

Archaeological Sites In The Desert Of Karbala

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Kerbala is famous as the burial place of Imam Al-Hussein and his brother Al-Abbas. But the city hides archaeological and historical sites that have been recalling the history of this holy area for 3,000 years: some from the pre-Christian era and some from the Islamic era.

The Altar caves

They are 400 caves carved by the hand of man in the rocks which have been transformed with time into a series of holes and ditches, throughout Al-Razaza Lake. They are about 30 kms southwest of Karbala, on the right side of the highway where Al-Ukhaider fort is found. The caves are at the top of a rocky circular hill, with numerous cracks. According to scientific research they were dug in 300 BC for defensive purposes and were also used as cemeteries. The Japanese delegation that carried out excavations in this region discovered more than 2,000 archaeological pieces. Some have been restored in Japan and returned in glass boxes. Most of these

pieces are fabrics embroidered with colored threads, as well as threads made from goat and camel hair.

Al-Kassir

Al-Kassir includes the oldest Eastern church in Iraq whose remains and walls are still standing. The church is located 15 kms from Ain-Tamr and 5 kms from Al-Ukhaider. It is a rectangular construction, with a main room, chapel and side rooms, constructed from roofing tiles. Its 15 doors are bent at the top. The main building is surrounded by a wall and towers.

This church contains writings in Aramaic dating back to the fifth century A.D. Some



The rocky edge that covers Imam Ali's well
السن الصخري الذي تقع حته قطارة الإمام علي



The church and its surrounding

الكنيسة والمنطقة المحيطة بها



Imam Ali's well

قطارة الإمام علي ويلاحظ مستوى الماء فيها

of the tombs are within the enclosure of the church (one assumes they are those of the monks). The other tombs, presumably those of the common people, are outside the walled enclosure. It is believed that a catastrophe forced the monks and inhabitants of the locality to leave. That is why the doors of the church were closed from the outside.

Tombs construction

The excavation of the tombs outside the church revealed coffins constructed with stones and covered with another great stone. After burying the coffin, the tomb was covered with a plaster layer. The tombs were arranged in rows facing towards Jerusalem. Each tomb measures 120cm x 60 cm. Investigations have demonstrated that such tombs were designed in geometric shapes before the bodies were placed inside. After the fall of Saddam's regime, looting from this archaeological site has increased and several tombs have been unearthed, in the belief that they contained gold and money.

Iraq's Assyrian Christians make an annual pilgrimage to the region. In the past a day was set aside when families carried out special rituals and prayers in the chapel but the security situation has prevented this in recent times.

Shama'on Palace

The ruins of the Sham'on Palace are in the district of Ain-Tamr on a hill top. It is made of stones, roofing tiles and plaster. Its construction is attributed to Shama'on Ben Yabir, at the end of the 6th Century AD or the beginning of the 7th Century AD. It was once an imposing structure but only ruins and part of an outer wall have survived. The corners of the palace have four towers and other towers are also in evidence. Why the palace was built in such a remote location remains a mystery.

The Well of Imam Ali

About 15 kms south of Karbala, enroute to Ain-Tamr oasis is a dusty footpath that takes visitors to the historical site known as 'the Well of Imam Ali'. When Imam Ali's army returned from the battle of Saffain the soldiers were thirsty. A monk told them there was no water for at least two more



The Altar caves

كهوف الطائر



Ruins of the church wall

أطلال جدار الكنيسة



Bones exposed when thieves opened a grave beside the church looking for treasure

عظام متحجرة لأحد الموتى المدفونين بجوار الكنيسة بعد أن أخرجها اللصوص ظناً منهم بأن القبور تحتوي على كنوز

leagues. The Imam gathered his men and asked them to dig in a place where there was a rock. When the rock was raised water gushed forth, so they could all drink and wash.

The Well of Imam Ali is a simple small hole of one square meter under a sharpened rock from which the water drips. It is found in a desert where there are only sharpened rocks. Vandals uprooted a beautiful, tall palm but the locals have planted another palm on the site to replace the relic. ■



The ruin's of Shamaon Palace

بقايا قصر شمعون