

Raqqa (ar-Raqqah) الرقّة

ar-Raqqah Governorate



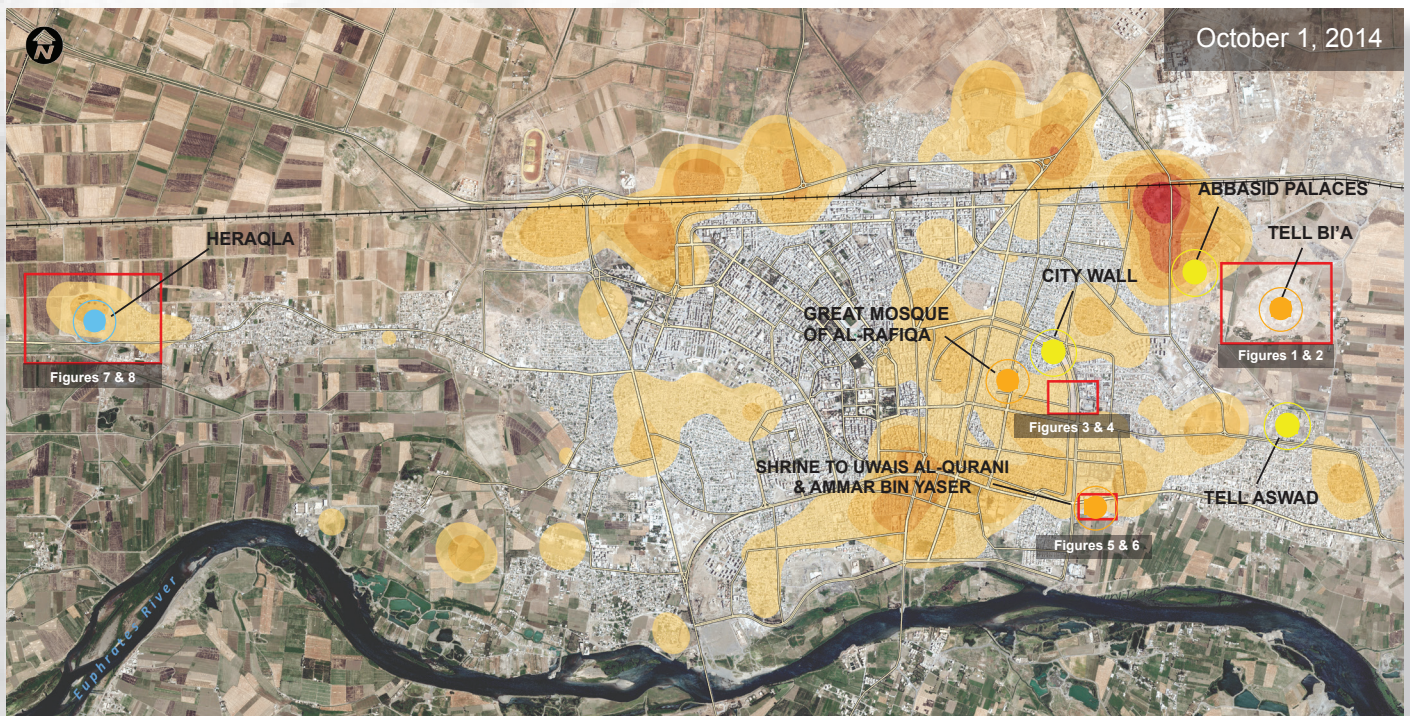


FIGURE 83. Density of detected damage in Raqqa. Damage increases from yellow to red.

High to low damage

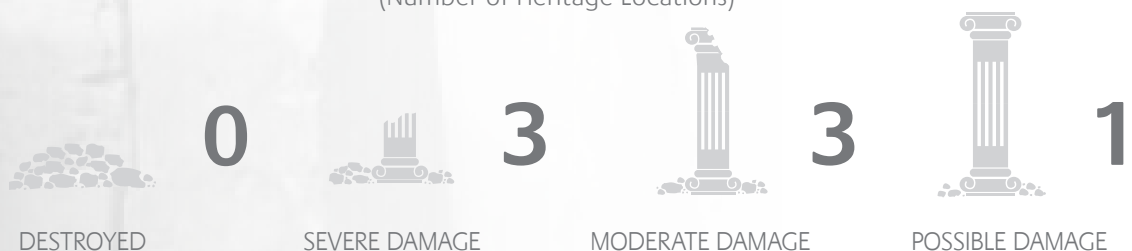
Site Description

The site has had continuous occupation since the Bronze Age, but is particularly important as an eighth-century Islamic capital. It is an exceptional site—one of the best documented—with some of the most significant urban, architectural and decorative achievements of the first decades during the Abbasid Caliphate reign. The modern city of ar-Raqqa is the center point of two 5 km radius which include the city of Tell Bi'a (now a partially excavated mound), a number of other small mounded sites around it and the fortress of Heraqla. The Abbasid Dynasty city of Raqqa-Rāfiqa was added to the UNESCO Tentative World Heritage List in 8 June 1999⁽ⁱ⁾:

“This typical city of the Abbasid era erected on a Seleucid site occupied by Romans and Byzantines, had a strategic and symbolic significance for the Caliphs of Baghdad. It brought them closer to Damascus, marked their victory over Damascus Umayyad, and symbolized their supremacy over the large Islamic Empire. The city, located at the crossroads between Byzantium, Syria, and Mesopotamia, testifies of the artistic and cultural eclecticism at the origins of Islamic arts.”⁽ⁱⁱ⁾



Raqqa Damage Level (Number of Heritage Locations)





Mosque Uways al-Qarani in Raqqa/Photo: Wikimedia Creative Commons.

Status Overview

Using satellite imagery, this study has examined 28 key buildings/locations within and around this property that is included on the World Heritage Tentative List of Syria; the list of features examined can be found in Annex 2. In general, the historic/archaeological sites of Raqqa-Ráfiqa appear to have sustained relatively little damage. The primary damage is to the holy shrines, many of which have endured severe damage. While the bodies these shrines purport to hold are sacred and ancient (several date to the time of the Prophet Mohammed), the actual buildings housing them are (relatively) recent.

Although there was looting in Tell Bi'a in the past, in recent years the tell has experienced a dramatic increase of heavy looting, particularly between June and October 2014 (see section on Tell Bi'a). In addition, between the acquisition of the two satellite images on 12 October 2011 and 06 October 2014, entire sections have been excavated, causing severe damage. None of the surrounding tells are affected, and no damage was visible to Heraqla (see figure 83).

RAQQA DENSITY MAP

The map is a density illustration of satellite-detected areas of damage and destruction in the Syrian cities of Ar Raqqa, Syria. Using satellite imagery from 2014, 2013, 2011 and 2010, UNITAR/UNOSAT created a damage site density index for affected areas in the city. Citywide analysis revealed a total of 467 affected structures in Ar-Raqqa. Most of the highest density of damage was found around the Abbasid Palaces and the Old City (see figure 82).

-  Destroyed
-  Severe Damage
-  Moderate Damage
-  Possible Damage

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, 2 and 3 satellite imagery acquired on 12 October 2011, 19 June 2014 and 06 October 2014 was used for this report.



Raqqā Qasr Banat/Photo: Wikimedia Creative Commons.

RAQQA DAMAGE ASSESSMENT SUMMARY	
LOCATION NAME	DAMAGE LEVEL
Abbasid Palaces (Main Palace of Harun al-Rashid, Palace A, Palace B, Palace C, Palace D, North Complex, Western Palace, Eastern Palace, Eastern Complex, Northeast Complex)	Moderate damage
Great Mosque of al-Rafīqa (Al-Mansour Mosque)	Severe damage
Shrine of Uwais al-Qarani and Ammar Bin Yasser	Severe damage
Tell Bi'a	Severe damage
Tell Aswad	Moderate damage
Walls of al-Rafīqa	Moderate damage

Although there was looting in Tell Bi'a in the past, in recent years the tell has experienced a dramatic increase of heavy looting, particularly between June and October 2014. In addition, between the acquisition of the satellite images, entire sections have been excavated, causing severe damage.



FIGURE 84. Shrine to Uwais al-Qarani and Ammar Bin Yasser.
Extensive damage to shrine buildings and structures.

GREAT MOSQUE OF AL-RAFIQA (ALT. AL MANSOUR MOSQUE)

Description

An eighth-century AD mosque; initial construction began 772 AD. Only the plain 25 m round minaret and part of the courtyard colonnade remain. However, it contains a shrine of great reverence, built during the nineteenth century. The Sufi Mausoleum of Wali Othman Saad el'Din Pacha al-Azem was built on the remains of the Great Mosque of Raqqa.

Damage Assessment

Imagery examination reveals the remains of the mosque appear untouched, but the green-domed shrine in the centre has been completely destroyed. This is likely to have been caused by bulldozing in January 2014.⁽ⁱ⁾ The ground inside the mosque also appears disturbed, perhaps from excavation.⁽ⁱⁱ⁾

SHRINE TO UWAIS AL-QARANI & AMMAR BIN YASSER

Description

These shrines contain the remains of two martyrs of the battle of Siffin (657 AD). The identification of their tombs, relying on traditions, is conjectural. Additionally, adjacent to the eastern mosque is the minor tomb of Ubayy ibn Ka'b. The current shrine was built over the original tombs (completed 2003). It consisted of a mosque housing each tomb and linked by an arcaded precinct, as well as an additional minor tomb of Ubayy ibn Ka'b to the east.

Damage Assessment

The shrine has been severely damaged. Satellite imagery shows that all three tombs, their minarets, and a section of the linking arcaded precinct have been destroyed. Remnants of a few walls of the eastern tomb and some of the central precinct are still standing, though they were likely damaged by the explosions. The demolition (using explosives) dates to May 2014.⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ The central precinct roof (southwest side) was also punctured by a shell in June 2013.^(iv) This appears to have been patched as only minor scarring is visible on the imagery (see figures 84 and 85).



FIGURE 85. Shrine to Uwais al-Qarani and Ammar Bin Yasser.
Shrine buildings and structures before damage.



Shrine to Uwais Al-Qarani & Ammar Bin Yasser. Crater on the roof of the mosque caused by alleged bombing/Photo: APSA (The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology), MCR/ar-Raqqa, 30 July, 2014.



Shrine to Uwais Al-Qarani & Ammar Bin Yasser before damage/Photo: Wikimedia Commons.



Severe Damage

The [Uwais al-Qarani] shrine has been severely damaged. Satellite imagery shows that all three tombs, their minarets and a section of the linking arcaded precinct have been destroyed. Remnants of a few walls of the eastern tomb and some of the central precinct are still standing, though they were likely damaged by the explosions.

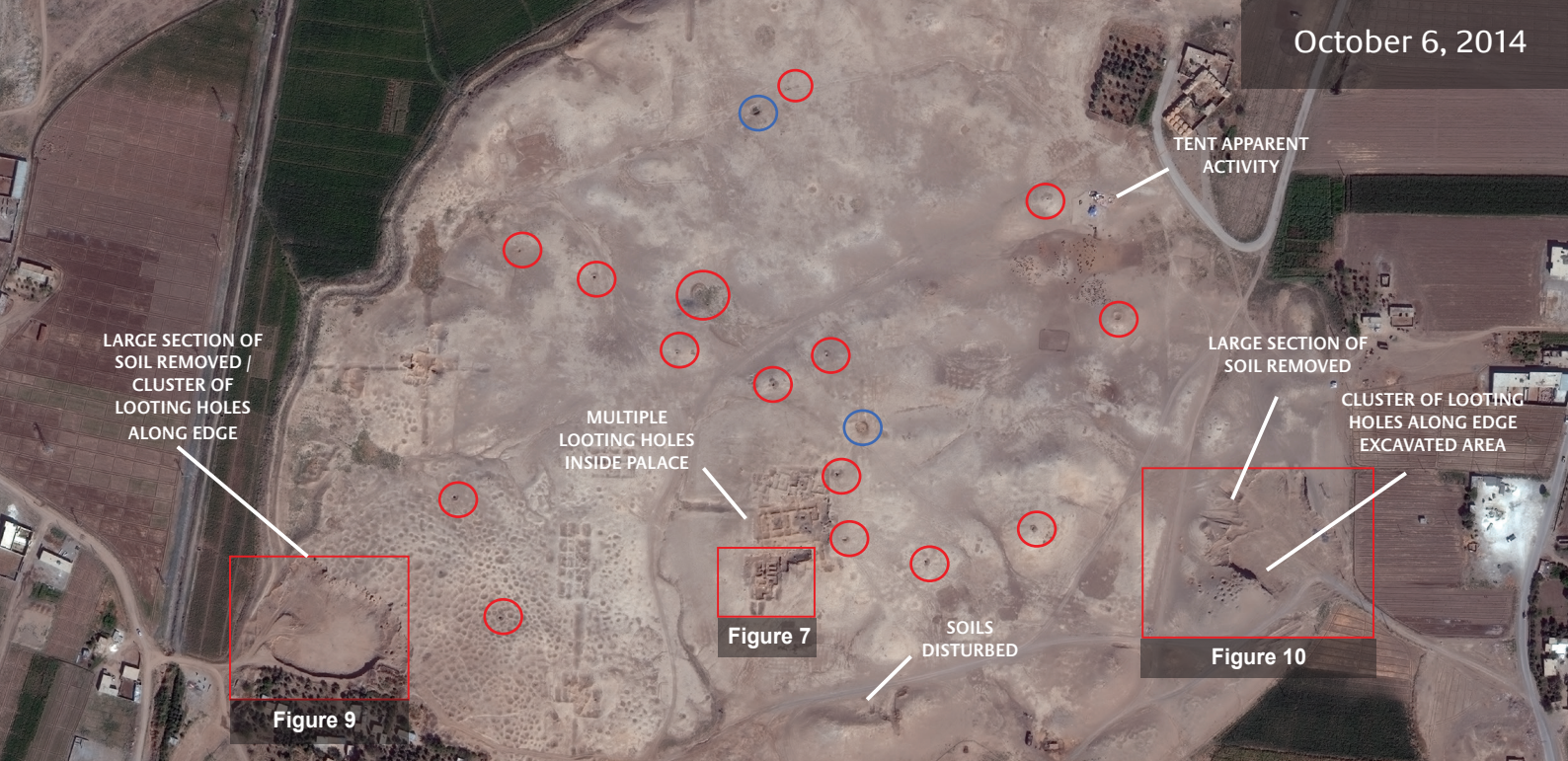



FIGURE 86. Tell Bi'a. Extensive looting and excavated areas at Tell Bi'a. Looting occurred between 19 June and 9 October, 2014.

 Looting holes

TELL BI'A (TUTTUL)

Description

The modern mound known as Tell Bi'a covers 38 ha. It was once the prominent city of Tuttul and has been occupied since the middle of the third millennium BC. Its zenith was during the Bronze Age (second millennium BC), although it remained sporadically occupied until the early Islamic period in the seventh through tenth centuries AD.

Damage Assessment

A review of imagery shows intensive looting concentrated on the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine settlement in the southwest part of the site covering approximately 10 ha. Minor looting was present in 2011 (see figure 86) and has dramatically increased between June and October 2014 (see figure 86 and 87). There are multiple, small new holes in the excavated palace (Bronze Age). A few of the holes from previous looting in 2011 are distinctively darker and larger, suggesting they have been reopened. Numerous additional looting holes have appeared throughout the site, mostly isolated holes, with clusters of holes concentrated within the palace and along excavated areas (see figures 88 and 89). There are two areas which have been completely excavated with earth moving machinery. One area, approximately 7,000 m², has been removed from the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine area that was previously looted in 2011. The other area is on the far right of the site where an area of approximately 9,000 m² has been removed. The reason is unknown; if it was to obtain earth, no spoil heaps or signs of construction are evident.



Tuttul Tombs south of central mound/
Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

There are two areas which have been completely excavated with earth-moving machinery. One area approximately 7,000 m², has been removed from the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine area.



Severe Damage



FIGURE 87. Tell Bi'a. Excavated areas and old looting holes at Tell Bi'a.

Visibly old looting holes and excavated areas



FIGURE 88. Excavation #1 At Tell Bi'a Tutul. Large section of soil removed and cluster of looting holes along edge of excavation area.



FIGURE 89. Excavation #2 At Tell Bi'a Tutul. Large section of soil removed and cluster of looting holes along edge of excavation area.

A review of the imagery shows intensive looting concentrated on the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine settlement in the southwest part of the site covering approximately 10 hectares. Minor looting was present in 2011 and has dramatically increased between June and October 2014.



FIGURE 90. Archaeological walls. Destroyed section of tower and wall.



Field of view (Figure 12)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WALLS

Description

The original, restored, mud-brick, city walls are from the eighth century AD Abbasid city. Two thirds of the walls still survive.

Damage Assessment

Imagery clearly shows damage to a small section, approximately 8 m, has been largely removed—only rubble remains. This damage is thought to have occurred at the beginning of May 2013^(v) (see figures 90 and 91). Imagery analysis also suggests that some of the turrets farther north on the wall have also been damaged, but this could not be verified.



SCAN THIS CODE
TO WATCH A VIDEO
OF THIS WORLD
HERITAGE
UNDER FIRE

Destroyed section of Archaeological Walls/Photo: YouTube, Ar-Raqqa Media Centre, May 2013.
Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpDacVUXEzw>

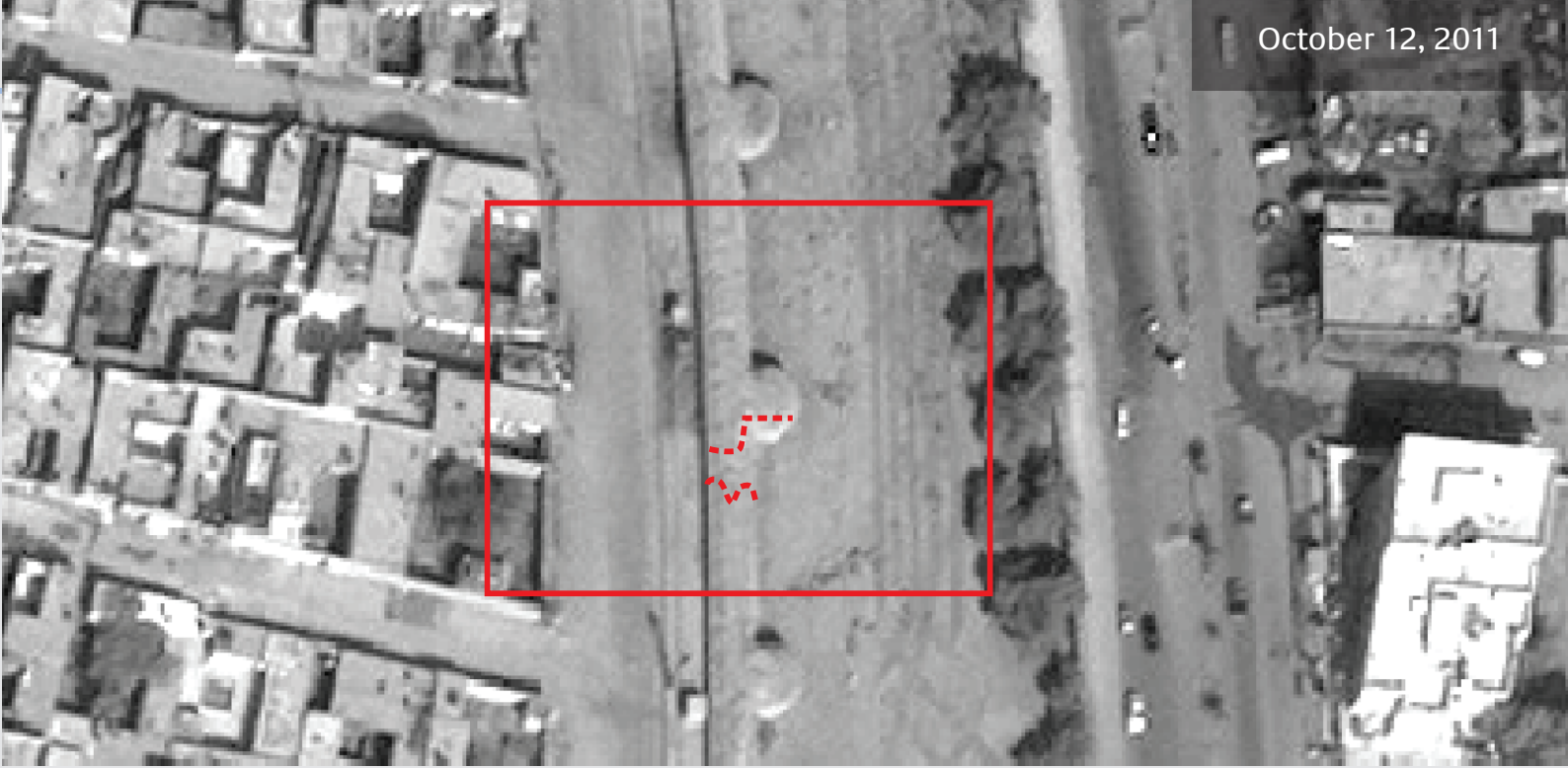


FIGURE 91. Tower and part of the wall before damage occurred.

ABBASID PALACES

Description

Currently, the huge complex of eighth-century Abbasid Palaces in northeast Raqqa consist of a reconstructed mud-brick palace (the Eastern palace) and several other excavated palaces, most of which have been built over.

Damage Assessment

Although the reconstructed palace is undamaged, building has continued in this area on the northern end of the location of the Western palace and over the North complex.

TELL ASWAD (SHUKSA)

Description

The Neolithic site known as Tell Aswad or Shuksa covers approximately 5 ha and dates back to 8700–7500 BC.

Damage Assessment

Much of the site appears to be undisturbed, however a new road has been built crossing through the northwest section of the site, measuring approximately 135 m in length. In addition, soil appears to have been removed in the south-eastern section of the site, potentially disturbing archaeological soils.



Moderate Damage



FIGURE 92. Imagery from 6 October 2014 shows new structures and collection of stones scattered throughout the Harqaleh site.



HARQALEH

Description

A victory monument from the ninth-century Abbasid period, built by Harun al-Rashid commemorating the victory over the Byzantine Empire. The site is surrounded mostly by agricultural fields.

Damage Assessment

While the monument appears to be undisturbed, the area surrounding the monument has seen significant building development. Approximately 19 new structures have been built on the site between June and October 2014. Multiple collections of stones are visible to the east and immediately south of the monument indicating potential looting or the use of archaeological stones as building materials. New paths are also visible linking to main roads surrounding the perimeter of the site, potentially disturbing archaeological soils in addition to development activities (see figures 92 and 93).



FIGURE 93. Imagery from 19 June 2014 before damage occurred at the Harqaleh site.

While the monument appears to be undisturbed, the area surrounding the monument has seen significant building development. Approximately 19 new structures have been built on the sites between June and October 2014.

(i) Facebook report with photos [2] by the The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology of the destruction of the shrine, 19 January 2014

(ii) According to a news article in MWCNews, 08 May 2014 [3], the ground may have been excavated.

(iii) Photos on Facebook [4] from Syrian Perspective showing the destruction of the Shrine, 18 May 2014

(iv) Facebook report with photos [5] by the The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology, 30 July 2013

(v) YouTube video [6] by Ar-Raqqa Media Centre, May 2013