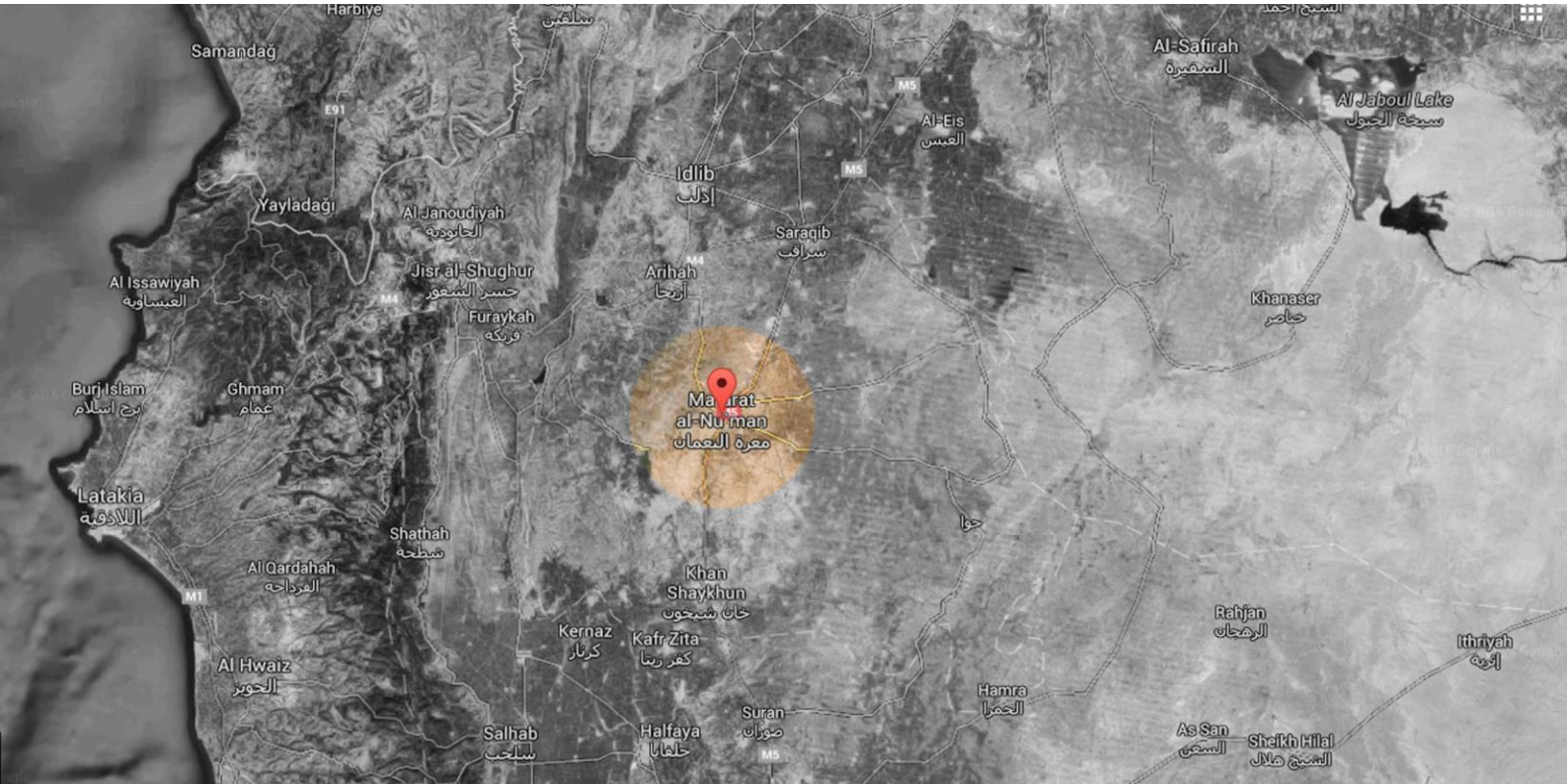


The Day After Heritage Protection Initiative

Site Monitors Project

Site Monitoring Report on

Ma'arrat Al-Nu'man Castle



Location:

The Ma'arra castle is located northwest end of the city of Ma'arrat Al-Nu'man. It was built on a raised base of natural limestone surrounded by a 10m deep, 13m wide moat that was once lined with dressed stone. Much of that stone was removed and used to build many of the older homes in the town and is now used as an orchard for fig and pomegranate trees.

History and Significance:

The castle sits on an area of 2500 m² surrounded by the seasonal Hermas river from the north, west, and south. The main entrance to the

castle used to be on the south side through a wooden draw bridge supported by a pillar in the middle of the moat. That part of the moat has since been filled and the southern entrance replaced with a secondary one to the southeast.



The the earliest foundation of the castle predate the Roman period. It was restored in the Ayyubid period after parts were destroyed by the First Crusade and later by Khawarizmians. The Ayyubid restoration occurred in the year 1234 AD and was commemorated with 30cm long Ayyubid inscription. The limestone columns found between the castle's defense towers bear decorative geometrical shapes like stars. The castle became well known after the infamous massacre of 1098 by the First

Crusade. When the Franks captured the fortress, they killed many of the civilians sheltering inside it at the time (about 10,000). There are also reports of cannibalism committed the Crusaders.



The Castle's Current Situation:

The growth and development of the city of Ma'arra made the castle a part of the town. Locals built their homes on its grounds and took residence in it. Though the eastern section has since been mostly evacuated, a number of families still reside in the castle. Most of the abandoned homes within the perimeter of the castle are currently used as barns for housing animals. This is a cause for concern due to poor sanitation and source for disease.

Additionally, the residents further damaged the castle by removing stones from the moat/trench and building unauthorized sewage lines which caused salt and waste water to seep underneath the castle walls. The castle moat/trench is also used as a dumping site for trash and manure.

The castle has been subject to deliberate and systematic shelling by the Syrian regime through artillery and the airstrikes, compounding the damage already caused by looters and their illicit digging.

The Syrian Heritage Center and TDA-HPI, continue to document damage to this historical structure and attempt to limit vandalism and illicit

digging activity when possible. We also in contact with the local community to raise awareness on the importance of the castle and its significance to the tourism and economic sectors.

Photos of the castle and its trench are included in this report.

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