



Report

The impact of the 2023-Earthquake on archaeological locations on the Syrian coast

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By Heritage for Peace Organization and the Arab Network to Safeguard Cultural Heritage (ANSCH) with collaboration and assistance from civil society organizations (CSOs) and individuals in Syria.

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Introduction

The recent earthquake that struck Syria and Turkey on February 6th, 2023, had severe consequences for the archaeological sites located on the Syrian coast. Dozens of sites in the governorates of Tartous and Latakia were affected, resulting in the closure of several important castles. The damages caused by the earthquake include partial collapses and large cracks that have exposed these sites to further harm, and there is a risk of these structures being lost forever.

The situation is even direr as the earthquake has not only put the built heritage at risk, but it has also affected the local population, causing them to lose their homes and livelihoods. Therefore, there is an urgent need for assistance for the affected population.

It is crucial that the international community and heritage stakeholders take immediate action to conduct urgent archaeological rescue operations for these sites and the people living around them. Failure to do so could result in significant losses to the cultural heritage of the region, which is of immense value not only to Syria but also to the world.





Al-Khawabi Castle

Located in Tartous Governorate in northwestern Syria, Al-Khawabi Castle is an ancient fortress that has its roots in the Phoenician era (1200-539 BC). During the Abbasid period in the late 10th century AD, it served as a military center for Hom's soldiers. Later, in the 11th century AD, the Byzantines took control of the castle and renovated it. Subsequently, the castle passed under the control of different groups, including the Ismailis, Crusaders, Ayyubids, and Mamluks.

However, the castle has suffered damages resulting from an earthquake, which include the collapse of a section of the upper castle (Haret al-Aghawat) and the basements supporting damaged upper structures. Additionally, there are cracks from the inside and clay fragments crumbling from the walls of the Citadel Mosque, along with the collapse of parts of the remaining ancient village walls.



Tartus Cathedral (Tartous Museum)

The Tartus Cathedral, a Catholic cathedral located in Tartous, Syria, was constructed in the 12th century AD and is regarded by historians as the best-preserved religious structure built by the Crusades. Later on, it served as the seat of the Tartous Museum.

Unfortunately, the recent earthquake that struck Syria and Turkey on February 6th, 2023, has caused damages to the Tartus Cathedral. Specifically, an old crack in the interior window to the right of the entrance has significantly expanded. There are also dangerous cracks in the decorative columns of the windows above the entrance, along with new cracks appearing in the museum's southern facade.

The situation calls for immediate attention and repair to prevent further harm to the Tartus Cathedral, which holds significant historical and religious value.





Historical slide in Banias:

Banias, a city located in northwestern Syria, has been a significant seaport since prehistoric times, with references to the city found in ancient historical records. The city's importance increased during the middle Ages due to its proximity to Al-Marqab Castle, a nearby fortress.

Unfortunately, the recent earthquake that struck Syria and Turkey on February 6th, 2023, has caused damages to the city of Banias. One of the damages includes the collapse of a wall and parts of the second floor in estate 157. Further damages include cracks and fissures found in property 143, along with cracks and collapse in the ceiling of the second floor in property 150.

The extent of the damages and their impact on the structures and the city's historical significance is yet to be fully assessed. Urgent attention and repair are necessary to prevent further harm to the city's heritage and cultural sites.





Safita Tower

The Safita Tower is a historic tower located in the city of Safita, in the southeastern corner of the Tartous governorate in Syria. Safita is situated on three mountain peaks, with the tower located on one of the peaks. The tower is the only remaining structure of the castle and stands at a height of approximately 39 meters.

Unfortunately, the recent earthquake that struck Syria and Turkey on February 6th, 2023, has caused damages to the Safita Tower. The damages include the enlargement of some old cracks and the appearance of new cracks in several places. Additionally, some parts of the stones have collapsed, and a cavity has appeared on the first floor. Moreover, the lightning arrester has been broken.

The extent of the damages and their impact on the tower's structural integrity and historical significance is yet to be fully assessed. Urgent attention and repair are necessary to prevent further harm to the tower and its cultural and historical value.



Samarian Khanes:

Samarian Khanes is a small village located in Tartous Governorate that is home to several significant archaeological monuments. The village gets its name from an ancient Aramaic term meaning "sweet spring." Unfortunately, the recent earthquake caused damage to some of the structures.

The damages include the collapse of a section of the remaining cellars.





Umm Hosh Tower

In the 12th century AD, the site was a crucial hub for communication between the castles of the Syrian coast, as well as a center of control for the garrison of Plain Al-Baqi'a. Sadly, the recent earthquake caused damage to the tower.

The damages include the collapse of the remaining parts of the tower.



The shrine of Mawla Hassan

Located at an altitude of 1150m, east of the town of Al-Qadmus, amidst a picturesque forest of cedar and cypress trees, is the shrine of Mawla Hassan, also known as Imam Hassan bin Nizar. Mawla Hassan was born in 470 AH and passed away in 537 AH. Unfortunately, the shrine has suffered significant damage with a large portion collapsing.





Hosn Suleiman

The Fortress of Hosn Suleiman , an archaeological site near Tartous, was originally called Pathiosi and served as a temple for Astarte and Baal by the inhabitants of Arwad / Arados island, who controlled a large part of the Syrian coast. The fort itself is built from massive stones within the temple structure.

Due to the recent earthquake, damages were sustained at the site:

- The northern gate of the Great Temple has suffered from shifted stones and some of them have fallen.



Al-Qadmous Castle

The castle is located on a natural rocky elevation, 1000 meters above sea level, about 30 km from the city of Baniyas and 70 km from the city of Tartous.

Damages:

- Significant collapse of the castle buildings and imminent risk of collapse of other parts.
- One of the walls of the Sinan Rashid al-Din shrine has collapsed.
- Stones have fallen from the arch of the main entrance to the castle.
- Some stones have fallen from the rocky cliff supporting the castle.
- There is a serious crack in the minaret of the ancient mosque



Al-Marqab Castle

Al-Marqab Castle, located 5 km east of the city of Baniyas on the Syrian coast, was built in 1062 AD on top of a hill that is 370 meters above sea level. It is an impregnable fortress belonging to the Tartous Governorate in Syria.

Damages observed are as follows:

- A part of the western façade in the second tower, north of the main gate, has collapsed.
- There is a crack in the southwestern corner of the main gate tower.
- Part of the roof and wall in the eastern pavilion has collapsed.
- Some walls on the roof of the southern Qalawun Tower have partially collapsed.
- There are cracks on both sides of the tower adjacent to the eastern gate.
- There are scattered collapses in the residential village and the inner wall.
- The entire water drainage channel south of the church has collapsed.
- Parts of the walls of the buildings located north of the Ottoman Khan have collapsed.
- The north furnace chimney in the furnace hall has partially collapsed.
- The wall at the top of the donjon tower has partially collapsed, with cracks and displacement on the western side.



Al-Aleqa Castle

Al-Aleqa Castle is a unique circular and oval-shaped fortress built on a single rock that covers approximately 18 acres. Surrounded by walnut, fig, grape, and pomegranate trees, the castle is located on a rocky cliff, rising about 815 meters above sea level and overlooking the sea.

Damages:



- A crack has been detected in the rocky cliff that supports the castle.
- Partial collapses have been observed in the southern wall of the castle, with adjacent cracks.
- Part of the upper vaults have collapsed, and cracks have appeared in other vaults.
- Part of the eastern vault near the castle entrance has collapsed, with visible cracks in the surrounding area.
- Part of the northern tower of the castle has collapsed.



Salah al-Din Citadel

This site is registered on the World Heritage List. The Salah al-Din Citadel is situated on a rocky peak, extending in length and framed by two deep valleys where two rivers converge, east of the city of Lattakia near the city of Al-Haffah. It is positioned at an altitude of 410 meters above sea level and has an overall appearance resembling an elongated isosceles triangle.

Damages:

- There are serious cracks in several towers and walls.
- One of the towers on the western side has partially collapsed.
- Stones have fallen from the Royal Tower





Saada" archaeological house

This ancient palace was constructed in 1905 AD and is located in the Latakia governorate.

Damages:

Significant cracks have appeared in the facades, decorations, and windows of the palace.

Bazaar Mosque

The mosque, constructed between 1824-1825 AD, is located in Lattakia and has suffered the following damages:

- Serious cracks have been observed in the minaret's dome, and some stones have fallen.
- The upper section has also experienced serious cracking.



Latin Church

The old church in Lattakia was constructed in 1933 AD. However, it has suffered damages including cracks in the church towers and some fallen stones.





Al Jadid" Mosque

The "Al Jadid" Mosque is a historic mosque located in Lattakia, known for its ornate decorations and built in 1727 AD.

Damages:

- Cracks have been observed in the minaret structure.
- Some of the decorative elements have been damaged.



Al-Ajan Palace

The archaeological palace, which dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century AD, is an important site in Lattakia. However, it has been damaged and the entire southern section has collapsed.



Aouina Bridge

This is a significant area of an archaeological district in Lattakia that dates back to the 18th century AD.

Damage:

- A significant portion of the roof has collapsed.
- An increase in cracks and fissures has been observed.





Al-Marfa Mosque

Built in 1748 AD, an ancient mosque in Lattakia has suffered damages, including the collapse of its minaret.

Acknowledgment

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 individuals and organizations in Syria.

