

Turkey Targets Archaeological Sites in Afrin



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In Afrin region, there are hundreds of important archaeological sites dating back to different eras. This small geographical area has been home to humans since ancient times (Dodria cave). The first agricultural villages in the Near East was founded at the site of (Ain dara). It also embraced cultural creations from Mesopotamia.

With the advent of the historical ages at the beginning of the third millennium BC, the Kingdom of Al-Alakh was established, which is one of the earliest countries of the historical ages in the Near East.

There are many peoples in this region, as the historical sources mention: Horians , Mitans, Heethis, the Assyrians, the Arameans, the people of Urartu, Midis, Persians, Greeks, Romans and Arab Muslims.

In addition to this long and exciting history of continuous human life in the mountains and valleys of the region of Afrin, it is rich in cultural property, with dozens of hills and archaeological sites that contain many historical stories dating thousands of years. Not to mention dozens of monuments such as churches, monasteries, hermitages, temples, tombs, bridges, and theaters and castles that testify to the importance of the region during the Seleucid, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods. Some of these have been included in UNESCO's World Heritage lists since 2011.

The Turkish attack on Afrin didn't only target civilians:

The brutality of Turkey was not confined to targeting unarmed civilians. It also extended, deliberately and systematically, to targeting archaeological and historical sites in the areas of Afrin in an attempt to obliterate and destroy the civilization of Afrin through its aggressive attacks against Afrin on 20 January 2018.

The Turkish military raids targeted several archaeological and historical sites in Afrin. The most important of these sites is the (Ain dara) site located 6 km south of Afrin in Shirawa district. It was subjected, late in January, to systematic bombing by the Turkish state, which is waging a war

of genocide against Afrin and its people and even its heritage which belongs to all mankind.

The Archaeological site of Ain dara:

The archaeological site of Eindara is /1/ km west of the present village of Eindara and / 6 / km south of the city of Afrin, surrounded by fertile land from three sides. Afrin river passes by the west side, and the height of the site is 240m, and the hill height is 40m.

This important archaeological site consists of two parts: a small, old south side, and a large north one.

Southern Section: A small hill, with an area of 1 dunum. Archaeologists say it was the site of an agricultural village from the Neolithic period inhabited by humans about 10,000 years ago. There were no large-scale excavations, only a sounding operation that showed some of the flint tools.

Northern Section:

South: It is a conical hill of Ain dara, with a surface area of 7500m². The archeologists call it (the upper town). The most important feature of this part is the archaeological temple on its northern side. Opinions differ on the history of the construction of this temple, but most scholars suggest Hori and Heethi beginnings of the temple.

Some researchers say the temple is built in a Heilani style (Hori – Mitani style). This form of construction prevailed in northern Syria between the period 1200-700 BC. The excavations of Ain dara demonstrated the existence of close cultural links that connected northern Syria with modern civilization.

It is confirmed by the guidebook of Aleppo Tourism: the temple is Heethi and dates back to the first millennium BC. The excavators in the temple

found fragments of Heethi Hieroglyphic writings from the first millennium BC and on a tablet of goddess Inanna.

The temple is surrounded by a wall from the Byzantine period built on the ruins of a Greek wall. The temple is built of basalt stones decorated with prominent engravings representing religious and mythological scenes, most notably are pictures of the winged lion and the inscription of the two large ritual feet at its entrance. It has two entrances each with a threshold of one piece of stone, 365 x 270 cm in size. The temple had a second floor built on huge columns with 90 cm diameter.

North: a flat land of 280 m × 180 m = 50400 m². The archeologists call it (the subterranean city), and the prospectors say it was surrounded at the end of the second millennium BC by a wall and defensive towers. The city had four doors on its four sides. The remains of the city wall are still on the western side, but only the northern gate and some of the western fence have been excavated.

The history of human settlement in the northern part of the hill of Ain dara with its northern and southern parts dates back to the fourth millennium BC and continues until the Ottoman era with periods of interruption.

- **The Late Aramean Period** 740 - 530 BC. M: The remains of this period were found on tombs, jars, some seals, and pottery.

- **Achaemenid "Parsi"** Period 530 - 330 BC. M: of the archaeological finds of this era, female dolls of the goddess Inanna, and amulet of crystalline stone, with (Ahoramazda) Zardashti Medi God.

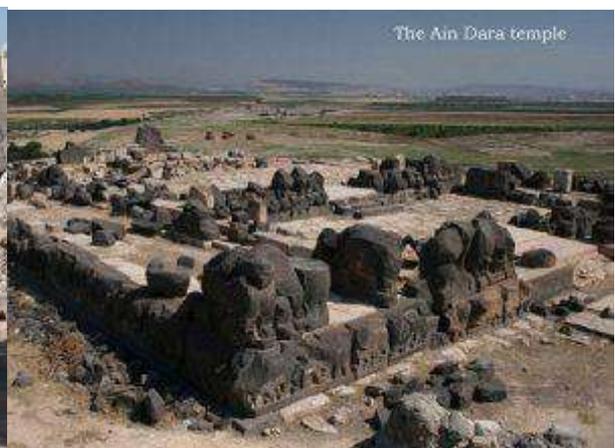
-**The Greco- Seleucid Period** 330-80 BC: The city was fortified and prosperous during this period, where Greek pottery and large amounts of Seleucid silver were found.

- **The Roman-Byzantine Period:** No signs of habitation were found at the site in this era.

- **Umayyad and Abbasid era:** Life returned to this site again, and its people worked in agriculture, they used (the Nawraj) and wood plow with an iron blade. The city continued to flourish after being re-conquered by the Byzantines in 969 AD during the (Hamdaniah State) Days, which featured good buildings and public facilities, olive press, and ovens for making bread and smelting.

Seljuk Period: After the decline of the Byzantine rule in front of the Seljuks in northern Syria since 1086 AD, the Byzantine village was burned in Ain Dara, and the destruction took place. New houses were erected on top of its ruins. But abandoned a short time later, the village turned into scattered ruins and planted barley in its place. The excavations were carried out at the site of Ain dara, by a Syrian national mission in 1954. Then the discoveries continued during several working seasons, and the temple was discovered in the late 1960s.

Images of the site before the attack:



The Turkish attack on the Site and the Size of the Destruction:

On January 27, 2018, the Turkish planes bombed and severely damaged the ancient Ain Dara temple, despite its distance from the fighting fronts and engagement areas by approximately 20 kilometers.

While the American Institute for Near Eastern Studies indicated that the bombing was carried out on 22/1/2018.

What Turkey has done through its systematic targeting of the Ain Dara temple, in particular, contravenes international laws, charters and conventions, the most important of which is the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Heritage during Conflicts, which some of its provisions stipulate the Contracting Parties to: Respect for cultural property in armed conflict as well as the absence of hostile action against such property. But what Turkey has done falls within the framework of war crimes, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2347, which states that any deliberate attack on heritage sites is considered a war crime.

What Turkey is doing towards heritage is not different from what the Islamic State in Iraq did to the relics of Mosul and its museum as well as Palmyra ruins in Syria.

Through its flagrant intervention in Syrian territory, Turkey is now seeking, in Afrin, to cut off parts of its territory and destroy its historical and humanitarian heritage, along with killing civilians. Turkey's aircraft systematically bombed the site of Ain Dara, which is one of the largest archaeological sites belonging to the pre-classical era in the valley of Afrin north-west of Syria near the Turkish border. This applies to resolution 2347 of the Security Council, which states: that the deliberate destruction of Heritage is considered a war crime.

Last year, the Turkish state seized the border triangle in northeastern Syria, where the ancient Ain Dewar bridge lies and then changes the course of the river, paving the way for the bridge to be flooded. The Tourism and Antiquities Protection Commission in Al-Jazeera Region in Syria, once

again calls on the international organizations concerned with the protection of heritage, and UNESCO to intervene urgently to protect the relics of Afrin and northern Syria targeted by the Turkish state. We also hold it responsible for the exposure of archaeological sites in Afrin to Turkish shelling because of their silence.

Images of the damage caused by the Turkish shelling:







The Democratic Self-Administration in Rojava – Northern Syria

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