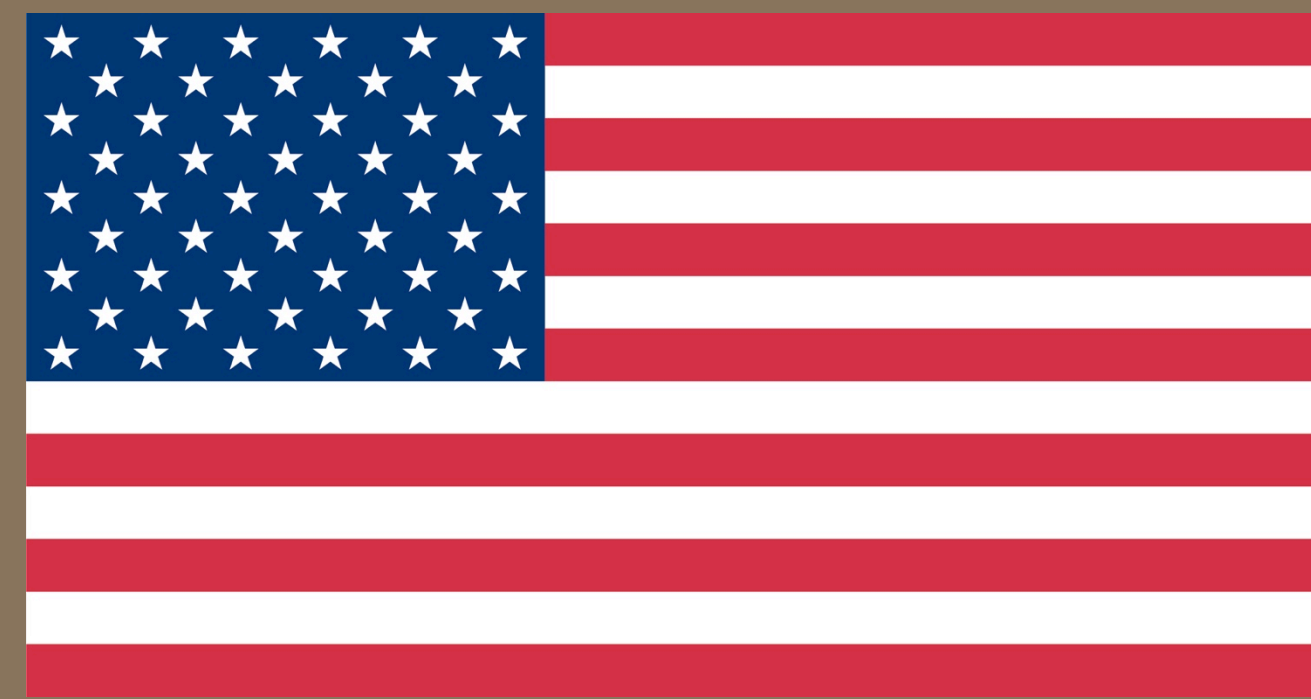


The Syrian Heritage Initiative: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria

Kyra Kaercher, LeeAnn Barnes Gordon, and Kurt Prescott
American Schools of Oriental Research



Mission Statement

The Syrian Heritage Initiative—Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria (SHI) is headed by The American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) and is funded by a cooperative agreement from the US Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. Armed conflict in Syria is contributing to the damage and destruction of cultural heritage. This research project aims to 1) raise awareness in Syria and among the international community about current threats to Syria's cultural heritage through ongoing monitoring and evaluation, 2) assist in mitigating adverse impacts, and 3) identify and plan cultural preservation projects and assistance that can be carried out in Syria now or post-conflict. The project will develop comprehensive documentation for the current condition and future preservation needs of cultural heritage in Syria and will generate immediately relevant best practices for conflict zones in neighboring regions.

Syrian Heritage Background

Syria has been called the “Crossroads of Civilization” for its prominent position not only geographically, but also historically. From earliest times, sites like Abu Hureyra, one of the oldest settlements in the Lake Assad region, give us information on early agriculture. The cities of Damascus and Aleppo lay claim to the oldest inhabited cities in the world. Large tells dot the surface of the Syrian landscape, and the geography contributed to the large kingdoms of Mari and Yamkhad. Ancient Ebla, with its library, and Ugarit, with its own written language, promoted the emergence of the Phoenician script. Greece and Rome left their traces in Syria at sites such as Apamea, with its columned streets, and Palmyra, with its large temples and funerary monuments. The fortified castles of Krak des Chevaliers and Qal’at Salahdin give testament to the Crusades. The Silk Road began its 4,000-mile journey across Asia from the Souq (covered marketplace) in Aleppo. The Umayyad Mosque in Damascus has significantly influenced Islamic architecture. The Noreas of Hama, wooden waterwheels built in the thirteenth century, delivered water to aqueducts that transported it within the town and neighboring countryside. In the largest cities, houses built during the French Mandate period coexist alongside the more modern buildings. Syria has six properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List and another twelve on the Tentative List. As of 2013 these sites have all been placed on the List of World Heritage In Danger. As one can see, Syrian Heritage is not just the heritage of Syria, but rather that of the entire world.

Summary of the Current Conflict

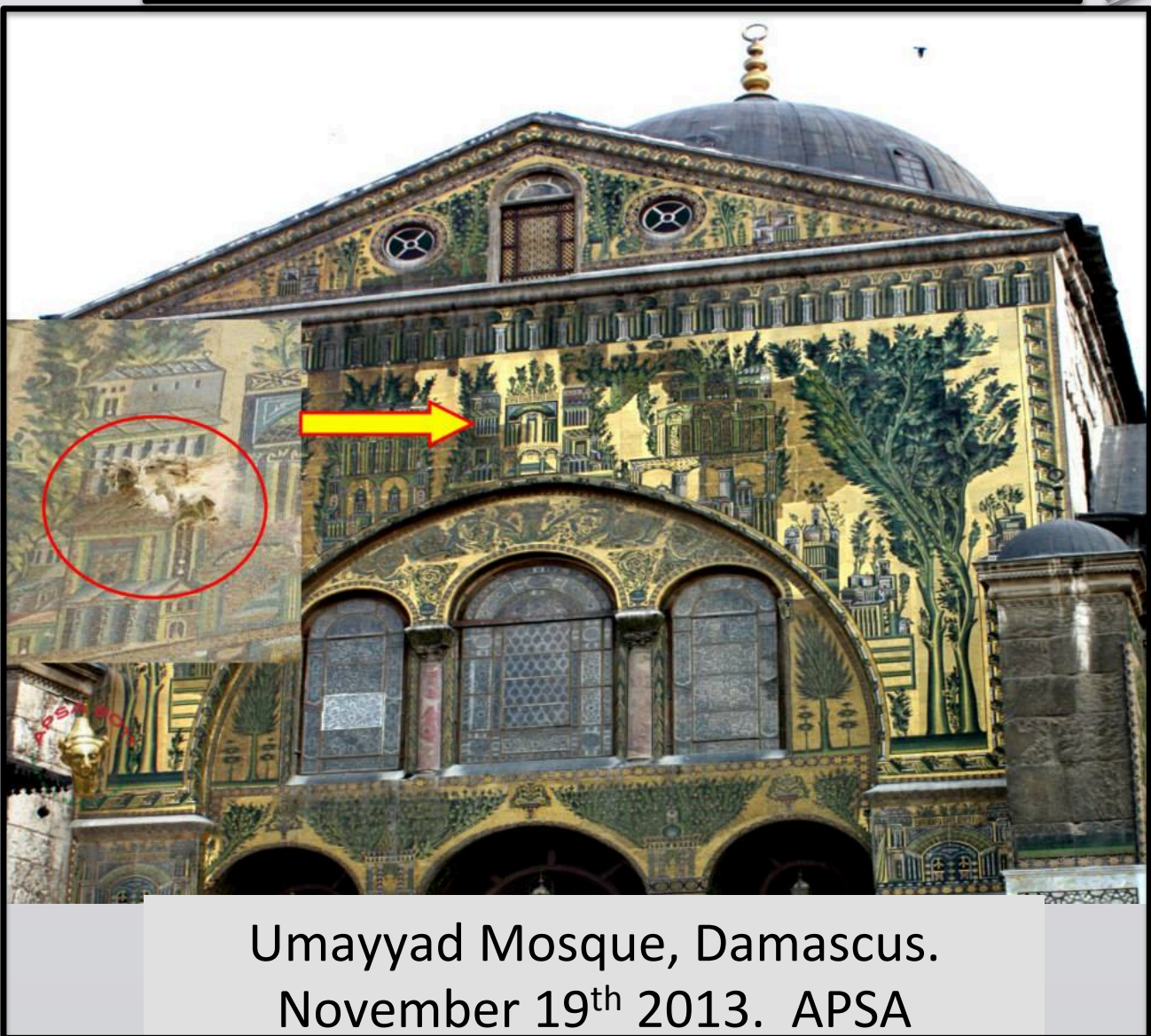
Current unrest in Syria began in March 2011 with protests in the city of Der’a against President Bashar al-Assad’s government, who responded with violent crackdowns. In late 2011, multiple countries passed sanctions against Syria, blocking the sale of oil. Early in 2012, the United Nations (UN) passed a resolution supporting the Arab League’s plan for Bashar al-Assad’s resignation. During the summer of 2012, increasing violence occurred in Syria, and the Syrian National Council was recognized as the legitimate representative of the Syrian People by the UN. In early 2013, this council was renamed, The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. Violence increased throughout the year, and outside forces such as Hezbollah joined the fight. In April 2013, there were confirmed reports of the use of chemical weapons. In January 2014, a convention called Geneva II occurred, holding talks between the Syrian government and the opposition. In May 2014, the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) overtook Mosul, Iraq, as part of its efforts to establish a caliphate in the territory. ISIS now controls an area from Aleppo to Erbil and down the Euphrates almost to Baghdad. The conflict has escalated for more than two years, and the UN currently estimates that more than 100,000 people have died and millions have been displaced.



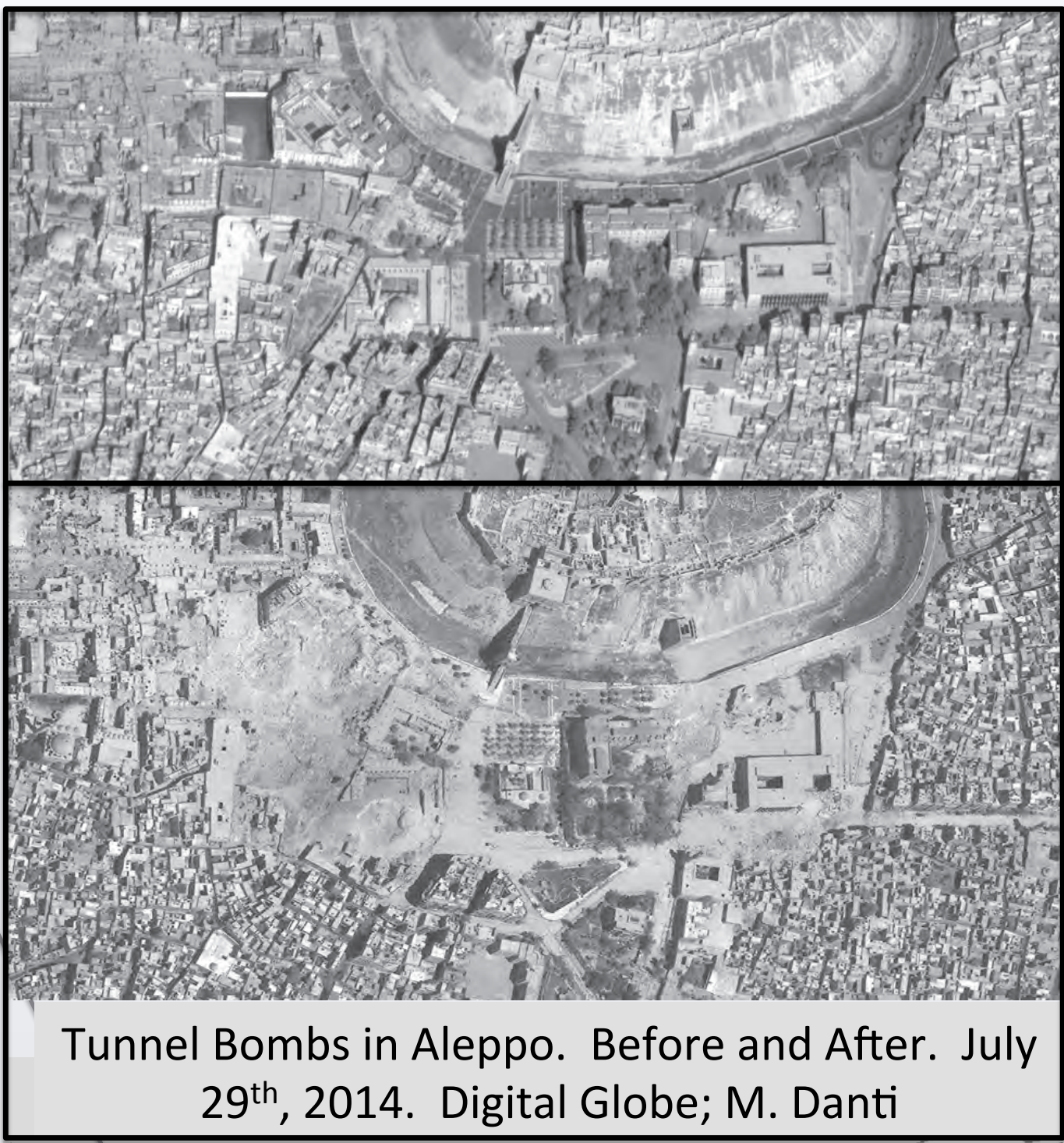
Destruction of Mosaics at Mara’at al-Numan. September 9th, 2014. APSA



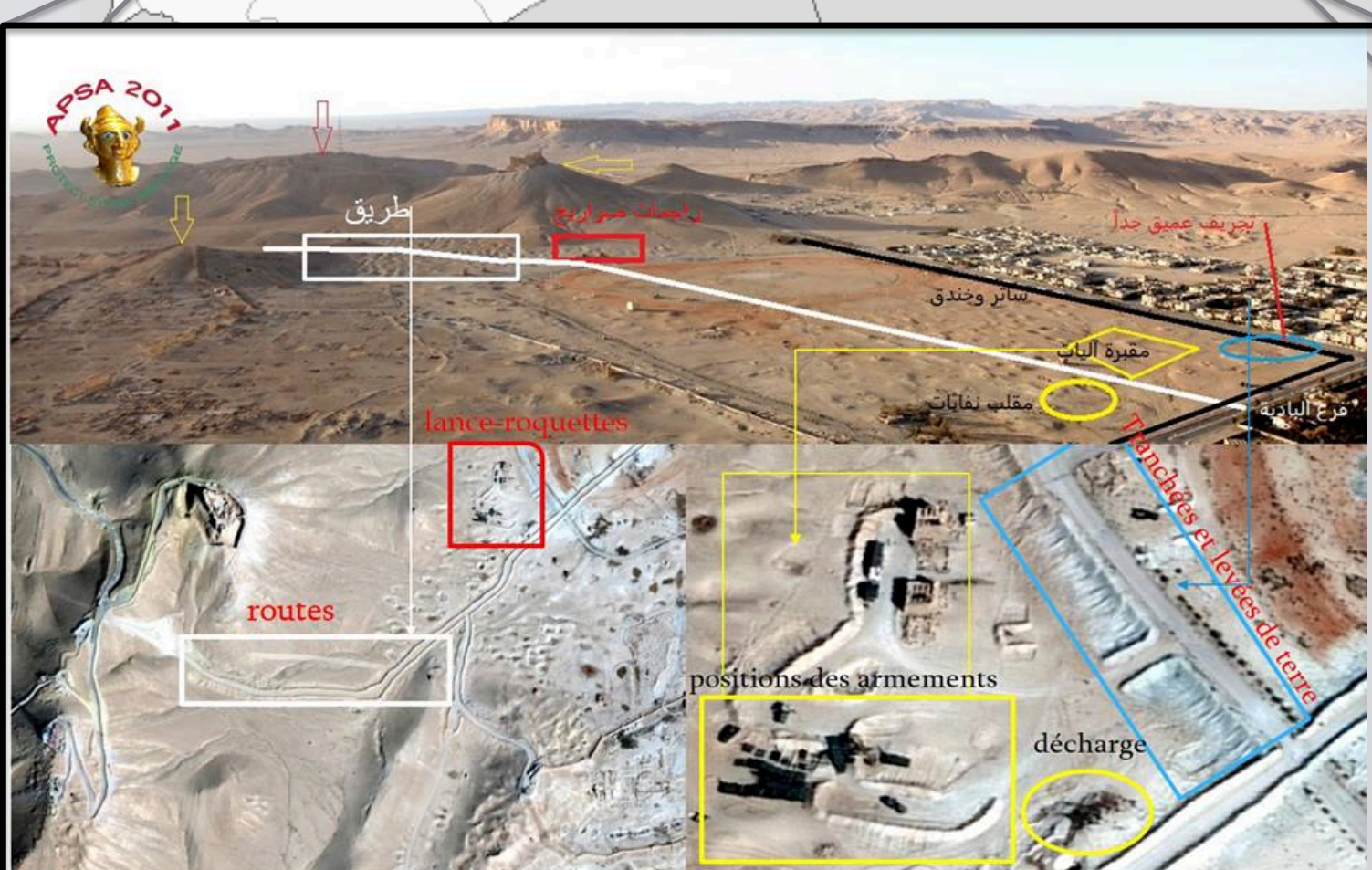
Looting in Apamea. Before and After. S.Branting; J. Casana; Digital Globe



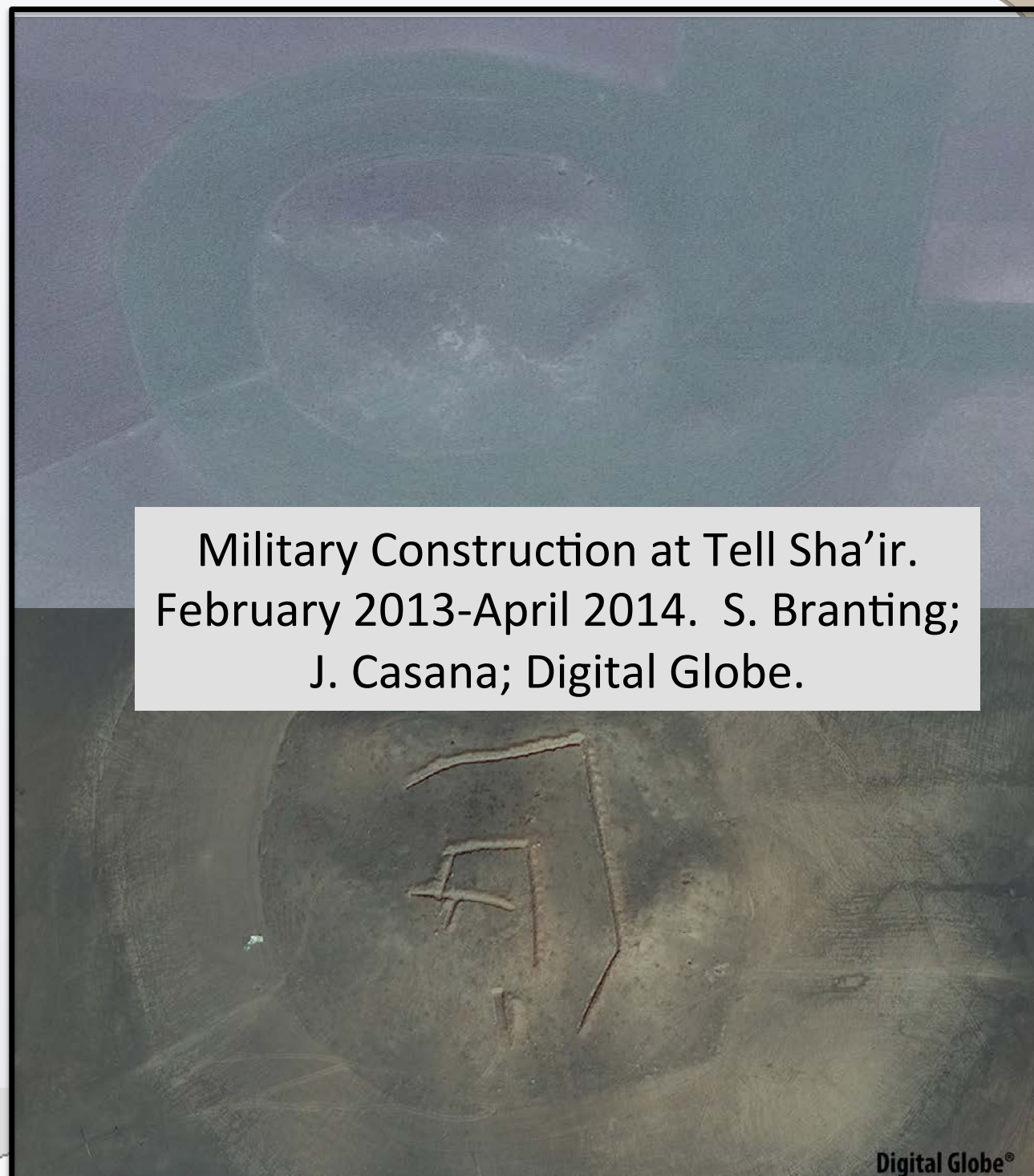
Umayyad Mosque, Damascus. November 19th 2013. APSA



Tunnel Bombs in Aleppo. Before and After. July 29th, 2014. Digital Globe; M. Danti



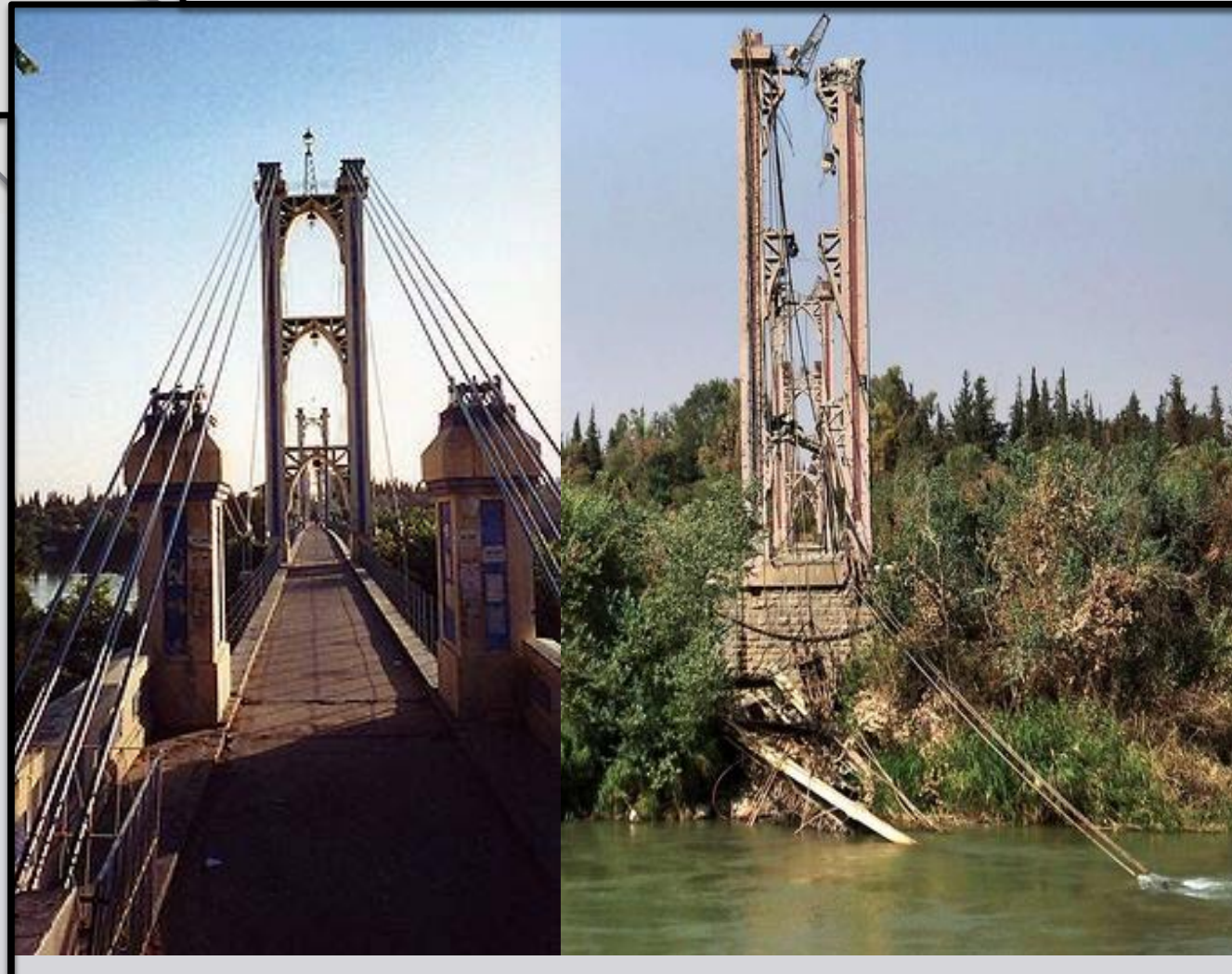
Looting and Military Installments, Palmyra. September 10th 2014. APSA



Military Construction at Tell Sha’ir. February 2013-April 2014. S. Branting; J. Casana; Digital Globe.



Destruction of Tell Ajaja Statues. May 17th, 2014. APSA



Deir ez-Zor Suspension Bridge. February 5th, 2013. Der Tagesspiegel; Reuters.

Who We Are

Co-Director

- Andrew Vaughn (ASOR)
- Scott Branting (ASOR)
- Jesse Casana (University of Arkansas)
- Michael Danti (Boston University and ASOR)
- Abdal-Razzaq Moaz (Indiana University and ASOR)

Co-investigators

- Cheikmous Ali (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique)
- LeeAnn Barnes Gordon (ASOR)
- Michel Fortin (University of Laval)
- Timothy Harrison (University of Toronto)
- Michel al-Maqdissi (The Louvre Museum)
- Bijan Rouhani (ICOMOS-ICORP)
- Richard Zettler (University of Pennsylvania)

Consultants

- Frank Braemer (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique)

- Suzanne Davis (Kelsey Museum of Archaeology)
- Andrew Moore (Archaeological Institute of America)
- Gaetano Palumbo (World Monuments Fund)
- Graham Philip (Durham University)
- Nasser Rabbat (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

Advisory Board

- Samir Abdulac (ICOMOS-CIVVIH)
- Zaki Aslan (ICCROM)
- Karin Bartl (German Archaeological Institute Damascus)
- Emma Cunliffe (Durham University)
- Mohammed Rafique Mughal (Boston University)
- Christopher Rollston (The George Washington University)
- Helene Sader (American University of Beirut)
- Yasser Tabbaa (Independent Scholar)
- Donald Whitcomb (University of Chicago)

Staff

- Laila Abdel-Malek (ASOR)
- Kaitlynn Andersen (ASOR)
- Adam Barnes (CAST)
- Danny Breegi (Boston University)
- Allison Cuneo (Boston University)
- Eva Eshak (ASOR)
- Christopher Fletcher (University of Arkansas)
- Elise Jakoby-Lauger (University of Arkansas)
- Kyra Kaercher (ASOR)
- Jared Koller (Boston University)
- Tony Lauricella (University of Chicago)
- Selma Omerefendic (ASOR)
- Mitra Panahipour (University of Arkansas)
- Susan Penacho (ASOR, University of Chicago)
- Kurt Prescott (ASOR)
- ASOR Staff

Cultural Heritage Monitoring and Documentation

- SHI is monitoring a wide range of media to document the impact of the conflict on cultural heritage as it occurs in real time.
- We are creating and communicating with an expansive network of Syrian heritage specialists, scholars, advisors, NGOs, and volunteers in order to help document and verify the condition of heritage collections and sites.
- We are working with Syrians to strengthen skills in heritage documentation and preservation.
- SHI is coordinating efforts with other organizations that are working to safeguard Syrian heritage.
- We are creating a comprehensive bibliographic database with sources pertaining to a wide range of cultural heritage sites in Syria that offers a wide-angle view of Syria’s culture heritage prior to the current conflict.

Satellite Remote Sensing and Mapping

- SHI is developing a comprehensive digital map and inventory of cultural heritage sites including archaeological sites, architectural monuments, museums and collections, libraries and archives, and administrative infrastructure.
- We are utilizing high-resolution satellite imagery to document and verify the condition of heritage sites in the inventory.
- We are engaging and sharing information with other groups that are creating inventories and maps of cultural heritage.
- SHI is analyzing satellite images of heritage places for changes over time to monitor damage. When combined with our other documentation efforts, such as geospatial imaging allows us to obtain a larger picture of both what has happened and what is happening on the ground.

Preservation Projects

- SHI is assessing the major preservation issues affecting cultural heritage during the conflict and is producing written and imagery-based condition documentation for sites in the heritage inventory.
- We are providing resources for emergency response activities to stabilize damaged heritage and to decrease the risk of damage to collections and sites.
- We are developing plans for small and large-scale documentation and preservation projects for cultural heritage in Syria that can be implemented in the future.
- SHI is identifying the human resource priorities and training needed to strengthen future cultural heritage management capacity for Syria.

For more information check out our website:

www.asor-syrianheritage.org

Contact us at

American Schools of Oriental Research

Located at Boston University

656 Beacon Street, 5th floor

Boston, MA 02215-2010

Tel: (617) 353-6570

Email: asorhert@bu.edu

