

Digital documentation of archaeological and heritage sites affected by armed conflict in Ashur city

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Abstract

Ashur city is the first capital of the Assyrian state, which was built on a rocky hill, surrounded by the waters of the Tigris River from the east, as it formed a natural barrier to the city. Its ruins are known today as the Citadel or the Citadel of Shirqat. It is located 96 km south of Mosul. The city of Assyria in Shirqat continued as a political and religious city for the Assyrians throughout the rule of the Assyrians (2000-612 BC). The ancient city of Assyria was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2003. The month of June of 2014 was a watershed date for the security reality of Salah al-Din governorate, as vast lands of the governorate were occupied by ISIS gangs, and they began to impose their ideas on society, and this was not limited to society, but also happened on heritage sites, which were affected by those armed conflicts, So they sabotaged and blew up many archaeological and heritage monuments in Ashur city. The study was divided into an introduction and four sections. The first dealt with the devastation of the archaeological gate called Tabira, while the second came to define the royal cemetery and document the damage it as a result of military operations. The third and fourth sections dealt with the devastation that occurred on the heritage buildings in the site of Assyria city, where the third topic focused on documenting the damage that afflicted the Farhan Pasha Palace, and the fourth topic dealt with the damage that afflicted the palace of the German excavator Walter Andre in Assyria city. The study ended with a set of conclusions reached by the research with general and specific recommendations, and the research appended with a set of documentary images on the studied site.

Keywords: Ashur city, documentation, armed conflicts, Tabira gate, Farhan Pasha Palace, Walter Andre Palace

1 Introduction

After announcement of the end of the military operations and the liberation of the area completely, our research team began the first steps to enter the city's site, and after obtaining the fundamental approvals, the field research began on 23/11/2020, where the study relied on the practical approach through digital documentation of the devastation that befell the city as a result of military operations because the site of city was high which made it a line of defense and repelling. In other words, Assyria city was a battlefield.

After ISIS took control of the city, they systematically sabotaged the monuments in the city, with a clear intention to erase and obliterate the cultural identity of Iraq to complete the crime series against the identity of Iraq. The study is also new, and no one has previously discussed it, as it combines modernity and antiquity, that is, the use of modern tools and digital cameras to document damages and etc. Accordingly, it has faced many difficulties and obstacles, such as taking fundamental approvals from the authorities to enter the site, as well as the fear of war remnants in the area of the site, this required doing many research trips in addition to searching for old photos from archives for the purpose of comparing between the ancient, safe forms and the modern forms. The study included four sites, two of them archaeological, namely, Tabira Gate and the Royal Cemetery, the other two are heritage sites, namely Farhan Pasha Palace and Walter Andre Palace. The study reached many field and research results in addition to general recommendations.

2 Historical Background of Ashur city

Ashur city was the capital of Assyrians, it was the center of monarchy and the focal point of royal power. It included the royal residence and served as the political-administrative core of the kingdom, into which economic resources were brought from different regions.

Ashur city was the origin of the Assyrian state and long served as the capital from the beginning of the second millennium BC.

2.1 Description of the city according to cuneiform texts:

The basic fortification system was apparently already established in the Old-Assyrian period in the central part of the city, which was called *libbi āli(m)* “inner city” or *ālu elu* “upper city” in the inscriptions of Puzur-Aššur III and Aššur-bēl-nišēšu, probably dating to the 15th century BC. Many Assyrian kings from the Old-, Middle-, and early Neo-Assyrian periods constructed or renovated the walls surrounding the central city, as shown in a number of royal inscriptions, before the well-recorded large-scale renovation of the city fortification by Shalmaneser III (859–824 BC) in the ninth century BC. The southern part of the city, called *ālu šaplu* “lower city” (RIMA 1, A.0.76.8, 25 [Adadnereri I]), also called *ālu eššu* (URU GIBIL) meaning “new city” (RIMA 2, A.0.87.3, l. 36 [Tiglathpileser I]), was probably first surrounded by walls under the reign of Puzur-Aššur III in the first half of the 15th century BC, as (Miglus ,2010, 235) argues. A later inscription of Shalmaneser III (RIMA 3, A.0.102.25) explicitly describes the city as being surrounded by a double wall, consisting of *dūru rabu* “great (inner) wall” and *šalhu* “outer wall” (the former surrounded the inner city, and the latter

encircled the inner and outer cities all together (Miglus 2010,p.235). The double wall, however, must have actually been constructed earlier, since several Middle-Assyrian kings referred to the outer wall in their inscriptions. The names of several gates located on those walls are attested to from earlier periods. From the Old-Assyrian period, *abul šēni(m)* “Sheep Gate” and *abul nišim/nišē* “People’s Gate,” as well as *abul^d Ilulā* “the Gate of the divine Ilula” are attested to in the royal inscriptions of Erišum I and Puzur-Sin. From the Middle-Assyrian period to the early Neo-Assyrian period, the building accounts for quite a number of royal inscriptions and the documents from the archive of Ninurtatukulti-Aššur refer to nine gate names of Ashur: *abul šēni* (Sheep Gate), *bāb Ea-šarru* (*Ea-šarru* Gate), *bāb Idiqlat* (Tigris Gate), *abullu ša libūr-šalhî* (Gate of My Outer Wall May Stay Firm), *bāb Aššur* (Aššur Gate), *abul/bāb Tabira* (Tabira [Coppersmith] Gate), *bāb Šamaš* (Šamaš Gate), *abul asâte* (Turret Gate), *bāb tisari* (Tisaru Gate), and *bāb Šērū’a* (Šerua Gate). The exact locations and interrelation of these gates and names are not clear, except for a few gates well-attested.

Also in later periods. Setting aside those questions as beyond the scope of this article, I will focus on the Tabira gates and walls of Ashur during the Neo-Assyrian period by reviewing the two most important sources. One is the text inscribed on the stone statue of Kidudu, the divine guardian of the city wall of Ashur, from the reign of Shalmaneser III (RIMA 3, A.0.102.25, ll. 37–47). In this inscription, the king claims that he rebuilt the “great wall” and the “outer wall” of Ashur (BAD GAL-*a ša URU-ia aš-šur u* BAD *šal-hu-šu*) that had been built by his predecessors but became dilapidated and fell into ruin, “both of them from the Tabira Gate to the Tigris river as a single work.”

2.2. The importance of Ashur city:

Ashur city which lies in Shirqat district is one of the most important archaeological cities in Iraq and the world, because it contains a cultural heritage of an important historical period that extends back to the year 2000 BC. The importance of the city came from being holy city of the Assyrians, who ruled in Mesopotamia for nearly two thousand years, and their rule extended to vast areas of Mesopotamia and the Levant, they reached as far as Egypt. The importance of Assyria city also lies in that it is a burial place for the Assyrian kings.

Ashur city, the first capital of the Assyrian state, was built on a rocky hill, surrounded by the waters of the Tigris River from the east (Grayson, 1995,p.192), as it formed a natural barrier to the city. Its ruins are known today as the Citadel or the Citadel of Shirqat. It is located 96 km south of

Mosul. Assyria city in Shirqat continued as a political and religious city for the Assyrians throughout the rule of the Assyrians 2000-612 BC

(Yamada, S,2000, p.38).

The ancient Assyria city was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2003(Kazem and Mohammed,2018, p.135) .Assyria obtained the attention of Europeans in the middle of the nineteenth century, and this care was not a coincidence, but rather a knowledgeable and reading of the holy books, and the historical books from which they derived the locations of these cities, and their importance.

See Appendix No. (1) for Ashur city.

3: Sites affected by armed conflicts in Ashur city:

The month of June of 2014 was a watershed date for the reality of security in Salah al-Din governorate, as vast lands of the governorate were occupied by ISIS gangs, and they began to impose their ideas on society, and this was not limited to society, but also happened on heritage sites, which were affected by those armed conflicts, So they sabotaged and blew up many of the archaeological heritage monuments in Ashur city(Kazem and Mohammed,2018, p.135), which we will detail below:

3.1: Destruction of Tabira Gate:

The gate is located in the northwestern side of the city wall, which contains several gates, the most famous of which is the Tabira Gate, which has been maintained and appeared to us as one of the landmarks of the Assyria city. It is also called Kurkuri (meaning the metal industries gate)(Ahmed, F.A. ,1986,P.142) the Army Gate, and the Weapon Gate(Kate', 1986, p.69). The Assyrian army in the event of an invasion does not exit except through this gate, and enters through it when return, therefore its name was associated with the name of the army (Madhloom,1979,p.313)and weapons(Ajaj,2012,p.14).

The gate is built of mud with foundations of stone and covered with bricks, the floors are paved with bricks and roofed with wood, which rests on the arches built of bricks ,its construction dates back to King Tawaklti Ninurta I (1244-1208 BC), then it was renewed by King Taglatplezer II (967-935 BC) (Yamada,S, 2020, p.88), then King Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC)

completely dismantled it, and rebuilt it again after changing its place and moved towards the trench((Yamada,S, 2000, p.38))

The Tabira gate was vandalized by ISIS gangs after they took control of Shirqat district after 9/4/2014. They detonated several explosions in it during the month of July of the year 2015, causing massive damage throughout the building and major collapses in the facades and in the covering bricks and cracks in the shoulders bearing the arches, parts of it collapsed and cracks in the large outer tower (the North Tower), cracks at the bottom and collapsed at the top. As for the arch , despite the damages and cracks, it remained fixed in their positions and had varying damages(Ajaj, Tabira Gate, 2020,p.25), as detailed in the following:

The damage hit the first arch of the gate, which overlooks the public street, and it was the most damaged. A number of the bricks of the first (outer) arch collapsed and more than half of the shoulder bearing the arch collapsed, and the arch is still holding together (Ajaj, Tabira Gate, 2020,p.25), The damage was not limited to that, but also hit the second arch, which is the (middle) is the largest and the most wide, it has cracks from the front and rear sides, a number of the western front bricks fell, shoulder collapses, cracks in the middle and collapses at the bottom of the arch(Abdullah,2016,p.72). As for the third arch, it was exposed to ineffective cracks and remained unharmed

Fortunately ,the gate did not collapse, but rather remained coherent. Maintenance operations were carried out on the Tabira Gate by the American University in Sulaymaniyah, the first arch was completely restored and maintained, while the second (middle) arch is still incomplete, until the end of 2021. The pictures in Appendix No. (2) show those damages, and the maintenance work carried out by the American University of Sulaymaniyah.

3.2:Destruction of the royal cemetery:

The royal cemetery is located within the walls of the ancient Ashur city. It was named royal as the resting place of the Assyrian kings. It is located

near the old royal palace, the palace of King (Adad - Narari I) (1300 - 1275 BC) (RIMA 1, A.0.76.8, 25 [AdadnereriI]), which is a rectangular pit measuring (24 x 21 m).), surrounded by a wall of sun-dried mud to prevent side collapses, and its strength is five tombs (burial chambers.) There are corridors that lead to it, and the building material is mud covered with bricks from the inside (the burials and corridors are covered with bricks), the floors are tiled with bricks, also there are two cemeteries paved with obsidian carved stone. The rectangular and square ones are roofed with brick domes, and covered with liquid tar, above which a burial with a thickness of 3 m goes down to it from the corridor (the secret entrance) that opens to the southwestern side(Ajaj, Royal Cemetery, 2014,p.15).

The Assyrians were known to hide tombs throughout their rule, so the tombs were found by chance, and this cemetery was one of the discoveries of the German expedition for years (1903-1914 AD) The plans show five burials. Three of them were discovered, namely, King (Ashur-Bel-Kala) (1074-1057 BC), and the last of them (Shamshi-Adad V) (811-823 BC). It is known that all the Assyrian kings are buried in the Assyria city, but their tombs have not been discovered until the present time(Suleiman, 2010, p. 11).

The cemetery is one of the monument that was given priority in maintenance. Its maintenance was started in 1986 AD by installing dilapidated walls and building partitions between the walls with dried mud. The cemetery was roofed with a metal shed in 2012, covered with thick glass that can be walked on(Ajaj, ISIS terrorist gangs destroying, 2018, p. 93). ISIS gangs entered the Ashur city in the year 2015 during the month of July, and detonated the gate first, then a week after the Tabira Gate bombing, the royal cemetery was vandalized by detonating explosive devices inside the burial chambers and the corridors leading to it, which also led to completely breaking the glass, and the tops of the walls were destroyed(Kazem and Mohammed,2018, p.138). The effects of sabotage and bombing have been documented, as shown in Appendix No. (3).

3.3: Destruction of Farhan Pasha's palace:

The palace is located in the northeastern side of the Ashur city, as it was built on the ruins of the ancient temple of the god Ashur(Ajaj, Farhan Pasha

Palace, 2020,p.26), and was named after its builder Sheikh Farhan bin Safuk Al-Jarba, head of the Shammar tribe during the days of the Ottoman ruler over Iraq Midhat Pasha (1868-1872 AD), who built the palace belonged to Sheikh Shammar in 1870 AD, and he was given the title of Pasha, in an attempt to settle the clans. Sheikh Farhan al-Jarba lived in the palace for four years 1870-1874, and as a result of the bad relationship between the Ottoman administration and Shammar, Farhan Pasha left the palace and became the headquarters of the Ottoman Gendarmerie, and remained so until the end of the World War I, then it became the headquarters of the Shirqat district (the Citadel district) until 1927 AD, when the district administration moved to another place, and only a British resident doctor remained in the palace, treating patients until 1929, the palace was hit during the World War II by a flying missile, most of its parts were destroyed, then it was restored in 1978 and completely restored to be taken as a museum for the antiquities which discovered in Ashur city (Kazem and Mohammed,2018, p.138). It remained so until the beginning of the American occupation in 2003, the museum was canceled and many of its antiquities were stolen, then ISIS gangs came and blew it up and turned it into a ruin(Ajaj, ISIS terrorist gangs destroying, 2018, pp.93-94), at the end of June of the year 2015.

See Appendix No. (4) explains what the palace has become because of ISIS gangs.

3.4: Destruction of Walter Andre Palace:

Walter Andre is the head of the German excavation mission that excavated in the city of Assyria (1903-1914)(Suleiman, 2010, p. 11), which stopped at the beginning of the World War I ,as soon as Andre set up his tents for excavations, he took the initiative to build a headquarters for his mission, which was planned to operate for dozens of years. One of the advantages of this palace is that it is located on the edge of the Tigris River. No foundations were dug for it in the ground to preserve the antiquities. Its construction was made of hard stones scattered on the site. Its construction was vertical, shortening the space, and in the oriental style.(See Walter Andre, 1987,pp,280) It has a central courtyard surrounded by a building on

all sides. It was built of two floors. After the German mission left, the palace was neglected then it was maintained and some stone was added to it. It became the headquarters of the Iraqi excavation missions, and it became a property of the Antiquities Authority until 2008. As the inspectorate of Antiquities Authority moved to a new building, the building remained a heritage building for more than a hundred years since its construction. With the entry of ISIS gangs to the city of Shirqat, they took it as their headquarters and the site was bombed because of that, so the building was destroyed in addition to stripping it of everything that helps to residency (Ajaj, ISIS terrorist gangs destroying, 2018, pp.96-97). It is mentioned that the bombing that targeted the palace was in November of 2014. (Kazem and Mohammed, 2018, pp.138-139)

Appendix No. (5) explains the bombing and neglect of the palace.

4: Conclusion

At the end of what we mentioned about the history of excavations in Ashur city, and the impact of the events of ISIS gangs on the city, this can be summarized by several points :

- 1- Ashur city is one of the most important historical cities that had a political and civilized role for nearly two thousand years.
- 2- The presence of Ashur city was linked to the Assyrians as their religious capital.
- 3- The West was the first to notice the existence of Ashur city, in the middle of the nineteenth century, and it became one of their concerns.
- 4- Ashur city was subjected to the looting of many of its archaeological finds during the nineteenth century, and the excavations were unscientific.
- 5- The German excavations, which began in the early twentieth century, are considered to have adopted the scientific bases in their work, and Walter Andre was able to draw an accurate map of the archaeological city, and it is still approved today.
- 6- The archaeological excavations of Ashur city continued, as we mentioned, but those excavations were sporadic.

- 7- Ashur city was subjected to sabotage by ISIS gangs, and this sabotage can only be justified by the hidden hatred of Iraqi civilization, by lobbies that have a lot of the truth of Iraqi history related to every development that took place on the ground.
- 8- Including the destruction of Ashur city, the Tabira Gate, the royal cemetery, and the rest of the places we mentioned in the text .
- 9- The destruction of antiquities by ISIS gangs was not from a religious aspect, as evidenced by their bombing of the Tabira Gate and Farhan Pasha Palace, as they were nothing but urban, heritage places, so it seems that their goal is to obliterate any monumental who adds tradition and civilization to Iraq.

5. Recommendations:

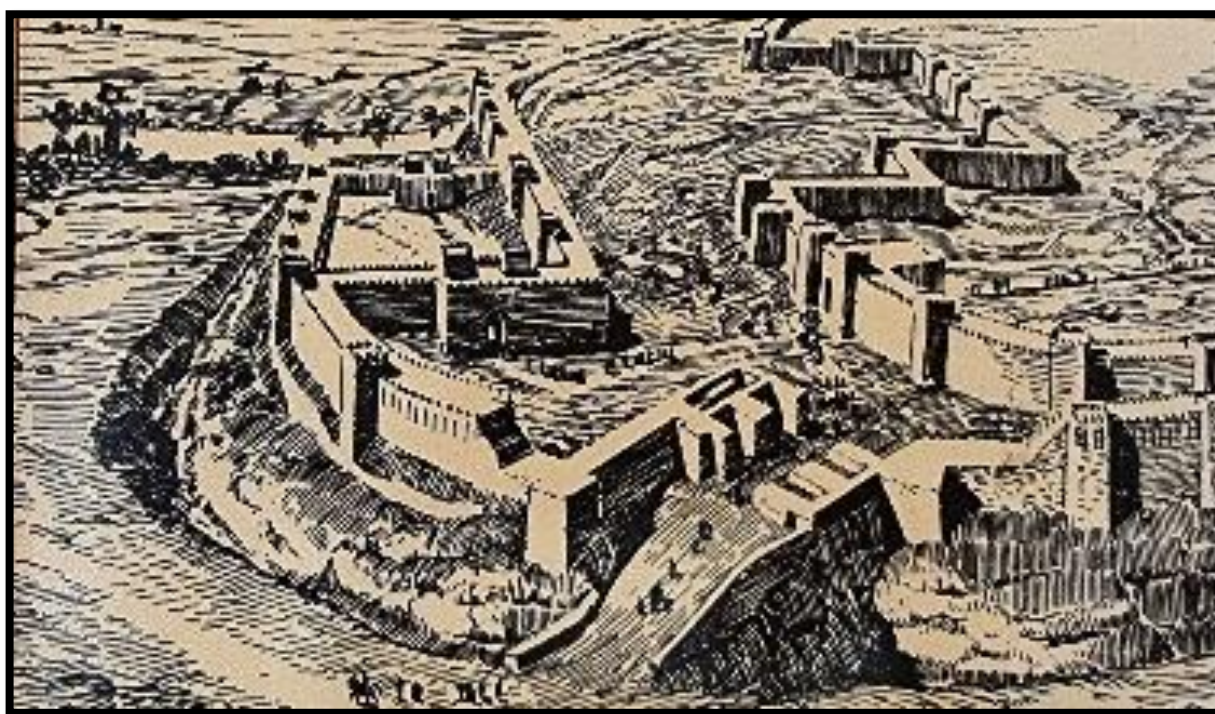
Work on reviving the archaeological sites and monuments in Ashur by conduct excavations of Assyria city starting from the walls and successively to the depth of the city, and then maintaining the walls, gates and ziggurat, to show the city for its true nature, knowing that all the excavations that took place on the city of Assyria did not exceed 15%.

6.Appendixes

6.1 Appendixes No (1)



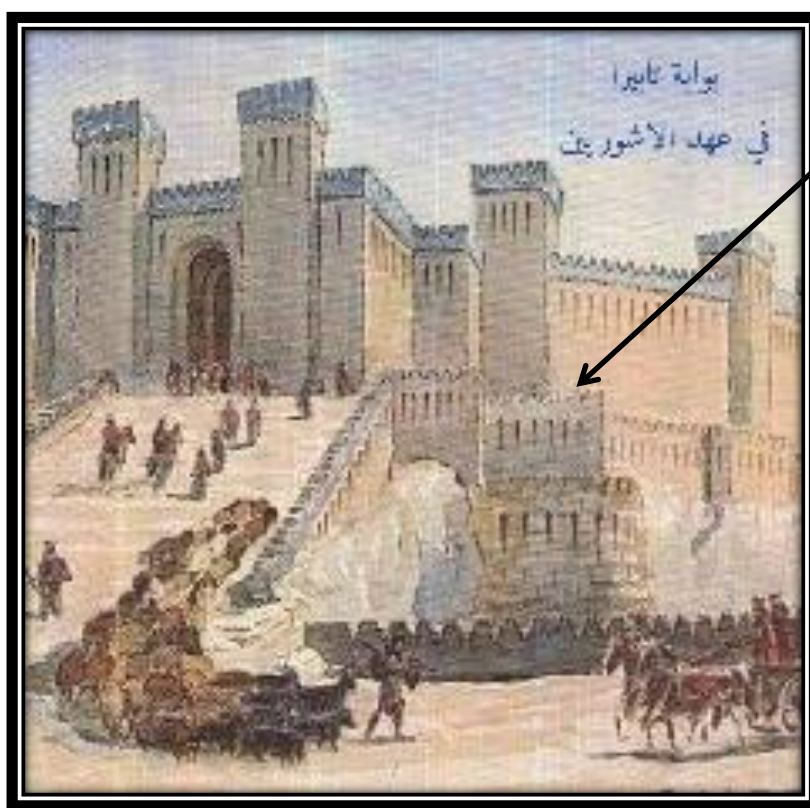
An imaginary drawing
of Assyria city by
Walter Andre



**An imaginary view of the city of Ashur from the north side
Tabira Gate Entrance**



6.2 Appendix No (2)



An imaginary drawing
of the Tabira Gate by
Walter Andre



Tabira Gate before
the bombing



Aerial view of the
Tabira Gate



The obvious
sabotage in the
first Arc



The obvious sabotage in
the first Arc



The obvious
sabotage in the
second Arc
Front side of the
gate



The obvious
sabotage in the
second Arc
outside of the gate



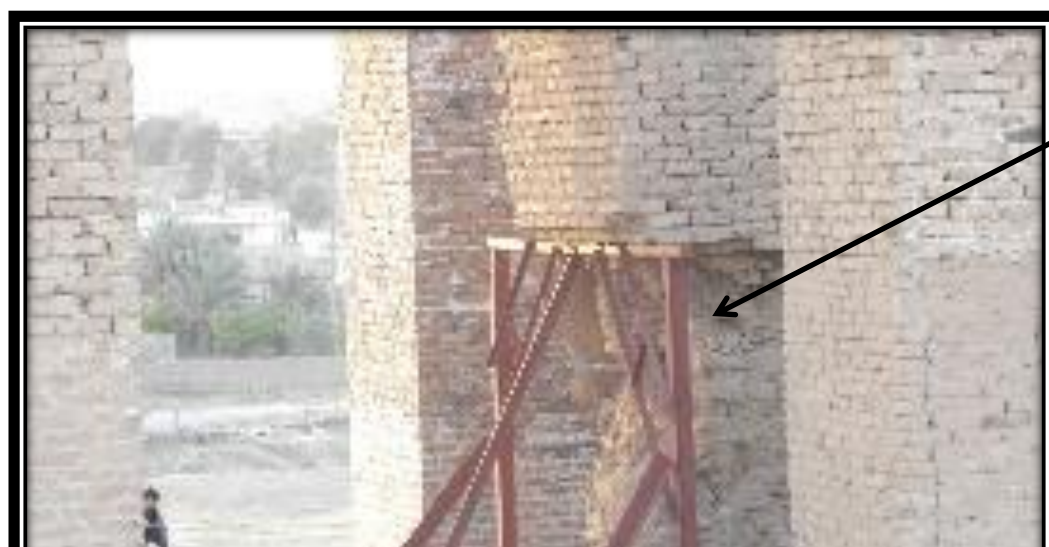
The cleaning
operations
conducted by the
Sharqat Antiquities
inspectorate
at the Tabira gate



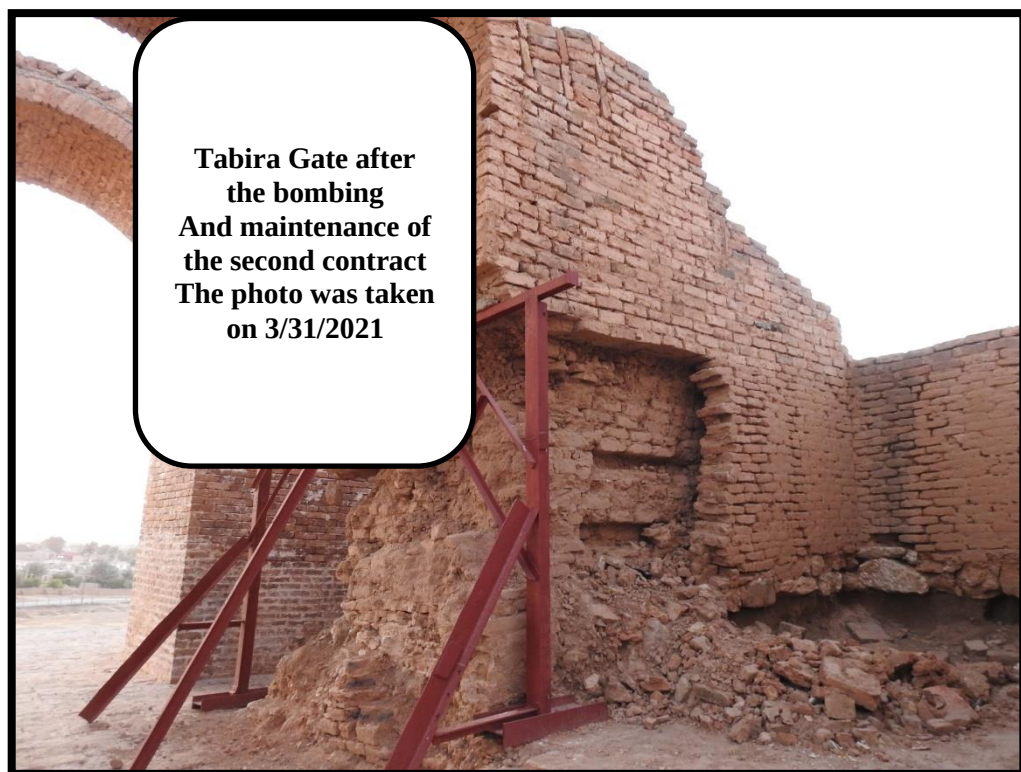
Third arc
It is clear that was
not damaged



**Tabira Gate after the
bombing
Maintenance of the
first arc**



**Tabira Gate after
the bombing
And maintenance of
the second Arc
The photo was taken
on 31/3/2021**



**Tabira Gate after
the bombing**

**Damage to the
middle arch**

after cleaning

Maintenance of



**Tabira Gate after
the bombing
And maintenance
of the second
contract
It is clear from the
picture that the
maintenance has
not ended
The photo was
taken on February
13, 2021**







**Tabira Gate after
the bombing**

**And maintenance of
the second
arc(middle)**



**Research team
in front of
Tabira gate
with a group
from the
students**

6.3 Appendix No 3



Royal Cemetery
after installation of
iron box



Inside the royal cemetery



The Iron Box of
the Royal
Cemetery, the
explosion shattered
all the installed
glass





One of the burials in
the royal cemetery



Royal cemetery from
inside



The Iron Box of the
Royal Cemetery, the
explosion shattered
all the installed glass

6.4 Appendix No 4



**Farhan Pasha Palace
before the bombing**





**Farhan Pasha Palace
before the bombing**



**Farhan Pasha
Palace
The effects of the
bombings of ISIS
gangs**



**Farhan Pasha Palace
And the devastation caused after ISIS bombed it**





Remains of Farhan Pasha's palace

Filmed on 31/3/2021

6.5 Appendix No 5



Walter Andre Palace 1909 image from archive



Walter Andre Palace
A recent photo by the



**Walter Andre Palace
A recent photo by the
researcher**



**Walter Andre Palace
Palace damage from
the inside**



**Walter Andre Palace
Palace damage**





Walter Andre Palace
Palace damage from
the inside





Walter Andre Palace
Palace damage from
the inside





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