, the former is more likely.

SOUTH-EASTERN FORTRESS (M)

Description

Excavated fortress adjacent to the south-eastern gate. It dates back to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2150 – 1600 BC).

Damage Assessment

Satellite imagery indicates the excavations have been heavily disturbed. The north and east sides of the excavated area have been extended, severely damaging or destroying the existing excavations, while the west side has been filled in with soil. A rectangular embankment has been built adjoining the fortress, which forms the southeast corner. It covers approximately 11,000 m², and has a small grey square feature (almost 200 m²) in the centre, surrounded by disturbed soil. This is either a structure or a parking area. Several small looting holes are also visible around the fortress. Adjacent to this, a platform has been dug into the city wall covering, approximately 150 m², with a ramp leading up to it, also dug into the wall.



Severe Damage

TEMPLE OF SHAMASH (TEMPLE N)

Description

Excavated second-millennium BC temple.

Damage Assessment

The excavations have been heavily disturbed. The original excavated area covered some 1,600 m² on the 2008 satellite imagery, but the area of disturbance on the 2014 imagery covers approximately 2,000 m². Additionally, the remains of the excavation are now indistinct. These have likely been covered or severely damaged/destroyed.

CEREMONIAL/NORTHERN PALACE (P)

Description

Early second-millennium BC palace.

Damage Assessment

Satellite imagery indicates the excavations have been heavily disturbed, to where some parts are now barely recognisable. In particular, the clarity of the features in the northern, western and southern parts has significantly degraded between the acquisition of the two images in December 2008 and August 2014, suggesting they have either been severely damaged, destroyed or buried by soil excavated from somewhere else. However, there is no evidence of large-scale earth moving visible on other parts of the site which would create a large amount of soil. Several small looting holes are also visible in the south-eastern corner of the excavated area.

CROWN PRINCE'S PALACE (PALACE Q)

Description

Excavated structure, probably dedicated to deceased royal ancestors, most likely dating back to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2150 – 1600 BC).

Damage Assessment

The excavations have been disturbed, in particular, the excavations in the northwest corner have been extended. The clarity of part of the excavations on the eastern side have decreased between the acquisition of the two images (December 2008 and August 2014), suggesting the structures have either been severely damaged or destroyed, or buried by spoil from looting done elsewhere. Several looting holes are also visible inside the structure.

RESHEPH TEMPLE (C)

Description

Excavated temple, most likely dating back to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2150 – 1600 BC).

Damage Assessment

Satellite imagery indicates the excavations have been disturbed. The clarity of the excavations has decreased between the acquisition of the two images (December 2008 and August 2014), suggesting the structures have either been severely damaged, destroyed or buried by spoil from looting done elsewhere. Several looting holes are also visible inside the structure. Furthermore, a rectangular embankment has been created from the east of the temple to the city wall, using heavy, earth-moving machinery. It covers an area of 9,000 m² and has a small grey square structure or parking area in the centre, covering approximately 150 m². A vehicle of some sort is visible just inside the eastern wall. Attached to this is an excavation into the city wall where it appears a platform of about 200 m² has been flattened into the wall.

DEAD KINGS' SANCTUARY (B)

Description

This complex, together with the Crown Prince's Palace, was responsible for administering the cult of the ancestors. The excavated structure most likely dates back to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2150 – 1600 BC). As part of this complex, natural caves were used for princely burials during the period between 1825 – 1650 BC. The Royal Necropolis extended underneath the Crown Prince's Palace (Q) and the Temple to Reshef (C).

Damage Assessment

This excavated structure has sustained severe damage; many of the wall edges have been destroyed, severely damaged or buried with soil, particularly in the western section. Excavations in the eastern section have been illegally extended, and small looting holes and signs of severe soil disturbance can be seen throughout this building.^(ix)

TEMPLE OF ISHTAR/ISHTAR'S SACRED AREA (P2, P3, AND PS)

Description

This excavated part of the temple complex, dedicated to the goddess Ishtar, dates primarily to about 1950 BC, though the Lions Terrace dates back to approximately 1650 BC.

Damage Assessment

The excavations have been heavily disturbed and, in some parts, potentially destroyed or buried under soil. Given the levels of soil disturbance that are visible, the former is more likely. The western area of the excavation is full of looting holes which have potentially destroyed the site's features—these extend to the south of the excavated area. Adjacent to this, at least 12 more looting holes were dug into the base of the acropolis mound. No damage is visible to the Lions Terrace (Area P3). Structure PS, south of the main complex and east of the terrace, has experienced the worst damage. The area has either been completely infilled with soil or completely destroyed; no trace of the excavated features are visible on the August 2014 satellite image. Two small looting holes are visible south of it. To the east, a section of the acropolis wall has been excavated, potentially with heavy machinery. It may be that the spoil from this has filled structure PS or that may also have been excavated.

MBA ROYAL PALACE (E)

Description

Excavated Royal Palace dating back to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2150 – 1600 BC).

Damage Assessment

A comparison of the satellite imagery indicates that a new track has been built up the side of the acropolis to this excavated area. The northern and eastern parts of the excavated palace have been destroyed; the area is heavily disturbed and there are signs of extensive soil removal. Some of the southern excavated walls are no longer visible as they were either buried with soil or severely damaged/destroyed. Numerous looting holes are visible, both within the destroyed area and the damaged area.

PRIVATE ISHTAR TEMPLE (D)

Description

Private temple to Ishtar; part of the Palace complex G. It dates back to the Early Bronze Age (c. 3100 – 2150 BC).

Damage Assessment

This area has been badly damaged. A comparison of the imagery acquired on December 2008 to that acquired on August 2014 indicates that the excavated temple walls have significantly degraded, suggesting either heavy damage or burial of the features with soil. Given the level of disturbance visible in the general area, and the damage to the surrounding structures, the former is more likely. The unexcavated area east of the temple has been partially excavated. The section of a legitimately excavated building linking the private temple to the reconstructed palace has been almost completely destroyed; almost none of the excavated walls are visible as of 2014, and a large area to the east has been illegally excavated.



Severe Damage

ROYAL PALACE AND ARCHIVES ROOM (RECONSTRUCTED) (G)

Description

This excavated Palace complex dates back to the Early Bronze Age (c. 3100 – 2150 BC). Large parts of it have been reconstructed, including the audience room and the archives room, which contained a collection of some 18,000 tablets dating as far back as 2300 BC.

Damage Assessment

Analysis of the two satellite images indicates that several of the reconstructed walls have been destroyed, including the eastern end of the monumental staircase walls and large parts of the southern end of the structure. A few looting holes are visible in front of the reconstructed area, and the whole area appears heavily disturbed. Behind the palace complex, sections of the acropolis have also been illegally excavated.

AREA CC

Description

Excavated area; the features date back to between 3100 – 1600 BC.

Damage Assessment

The imagery shows that this excavated area is no longer visible. The legitimately excavated features have either been severely damaged/destroyed or completely filled in with soil. As no adjacent excavated areas with the potential to provide soil are visible, the former seems more likely.

TICKET BOOTH, CAFÉ AND MUSEUM

Description

Three modern brick structures.

Damage Assessment

The area around these buildings has been redeveloped, and the largest building is no longer present.^(x)

Analysis of the two satellite images indicates that several of the [Royal Palace] reconstructed walls have been destroyed, including the eastern end of the monumental staircase walls and large parts of the southern end of the structure. Behind the palace complex, sections of the acropolis have also been illegally excavated.

CITY WALLS

Description

The walls surround the outer town and date back to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2150 – 1600 BC), replacing an earlier, third-millennium BC structure. They were up to 30 - 40 m thick and once stood up to 22 m high.

Damage Assessment

Some areas are being used as entrances on and off the site; the vibrations caused by vehicles could potentially damage the mud-brick remains. In one area approximately 200 m west of the Euphrates Gate, there are signs of an excavation. As the site was still being legitimately excavated from 2008 - 2010, it is unknown if this is a legal or illegal excavation. The excavated area covers approximately 300 m². About 100 m east of the Damascus gate is a potential trench abutting the inside of the walls. It measures just over 60 m long and is less than 10 m at its widest point. Again, it is unknown if this is a result of legitimate or illegitimate excavation/construction.^(vi) An excavation into the western city wall has created a platform of roughly 200 m² within the wall, linked to the embankments east of the Resheph Temple (C). A similar platform covering around 150 m² and a ramp have been dug into the wall by the south-eastern fortress (see figures 43 and 44), adjacent to the embankment there. A section covering approximately 250 m² has been excavated out of the north-western corner of the city wall, adjacent to the north-western fortress excavations). Given their relationship to the embankments, these are almost certainly illicit.^(xii)

NORTH-EASTERN FORTRESS (EE)

Description

Excavated fortress dating back to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2150 – 1600 BC), replacing an earlier, third-millennium BC structure.

Damage Assessment

While most of the excavated area appears undisturbed, the southern-most part has been mostly filled in and has also possibly been looted. The appearance of the infill on the August 2014 satellite image matches the patterns seen in looting holes elsewhere on the site.

NORTH-WESTERN FORTRESS (AA)

Description

Excavated fortress, adjacent to the south-eastern gate. It dates back to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2150 – 1600 BC).

Damage Assessment

The excavations were disturbed between December 2008 and August 2014. In particular, the south-western end has been extended slightly. The fort excavations have been incorporated into the north-western end of a raised earth embankment, which covers an area of approximately 6,300 m², the centre of which is a small grey square feature (about 160 m²) that is either a parking area or a structure. There are also two small areas of disturbed soil adjacent to it. A very small structure or vehicle is visible within the embankment; the disturbed soil around it suggests it is intended to be there on a long-term basis. To the north of the embankment is an excavated area where a large amount of soil has been removed within the city wall covering 250 m². New tracks are visible on the satellite imagery leading from the road through the centre of the site to this excavation and to the north-western fort, suggesting these are recent excavations. Soil has also been removed from a large area south of the embankment, covering approximately 1,300 m².



Moderate Damage

EUPHRATES GATE (BB)

Description

Excavated gateway flanked by wide mud-brick bastions in the city walls. It dates back to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2150 – 1600 BC), replacing an earlier third-millennium BC structure.

Damage Assessment

This area is being used as an entrance on and off the site; the vibrations this causes could potentially damage the mud-brick remains. An embankment has been constructed around the entrance, measuring 450 m in length. Some of the soil within it has been disturbed, whether from construction or earlier looting (now filled in) is unknown. A second banked enclosure has been constructed next to it, covering nearly 7,000 m². This enclosure contains a grey square feature that is either a parking area or a covering in the centre, measuring 200 m². Soil heaps are also visible next to it. However, these embankments do not reach the excavated area of the Gate.

AREA R

Description

Excavated area with features that date back to between 3100 – 1600 BC.

Damage Assessment

The excavated areas, which were clearly visible on the satellite imagery acquired in 2008, are no longer visible on the 2014 imagery. They have potentially been filled in with soil. The condition of the excavated features is unknown.

NOTE

No damage was visible to area FF, which had no open excavations or to the Damascus Gate (A) or the Aleppo Gate (DD). These were the only seemingly undisturbed features, but given the level of damage to the other features on the site, it cannot be ruled out.

- (i) UNESCO Ebla (Tell Mardikh) Tentative World Heritage Submission [1] (Translation E. Cunliffe)
- (ii) Structures have been identified using a combination of Burns, 2010, p156 [2] and Pinnock 2001, P14 [3]
- (iii) Both the platforms in the walls and the embankments are apparently part of a military training camp that was opened on the site, reported by the DGAM in February 2014 [4]. Available at: <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=239&id=1150>
- (iv) The DGAM visited Ebla in November 2013 and published a number of photographs of the looting and damage [5]. Available at: <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=239&id=1054>.
- (v) Report and photograph by the The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology in March 2013 [6]. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=387426824697768&set=a.387426678031116.1073741828.324869057620212&-type=1&relevant_count=2&ref=nf
- (vi) News article and video by the New York Times, April 2013 [7]. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/world/middleeast/syrian-war-devastates-ancient-sites.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&, and <http://www.nytimes.com/video/world/middleeast/100000002157622/destroying-syrias-past.html>
- (vii) DGAM report from July 2013 [8] and report from June 2014 [9]. Available at: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=941>, and <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1268>
- (viii) Looting has been reported at the site by Le patrimoine archéologique Syrien en danger since April 2012 [10]. By November 2012, the The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology reported November 2012 [11] that looting had occurred at the Acropolis, especially Palace G around the Archive room and administrative suite, parts of palace E, some small damage to Northern Palace P, the Great Temple of Ishtar and some other small scattered holes. They also stated the site had been damaged by neglect. However, they reported that although there was fierce digging at the start, this declined later, partly due to the unpredictability of the finds, and partly thanks to the cooperation of the local people. Unfortunately, by December 2012 [6], illegal excavations had restarted in the Acropolis Palace G and the archive room and Palace E. Excavations in the Northern Palace P, the Great Temple of Ishtar and the Southern Palace (FF) were minor, and a single hole was dug in HH and wells were searched. Reports continue throughout the conflict of both ongoing looting and the cooperation of the local people in preventing it. According to a DGAM report from June 2014 [9], no looting occurred during their site visit in 2014; the illegal excavations stopped in May 2014. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/le-patrimoine-arch%C3%A9ologique-syrien-en-danger-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A2%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%B1/news-are-too-serious-to-be-left-to-journalists/296457393755925>, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=336033349837116&-set=a.324921080948343.76891.324869057620212&type=1&relevant_count=1&ref=nf, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=387426824697768&set=a.387426678031116.1073741828.324869057620212&type=1&relevant_count=2&ref=nf, and <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1268>
- (ix) Although it is not possible to see the damage to the caves using satellite imagery, this video [7] by the New York Times shows the levels of looting within the cave necropolis. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/video/world/middleeast/100000002157622/destroying-syrias-past.html>
- (x) According to the The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology, in March 2013 the Idlib Department of Antiquities reported extensive damage to the modern facilities of the site, such as the cafeteria and the newly constructed visitor centre, in addition to the service room [6]. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=387426824697768&set=a.387426678031116.1073741828.324869057620212&type=1&relevant_count=2&ref=nf
- (xi) A comparison to DigitalGlobe imagery available on Google Earth dating to August 2011 suggests they are illegitimate, as neither excavation was visible then. Shortly after this date, fieldwork in Syria by foreign missions stopped.
- (xii) The illegal construction of these platforms were reported during a site visit conducted by the DGAM in February 2014 [12]. Available at: <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=239&id=1150>