



Report

The impact of the 2023-Earthquake on archaeological locations in Northeast Syria

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By the Arab Network of Civil Society Organizations to Safeguard Cultural Heritage (ANSCH - an initiative of Heritage for Peace) with collaboration from civil society organizations in Syria (Orient Association and Rafekatuna Group)

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The impact of the 2023-Earthquake on certain archaeological locations in Northeast Syria

Introduction

The recent earthquake in Syria has exacerbated the already dire situation of the historical and archaeological sites in the cities of Raqqa and Manbij, which have long been endangered by the ongoing war and the effects of climate change. These sites, including a castle, a gate, a mosque, and a palace, hold great cultural and historical significance. However, the conflict and the increased humidity resulting from climate change have weakened the structures over time. The earthquake has caused significant damage, resulting in cracks, fissures, and collapses in walls, arches, and reservoirs, further endangering these important sites. Cultural heritage authorities are now faced with the challenging task of assessing and repairing the damage, as well as implementing emergency response and preventive measures to ensure the preservation of these valuable cultural heritage sites.

Archaeological sites in Raqqa

The historic castle of Ja'bar is located on the western bank of Lake Asad, approximately 42 km east of the inhabited village of Bals and 45 km West of the city of Raqqa, near the Frat Dam. Currently, there is no clear evidence or indications as to the exact date of construction of the castle, however, most of the Islamic sources that mention the castle suggest that it was built prior to Islam and specifically during the reign of King Al-Mundhir Bin Nomman of Hira (5th century AD). Some of these sources indicate that the castle was known by the name





Dausar, Dausara, or Dausaria, while others believe its history dates back to earlier centuries, possibly the 2nd century AD. Archaeological excavations and restoration work have been carried out at the castle intermittently since the 1960s and before the start of the crisis in 2011, by the Archaeology Authority, Museums, and the Antiquities Department. The castle, most of whose remaining parts date back to the dominant era, is situated on a rocky plateau. It has a roughly circular shape and has two massive walls surrounding it, one interior and one exterior, built of baked bricks. The space between the two walls measures approximately eight meters, and a large number of towers, numbering over 35, intersect with the walls. These towers have different shapes, some resembling semi-cylinders, octagons, and circles. The second tower is one of the largest towers in the castle. Further research is needed to determine the precise history and origins of the castle.

Damages: The assessment report is concerned with evaluating the structural damage to four historical sites located in Raqqa, Syria.

- a. The Aliya Tower or Museum: There is a crack in the front wall of the museum, which runs from top to bottom. There is also a minor crack in the eastern wall of the museum in the northern aisle.
- b. The Strange Tower or “the Gharib”: There are significant cracks and fissures in the tower's facade.





A crack in the outer façade of Alia Tower (the façade of Jaabar Castle Museum)



High tower façade, traces of cracks



Cracking in the Gharib Tower at Ja'bar Castle

1. **Palace of the Maidens:** The Palace of the Maidens is an Islamic architectural monument that was constructed using fired clay bricks during the Abbasid period. Later, it was reconstructed during subsequent periods, resulting in some changes to its internal structure and functional layout. Excavations at the site began in 1977 by a Syrian mission and continued for six seasons. This was followed by extensive renovations to the palace, which was restored to its current state before excavations resumed in 2007.

Damage:

- a. Cracks and fissures in the walls of some rooms.
- b. Ceiling arches in the porch of the Seaside Hall have cracks.
- c. Cracks in the northern walls of the ionic room, in the room of the mosaics.
- d. Some walls are dropping lace.



A slight crack and collapse of parts of one of the walls in the Banat or Girl's Palace in Raqqa



A crack in one of the walls of the Girls' Palace in Raqqa

2. **Baghdad Gate:** The Baghdad Gate dates back to the Abbasid period and is located in the southeastern corner of Raqqa's walls. It was constructed using fired clay bricks and underwent renovation and reinforcement by the Raqqa Antiquities Department at an earlier stage.

Damage:

- a. One of the supports for the Baghdad Gate has a crack.



A slight crack in one of the pillars supporting the Baghdad Gate



The crack on the other side of the pillar supporting the Baghdad Gate



3. **The Mansur Mosque or the Old Mosque:** The mosque is located within the city of Raqqa and dates back to the Abbasid period. It was constructed using fired clay bricks.

Damage:

- a. There is a minor crack in one of the arches of the Old Mosque.
- b. There is a minor crack in one of the supporting walls.

Archaeological sites in Manbij:

1. **Najm Castle:** Najm Castle is situated approximately 130 km east of Aleppo and 30 km northeast of Manbij, on the right bank of the Euphrates River close to the Qara Qawzak Bridge. There is limited information regarding its construction date and the builder, however, some sources suggest it was built in the early 7th century AD, post-300 AH, by Najm Ghulam Ghulam al-Safwani, who was the mawla of Ibn Safwan al-Aqili, hence, the castle got its name from him.

The castle was built using limestone blocks and has about ten towers providing support. It has a main entrance that leads to the ruler's palace or the emirate's palace. The palace is adjacent to the bathroom, which is a small area. The castle also has a furnace and a long corridor that connects to a group of large storage rooms, forming the ground floor which can be accessed through the middle corridor leading to the palace. The ground floor also includes secret passages along with water tanks and stores.

A mosque was built above the gate tower, and it consists of two parallel courtyards. The castle also has an arsenal located at its base which served as a command or operations headquarters. It underwent renovations during the Zangid and Ayyubid periods, with most of the visible structures dating back to that period. The General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums also recently renovated the castle from 1989 to 2000.

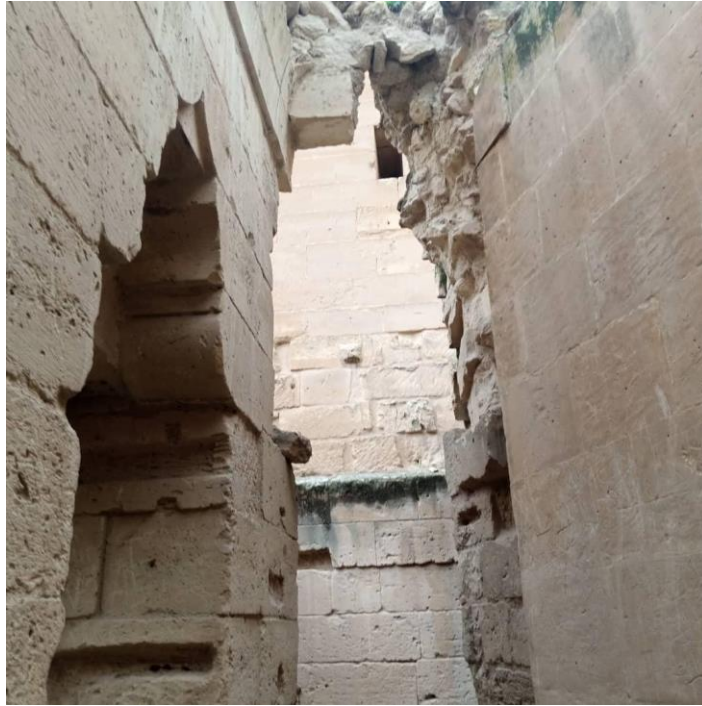




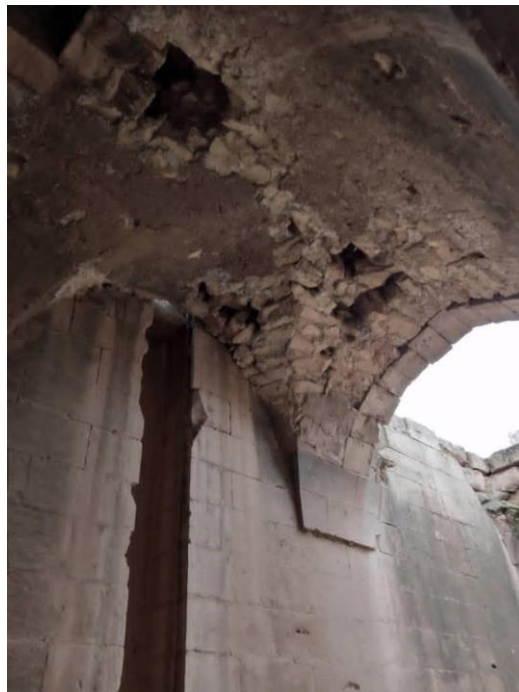
Collapsed parts of the outer wall of Najm Castle



New cracks in the arches of Najm Castle



New cracks in the arches of Najm Castle



New cracks and fractions in the arches of Najm Castle



New cracks and fractions in the arches of Najm Castle



Structure collapse in Najm Castle



Structure collapse in Najm Castle



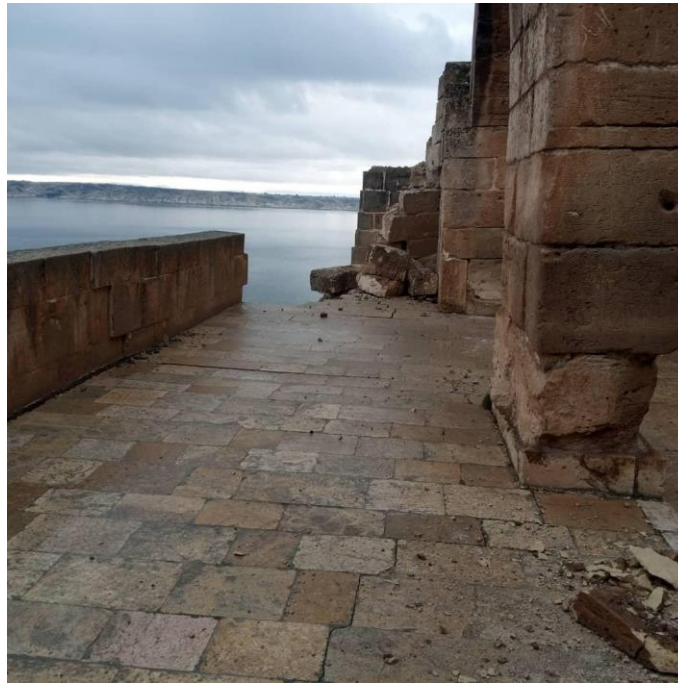
Structure collapse in Najm Castle



Structure collapse in Najm Castle



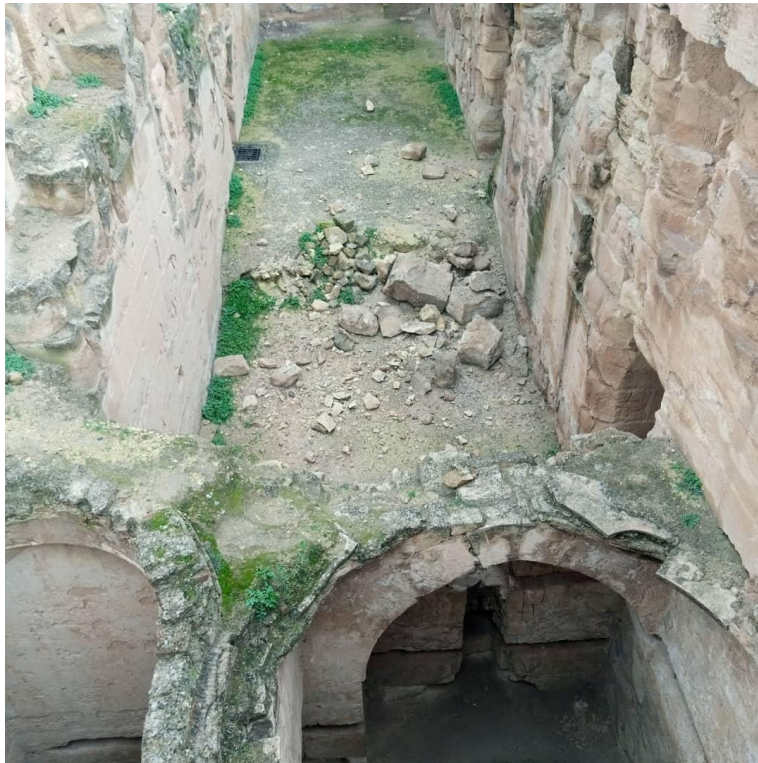
Structure collapse in Najm Castle



Structure collapse in Najm Castle



Structure collapse in Najm Castle



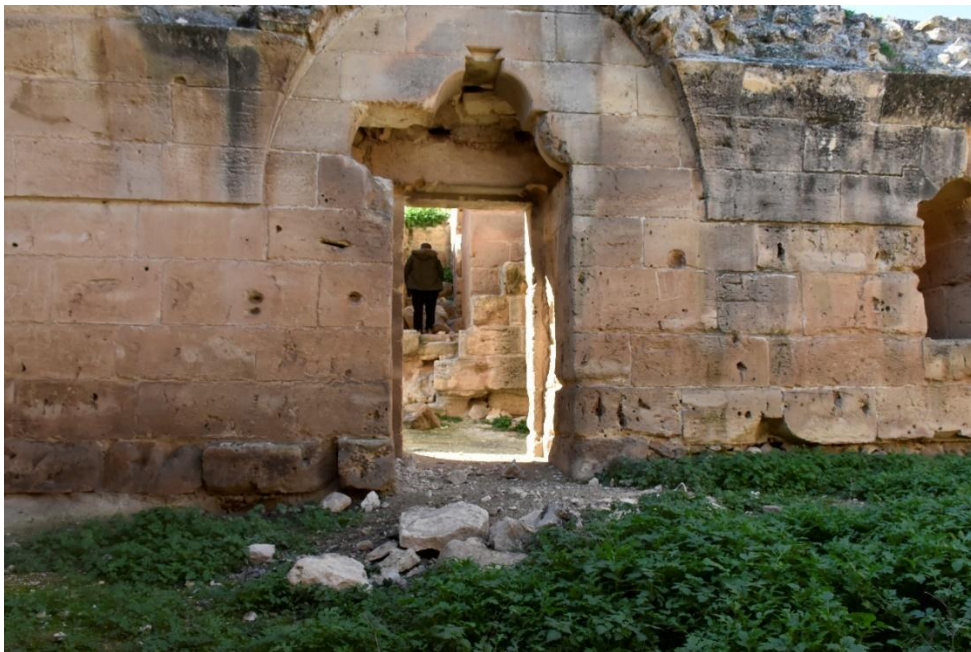
Structure collapse in Najm Castle



Parts of the outer wall of Najm Castle collapsed near the main entrance



Cracks in the ceilings of the throne room at Najm Castle



A collapse of some stones inside the Throne Hall of Najm Castle



Cracking and collapsing of some stones from the roof of the court in Najm Castle



Some blocks of stone fall from the walls of the court in Najm Castle



Cracks in one of the arches of the ancient mosque in Raqqa



Minor cracks in the arched walls of the ancient mosque in Raqqa.



Damage Assessment:

- a. The Castle Wall, Throne Hall, and Reservoirs:
- b. Part of the outer castle wall to the right of the main entrance gate has collapsed from the top.
- c. Part of the arch of the Throne Hall has collapsed from the eastern side.
- d. There is a crack in the ceiling of the corridor in the right hall of the Throne Hall.
- e. There is a collapse in the walls of one of the tanks located to the left of the market, opposite the bathroom.
- f. Part of the arch in the residence hall has collapsed.
- g. Parts of the control tower opposite the housing on the western side have collapsed.

The Court building:

- a. There is damage on the northern side of the court wall.
- b. The western wall of the court has collapsed and there are cracks in the ceiling arches.
- c. There are cracks in the court corridors and in the walls supporting the arches and portico.
- d. There are cracks and collapses in the roof of the main door of the court.
- e. There are cracks in the outer wall of the court from the eastern end.

Mosque:

- a. There are collapses in some stones of the mosque wall from the northwest side.
- b. There are cracks in the ceilings in the right and left galleries and the entrance wall of the mosque, all the way to the inscription.
- c. There are cracks and inclinations in the wall of the southern end above the mihrab.
- d. There are cracks in the arches and inclinations of the mosque and a crack in its floor from the eastern side.
- e. There is a crack in the floor of the mosque in the castle.





Cracks and cracks in the floor of the Manbij Citadel Mosque



Cracks in one of the arches of the ancient mosque in Raqqa



Minor cracks in the arched walls of the ancient mosque in Raqqa.

Damage outside the Castle:

- a. There are widening cracks in the northern outer wall of the stables entrance.
- b. There are collapses in the stones of the outer wall of the castle at the northern end.

Hamмам Manbij (The Great Bath):

The Great Bath is located east of the public garden and its construction dates back to the year 1332 AD, which is at the end of the Ottoman period as indicated by an inscription. The following are the damages observed in Hammam Manbij (The Great Bath):

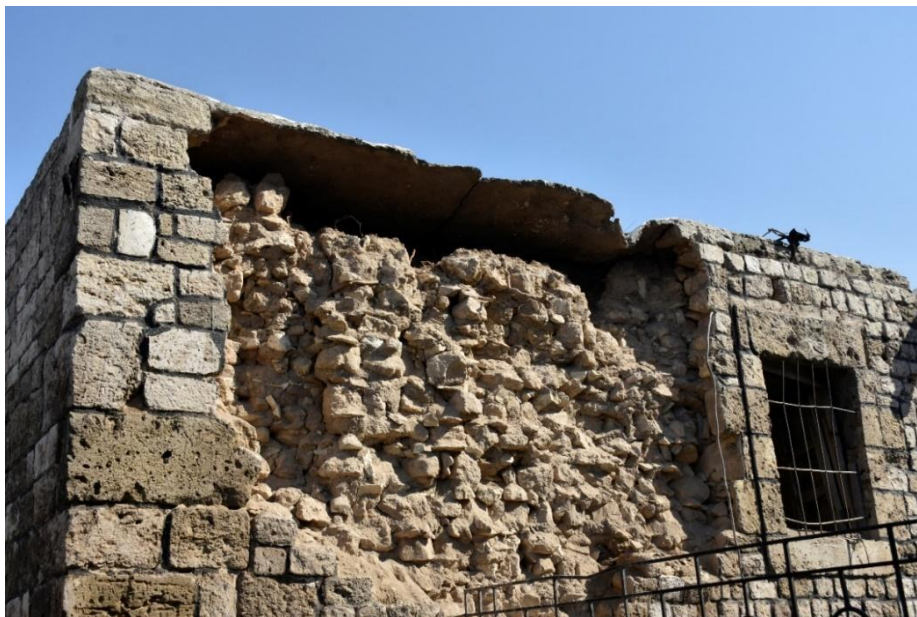
- a. Collapse and loss in the western wall near the main door of the bath.
- b. Cracks and fractures in the bath's ceiling and domes.
- c. Minor cracks in the stone near the main door.



Cracks in one of the domes of the Ottoman bath in Manbij



Cracks in one of the domes of the Ottoman bath in Manbij



The collapse of parts of one of the walls of the Ottoman bath in Manbij



Cracks and cracks in the floor of the Ottoman bath in Manbij

The Tower Cemetery in Surin:

The cemetery is in the eastern part of the village of Surin, east of the city of Aleppo, about 120 km away. It is a Roman tower cemetery that dates to the first century AD, as indicated by the engraved writings on it.



The eastern facade of the tower vault, Busreen



The northern facade of the tower vault, Busreen

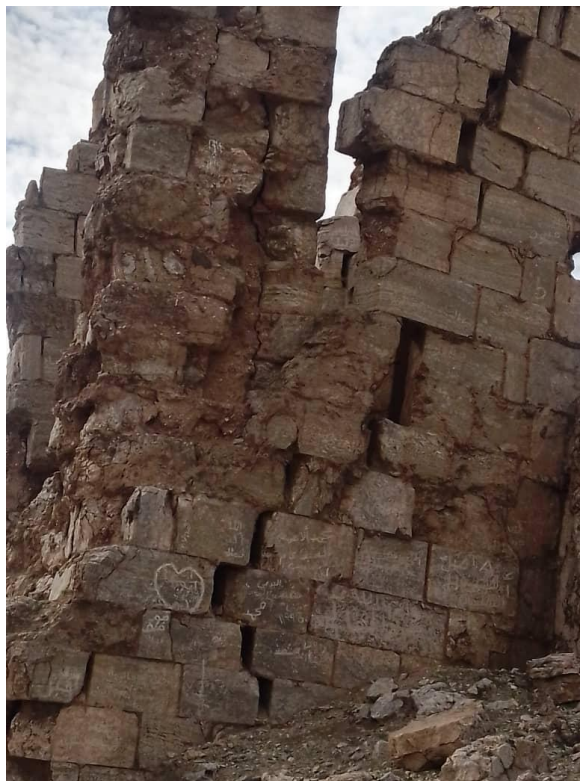
Damages:

- a. There are cracks in the building structure (tower), which are longitudinal cracks caused by natural factors (earthquakes), especially in the southern and northern facades.
- b. Eastern facade: there are cracks above the main gate.
- c. Western facade: there is a slight detachment in the cemetery's stone.

Archaeological Sites in Deir El Zor

Archaeological Site of Halabiya in Deir El Zor

The site of Halabiya is located near one of the valleys of the Wadi Al-Furat, between the flow of the river and the well-known Bazzalti hills known as Qalib Al-Hamma, located 48 kilometers northwest of Deir El Zor. The site has passed through different historical periods, perhaps the most important of which is the Byzantine period, and it was visited by various missions, the latest of which was the Syrian French mission.



Cracks in one of the defensive towers at the Halabiya site in Deir Ezzor

Damages:

- a. There has been an increase in cracks and deformations in some of the walls and remaining towers of the Halabiya site.



Acknowledgement

This report was created by Heritage for Peace Organization and its joint initiative “the Arab Network to Safeguard Cultural Heritage” with collaboration and assistance from on-the-ground civil society organizations in Syria (Orient Association and Rafekatuna Group)

