



Final Report of the Jewish Cultural Heritage Initiative

A Joint Project of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage and the American Schools of Oriental Research's Cultural Heritage Initiatives

Funded by the Thomas S. Kaplan and Daphne Recanati Kaplan Family

EDITED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

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Executive Summary

The Jewish Cultural Heritage Initiative (JCHI) is a joint project of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage (FJH) and the American Schools of Oriental Research's Cultural Heritage Initiatives (ASOR CHI), generously funded by the Thomas S. Kaplan and Daphne Recanati Kaplan family. The project has catalogued 368 Jewish built heritage sites in Iraq and Syria. Team members assessed the history, condition, and significance of each site in order to provide an overview of the current status of Jewish built heritage in the two countries and to identify candidates for future heritage work.

Four sites were chosen as priority candidates for stabilization projects on the basis of their significance, condition, and project viability. All are in Iraq. Two—Meir Tweig Synagogue and the al-Habibiyah Jewish Cemetery—are active sites that are currently managed by the local Iraqi Jewish community in Baghdad. The other two—Sasson Synagogue and the Shrine of the Prophet Nahum—are badly deteriorated sites in post-conflict northern Iraq.

Introduction

The Jewish Cultural Heritage Initiative was created to develop an inventory of Jewish built heritage in Iraq and Syria and identify viable stabilization projects in both countries. ASOR staff worked on the project from December 2017 until June 2019. Dr. Darren P. Ashby, Project Manager for Syrian and Iraqi Cultural Heritage Projects, was the project lead and produced all of the content in the database except for satellite assessments. Dr. Susan Penacho, Project Manager for Geospatial Initiatives, conducted the satellite assessments with assistance from Gwendolyn Kristy, developed the database, and was responsible for data management.

This project benefitted greatly from the generous assistance of many specialists in Jewish heritage and history. We would especially like to thank Dr. Zvi Yehuda, Director of Research at the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center (BJHC), and his assistant Limor Kattan for their suggestions of new sites, detailed feedback on draft research, and steady encouragement throughout the project. Thank you as well to Prof. Ethel Sara Wolper at the University of New Hampshire for her help with Jewish sites in Mosul and her open spirit of collegiality.

Project Deliverables

ASOR and FJH agreed on nine deliverables for the current project:

(1) In consultation with FJH, ASOR would develop an inventory of Jewish heritage sites in Iraq and Syria from antiquity to the modern day. The project would take an inclusive approach that documented all site types, from the scale of a single grave to an entire settlement. ASOR would begin with the contents of their own ASOR CHI database and expand the inventory through consultation with the Center for Jewish Art at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center as well as through independent research.

(2) ASOR would conduct desk-based assessments for every site in the inventory. These would include documentation of the site's history and past and present use; compilation of data on previous site documentation and relevant scholarly studies; and the inclusion of conservation activities and risk/threat assessments.

(3) ASOR would conduct satellite assessments of every site in the inventory in order to assess current site conditions. Where applicable, this work would be complemented by consultation of historical satellite imagery as well as aerial photography to develop a more thorough understanding of changes in site use.

(4) ASOR would conduct ground assessments of inventoried sites where security and political considerations allowed. These would be done in consultation with local authorities and stakeholders and involve the collection of interior and exterior photographs, videos, and site plans as well as the production of a written report.

(5) ASOR would assess the significance and overall condition of each site in the inventory. These assessments would follow the rubric established for FJH's Historic Synagogues of Europe website in order to make the two datasets compatible.

(6) ASOR would provide site-specific recommendations for risk mitigation, preservation, and conservation activities at each site based on its assessment activities as conditions allowed.

(7) ASOR would establish a remotely-accessible database that housed all of the information collected on each site.

(8) ASOR would provide a spreadsheet with all project information in a common format so that the material can be integrated into a publicly-accessible online database modeled on the Historic Synagogues of Europe website.

(9) ASOR would produce a final report that details the methods, results, and findings of the project and share all data with FJH. In consultation with FJH, ASOR would also provide recommendations for future work.

Methodology

The work on this project occurred in two stages. In the first stage, JCHI developed a database in FileMaker Pro (Fig. 1).¹ This database is modeled on ASOR CHI's larger database and pulls directly from the latter's records for essential site information such as site name, coordinates, and site type. Although the two datasets are linked, the JCHI records are numbered independently (e.g. JCHI #1; JCHI #2; etc.). Information drawn from the ASOR CHI inventory appears in the upper right corner of the JCHI database. A list of relevant satellite assessments, which are a separate part of the ASOR CHI database, is present at the bottom of each record.

The rest of the JCHI database is modeled on the Historic Synagogues of Europe (HSE) database that was assembled by the Foundation for Jewish Heritage (FJH) and the Center for Jewish Art (CJA) at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. HSE included fields for greater detail on the exact location of sites as well their contents and present use.

¹ Ashby and Penacho worked together to plan the layout of the database with Penacho responsible for its actual construction.

Additionally, JCHI maintained the definitions for site significance and building condition that were used in HSE.²

The image shows a screenshot of the JCHI Inventory database interface. At the top, there are logos for 'JCHI INVENTORY', 'Foundation for Jewish Heritage', and 'asor CULTURAL HERITAGE INITIATIVES'. The interface is divided into two main panels for record entry and details.

Left Panel (Record Entry):

- JCHI #:** 1
- JCHI Site Name:** Aleppo - Bandara Synagogue
- Hebrew Name:** בית הנסות אל-בנדרה
- Community:** Syrian
- Heritage Type:** Synagogue
- Street Address:** N/A
- Neighborhood:** al-Bandara
- Building Date:** 5th century CE
- Building Active Dates:** 5th century CE–20th century CE
- Reconstruction Dates:** 1405–1418; 16th century; 1855; ca. 1948; 1992
- Construction Material:** Brick Concrete Half-Timber Stone Timber
- Architectural Style:** N/A
- Architect:** N/A
- Artistic Decoration:** Sculpture Inscription (Painted) Stucco Inscription (Paper) Stained Glass Windows Textiles Wall Paintings Color-paste motifs Inscription (Stone) Mosaics Inscription (Wood) Wood Carving
- Architectural Significance:** The Bandara Synagogue is the oldest synagogue in Aleppo. The architecture of the building reflects the history of the Jewish community in the city. The western wing contains architectural elements that date to the 5th or 6th century CE. The eastern wing was built to accommodate the arrival of Sephardic Jews to Aleppo in the 16th century CE.
- Present Usage:** Abandoned
- Present Usage Details:** The Bandara Synagogue is located in an area that was heavily damaged by fighting in Aleppo during the Syrian Civil War.
- Significance Rating:** 1 (Local), 2 (Regional), 3 (National), 4 (International)
- Condition of Building Fabric:** A (Good), B (Fair), C (Poor), D (Very Bad), E (No return), No Information
- Building Condition Details:** The building is in very bad condition. The central courtyard, eastern wing, and "modern" wing have all been heavily damaged in the fighting. The roof of the western wing is largely
- Stabilization Priority:** Low, Medium, High
- Recommendation for Risk Mitigation, Preservation, and Conservation:** This building is a high-priority candidate for future work. The Bandara Synagogue needs immediate stabilization activity in order to prevent further deterioration of the site. A long-term preservation project will also be necessary to restore the site to its former condition. Short-term work on the site will be difficult to access. The synagogue is located in a heavily held territory.
- Bibliography:** Burns 2009: 55, Sutton 2005, Zenner 2000

Right Panel (Record Details):

- CHI #:** 61
- Site Name:** Aleppo - Bandara Synagogue
- Alternate Name:** Central Synagogue of Aleppo; Joab's Synagogue; Yellow
- Arabic Name:** كنيس البندره
- Hebrew Name:** בית הנסות אל-בנדרה
- City:** Aleppo
- Governorate:** Aleppo
- Country:** Syria
- Latitude:** 36.202897
- Longitude:** 37.157738
- Site Type:** Religious Site or Monument
- Religious Affiliation:** Judaism
- Site Description:** The Great Synagogue of Aleppo, also known as al-Safra Synagogue (The Yellow Synagogue) or the Synagogue of Yoab ben Tseruya, is located in the al-Bandara neighborhood of Aleppo's Old City district. Local Jewish tradition dates the construction of the synagogue to the tenth century BCE. However, the oldest part of the synagogue likely dates to the fifth or sixth centuries CE on the basis of architectural components and the earliest surviving inscription comes from 834 CE. The Jewish community expanded the synagogue in the sixteenth century in order to accommodate the Sephardic Jews who settled there following their expulsion from Spain and Portugal. The synagogue was heavily damaged by fire during the 19th century.
- Dating:** Foundation: 5th–6th century CE; Reconstruction: 1405–1418; 16th
- Period of Occupation:** Paleolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Early Bronze Age, Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, Medieval, Ottoman, Modern
- Related CHI#:**
- Related CHI Notes:**

Definitions: Significance Rating

- 1 (Local):** A building was constructed or served as a synagogue, and has no distinct architectural features or they are not preserved. It arouses interest only at the local level.
- 2 (Regional):** A building is a preserved example of regional synagogue architecture. It arouses interest only at the local and regional level.
- 3 (National):** The building is an important example of synagogue architecture in a given country. It is an object of national interest.
- 4 (International):** The building is of outstanding architectural, urban or historical importance. It has unique features and/or is especially influential internationally as an architectural pattern.

Associated Satellite Assessment

Fig. 1. The layout of the JCHI database.

² <http://historicsynagogueseuropa.org/synagogue-approach>

After the completion of the layout, Ashby populated the database with records of Jewish heritage sites. At the start of the project, the ASOR CHI database contained 18 relevant records. Additional sites were identified through consultation with scholars, library research, and open-source reporting, such as social media posts.³

The creation of each record involved multiple steps. The site was initially added to the ASOR CHI database and assigned a CHI number (e.g. CHI # 61). After the ASOR CHI record was filled out, a new JCHI record was created and linked to the ASOR CHI database via the CHI number.

Ashby conducted a desk-based assessment for each record in the database. Ashby's association with the University of Pennsylvania provided extensive access to physical and digital scholarship as well as the ability to request material from other universities. As part of each desk-based assessment, Ashby wrote a description of the site that included an overview of its history and a survey of its physical features. The depth of each desk-based assessment varied based on the age and importance of each site. In general, the more recent and significant a site, the more documentation existed with which to write a detailed description.

Penacho and her assistant Gwendolyn Kristy conducted satellite assessments on sites whose exact location was known, and which were either still extant or had not been confirmed as destroyed. Uncertainty around the status of a site was noted in the assessments as well as in the corresponding JCHI record. Satellite assessments followed the methodology established by ASOR CHI for its own documentation work. The assessor assigned an overall condition rating and an overall percentage of damage and wrote a short description of the site condition. If possible, the assessor also identified what had caused the damage (e.g. military activity; development; agricultural activity).

JCHI identified a subset of sites in Iraq and Syria for ground-based assessment. The security environment in both countries dictated which sites could be visited and the level of their documentation. Two projects were conducted. In Syria, in-country sources visited sites in the Jewish Quarter of Damascus. In Iraq, in-country sources worked with members of the local Jewish community to document sites under the community's control.

³ This project made limited use of Diarna, a publicly accessible geospatial database of Jewish heritage in the Middle East, due to JCHI's decision to rely on primary sources as much as possible and the identification of some minor location errors in Diarna's records. The majority of sites drawn from Diarna are located in Damascus and Aleppo; JCHI was able to confirm the location of most of these through other sources.

Based on the results of the desk-based, satellite, and ground-based assessments, Ashby assigned each site a significance and building condition rating. These two ratings followed the criteria established for both categories in the HSE database. Significance ratings were based on architectural, urban, and historical aspects. They fall into four tiers: (1) Local; (2) Regional; (3) National; and (4) International. These designations are based on the importance of the site during its active life, rather than its present-day significance. Building condition is based on current building use and level of maintenance as well as the degree of modification to its historical character. There are five tiers: (A) Good; (B) Fair; (C) Poor; (D) Very Bad; and (E) No Return. When nothing definite could be found on a site's condition, it was tagged as No Information.

Finally, Ashby designated a stabilization priority for each site and provided a recommendation for risk mitigation, preservation, and conservation. Stabilization priority is divided into low, medium, and high categories. Each site's designation was determined through considerations of site significance, building condition, and project feasibility due to the local political and security environment. The final factor played a major role in which sites were categorized as high priority rather than medium priority.

Results

ASOR developed an inventory of 368 Jewish heritage sites in Iraq and Syria. The inventory contains 297 sites in Iraq and 71 in Syria (Figs. 2–7).⁴ These sites date from the second half of the first millennium BCE up to the present day. The majority of sites were built in the 19th or 20th centuries.

⁴ The disparity between the number of sites in the two countries originates primarily from the publication of more systematic documentation of Jewish heritage in Iraq by scholars as well as the direct assistance of the BJHC.

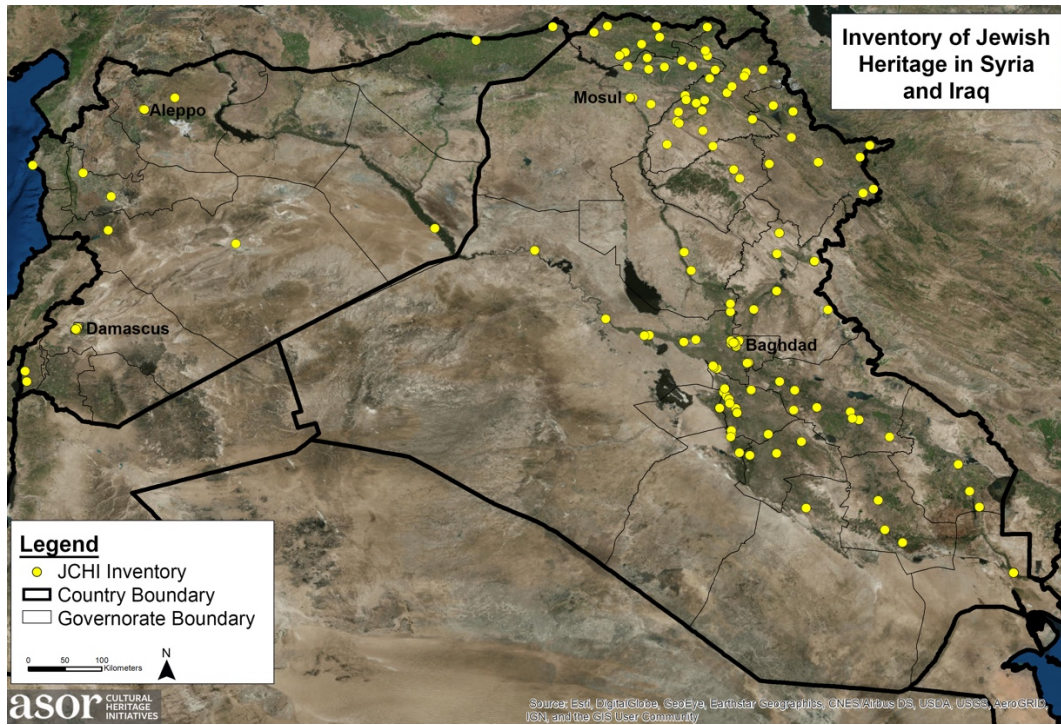


Fig. 2. The geographic distribution of sites in the database at settlement level.

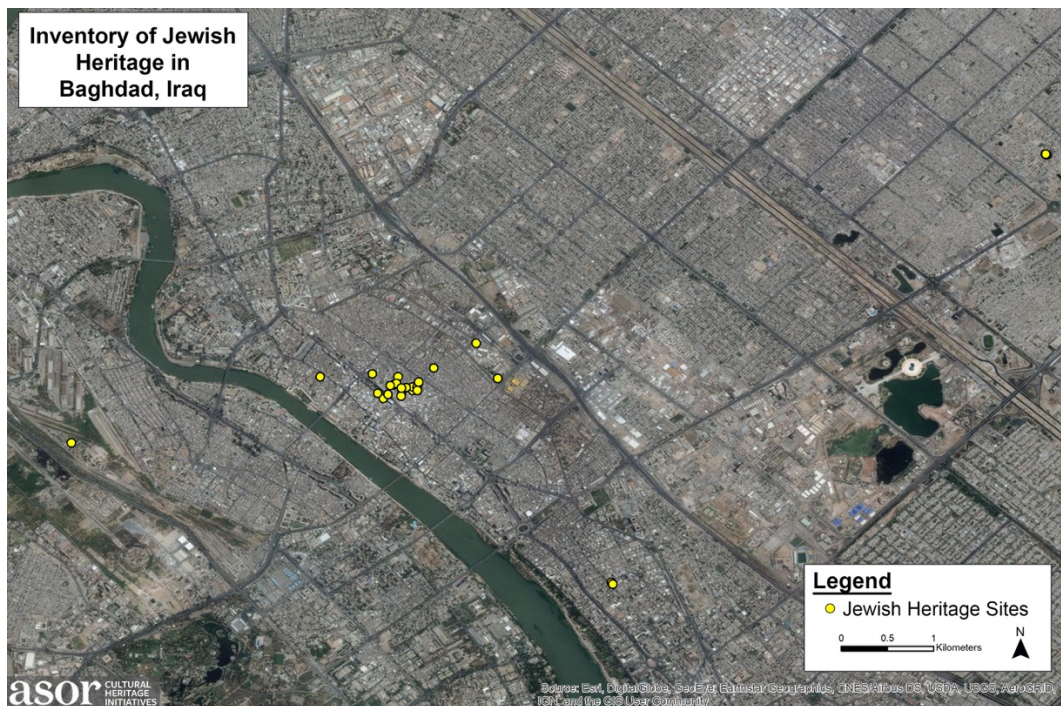


Fig. 3. The distribution of recorded Jewish heritage sites in Baghdad; only sites with an exact location are shown.

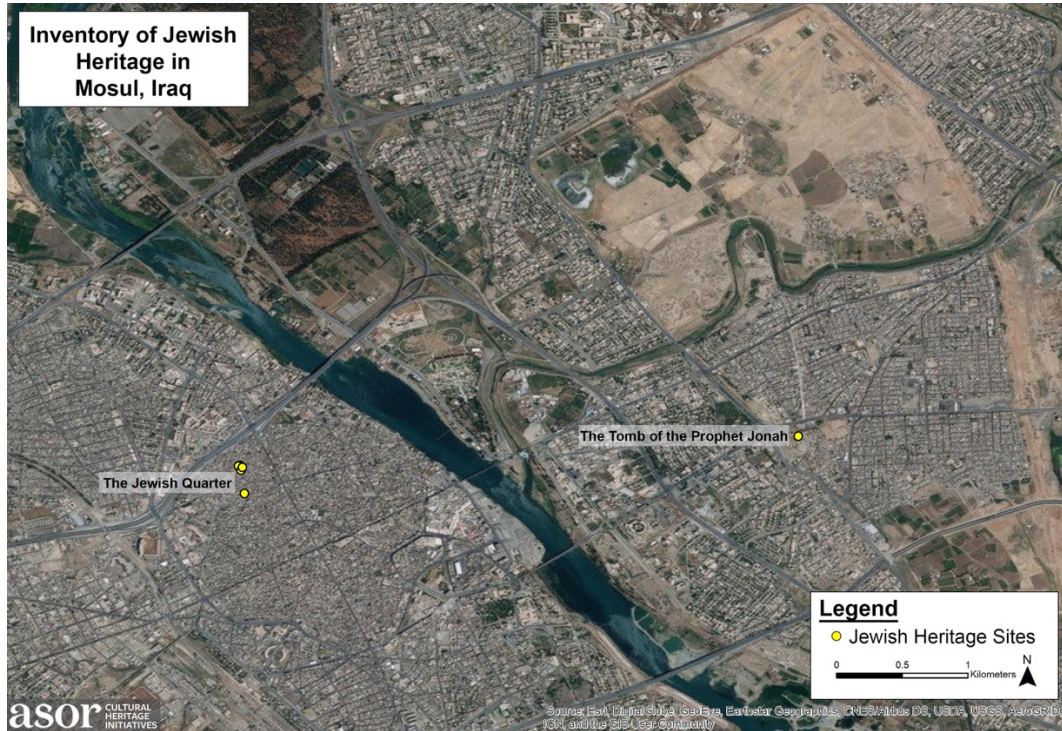


Fig. 4. The distribution of recorded Jewish heritage sites in Mosul; only sites with an exact location are shown.

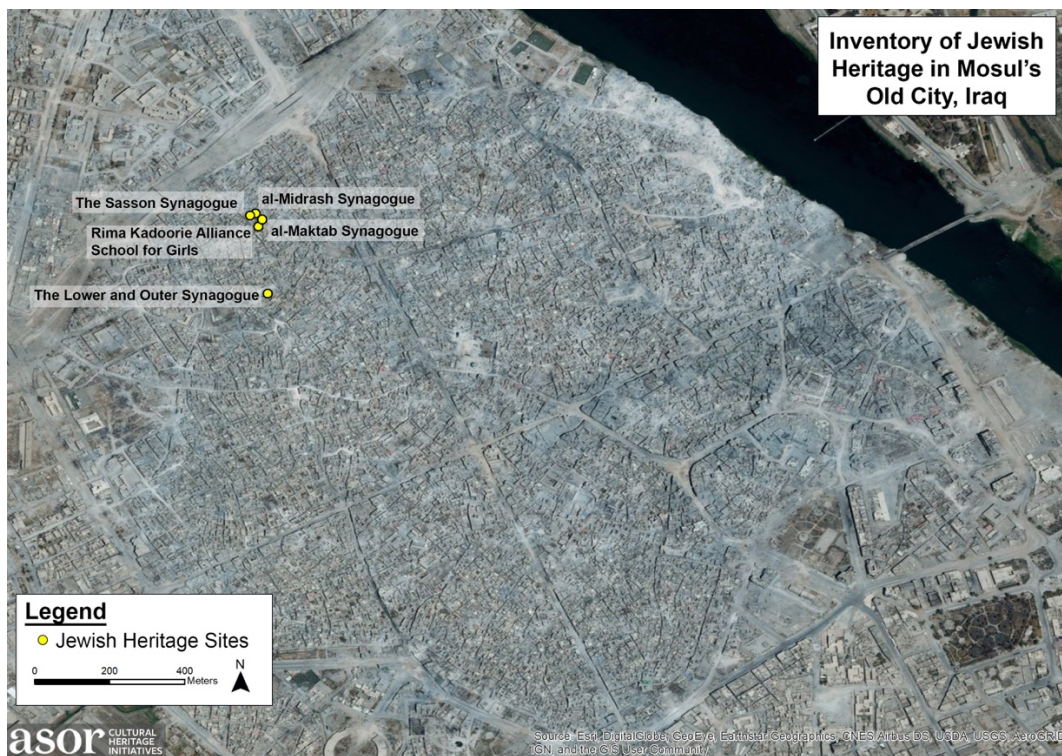


Fig. 5. The distribution of recorded Jewish heritage sites in the Old City of Mosul; only sites with an exact location are shown.



Fig. 6. The distribution of recorded Jewish heritage sites in Damascus; only sites with an exact location are shown.

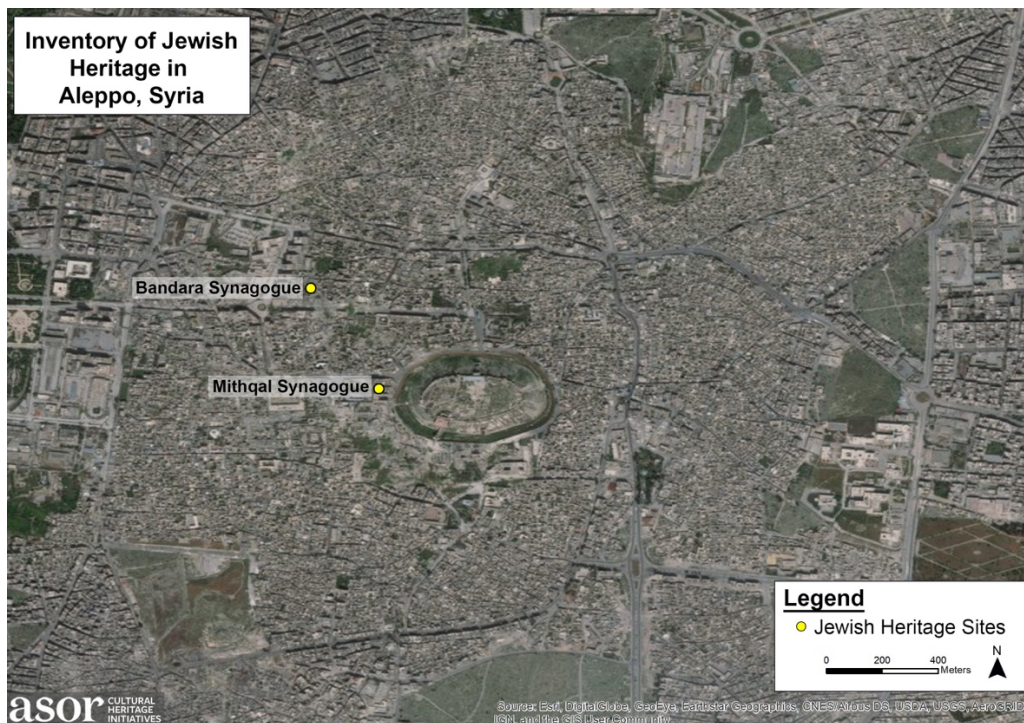


Fig. 7. The distribution of recorded Jewish heritage sites in Aleppo; only sites with an exact location are shown.

The dominant documented site types differ slightly between the two countries (Fig. 8). Among Iraqi sites (Fig. 9), synagogues (40%; 118 sites), settlements (32%; 96 sites), and schools (16%; 48 sites) constitute the three largest categories in the database. In Syria (Fig. 10), synagogues (58%; 44 sites), residences (19%; 14 sites), and schools (7%; 5 sites) are the three primary types.

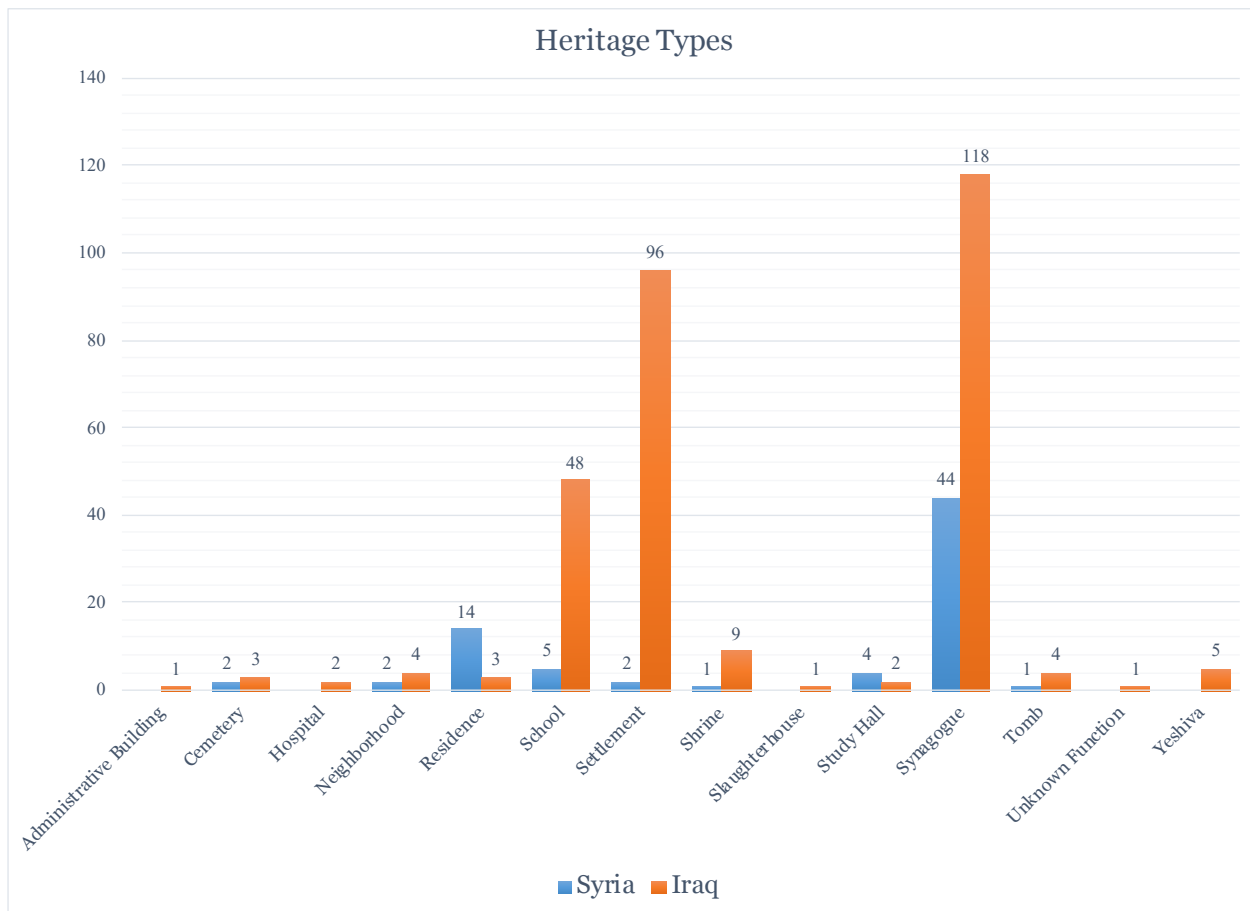


Fig. 8. Distribution of heritage types in Iraq and Syria.

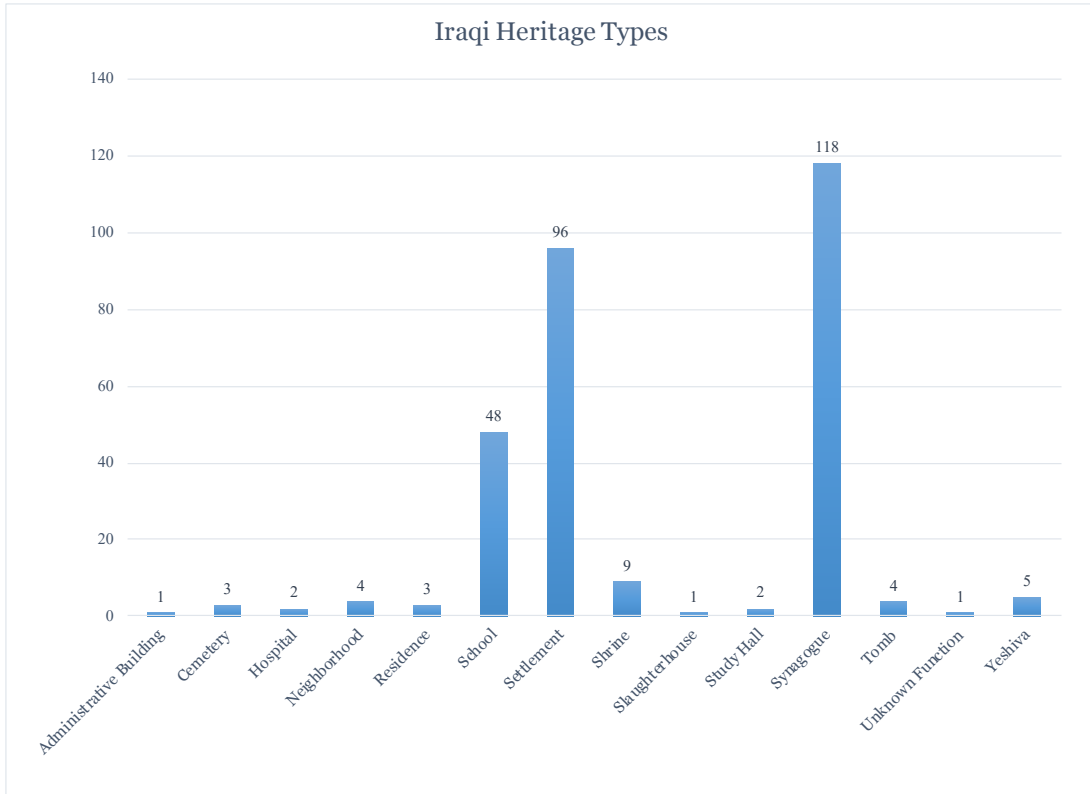


Fig. 9. Iraqi Jewish heritage types.

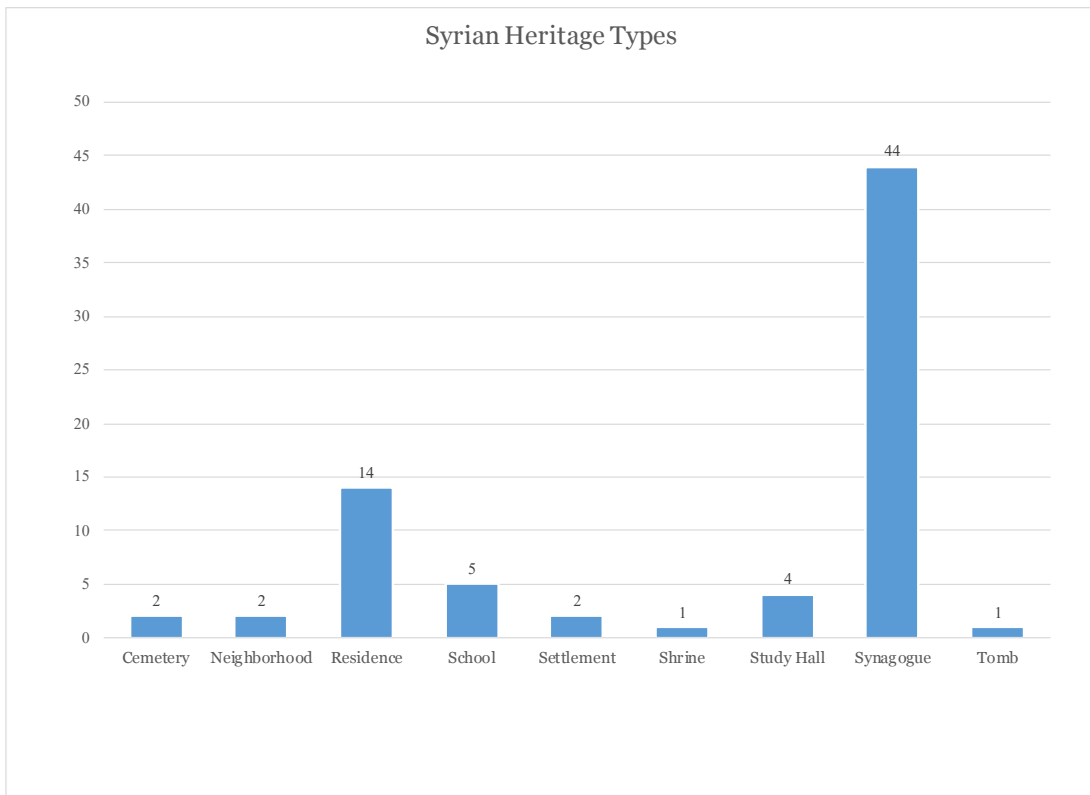


Fig. 10. Syrian Jewish heritage types.

Despite the disparity in the number of documented sites, both countries have similar ratios of site significance (Fig. 11). Among Iraqi sites (Fig. 12), 88% were classified as local, 5% as regional, 3% as national, and 4% as international. In Syria (Fig. 13), 82% were classified as local, 7% as regional, 7% as national, and 4% as international.

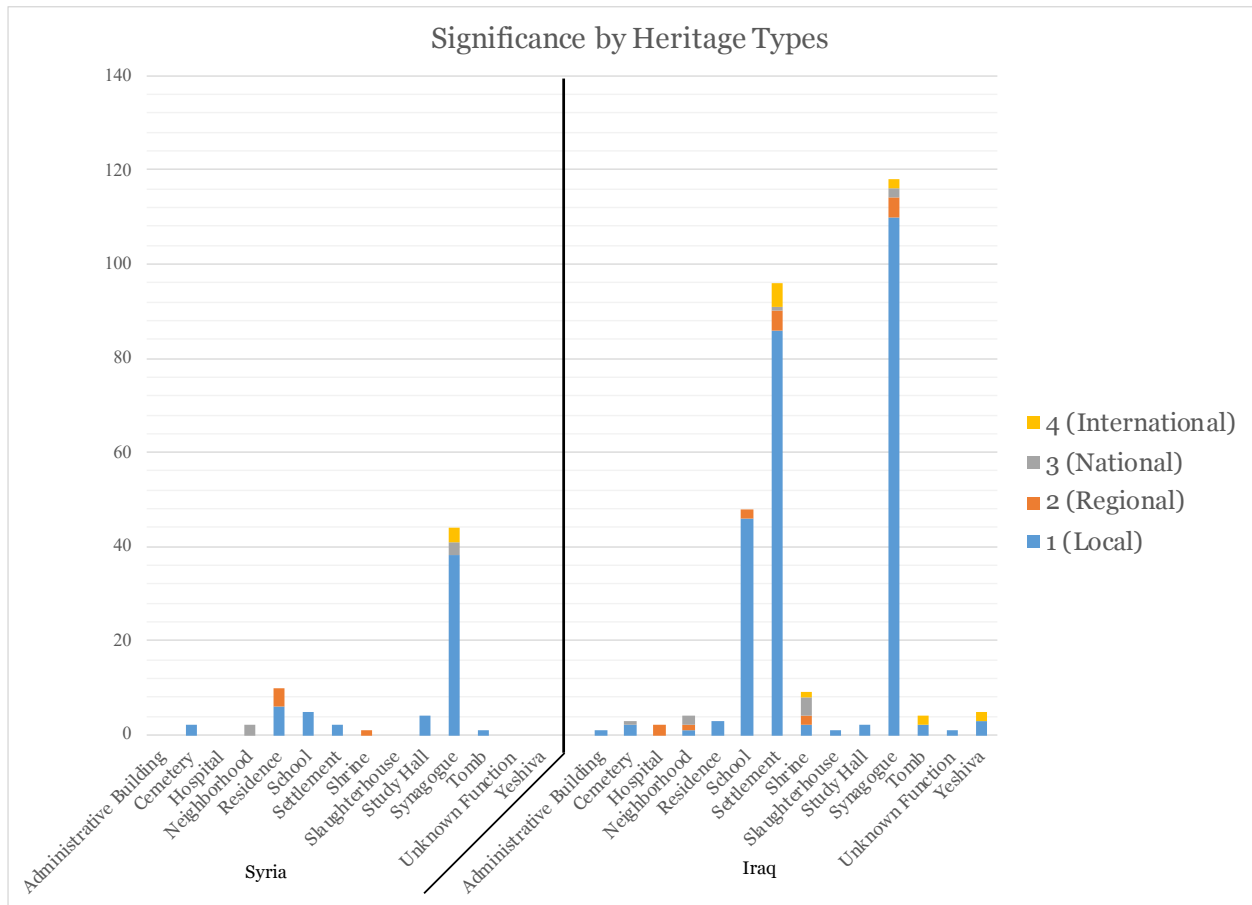


Fig. 11. Site significance by heritage type in Iraq and Syria.

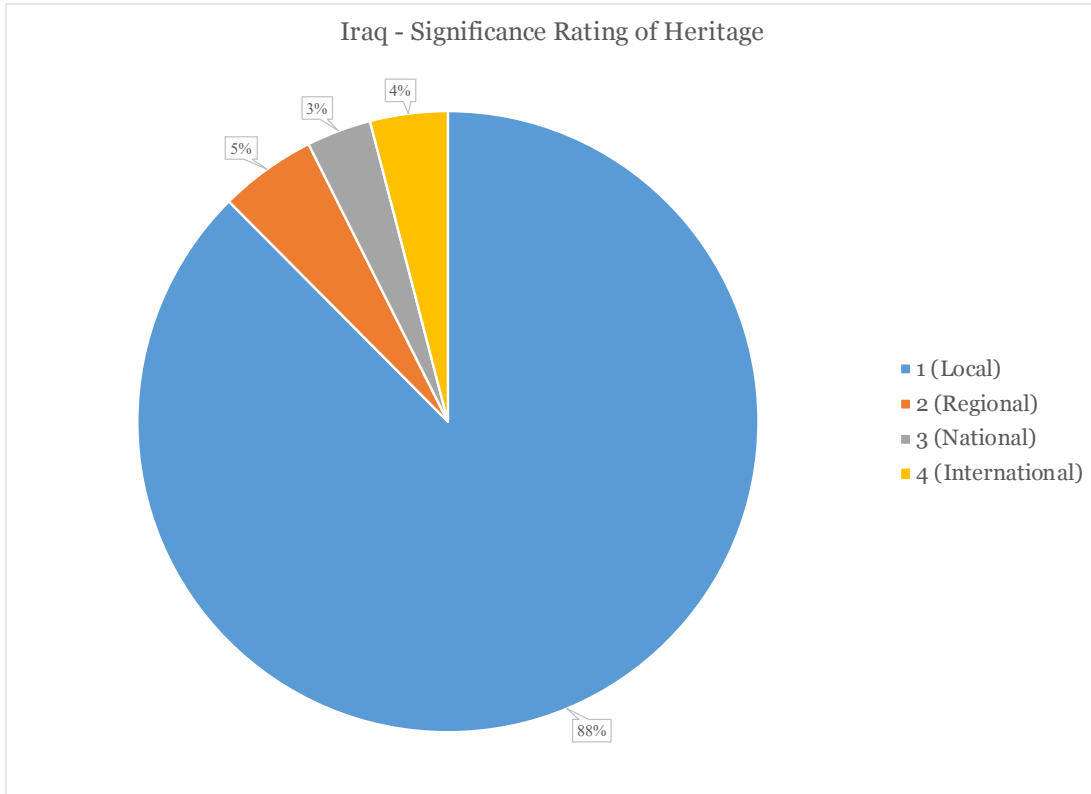


Fig. 12. Ratios of site significance in Iraq.

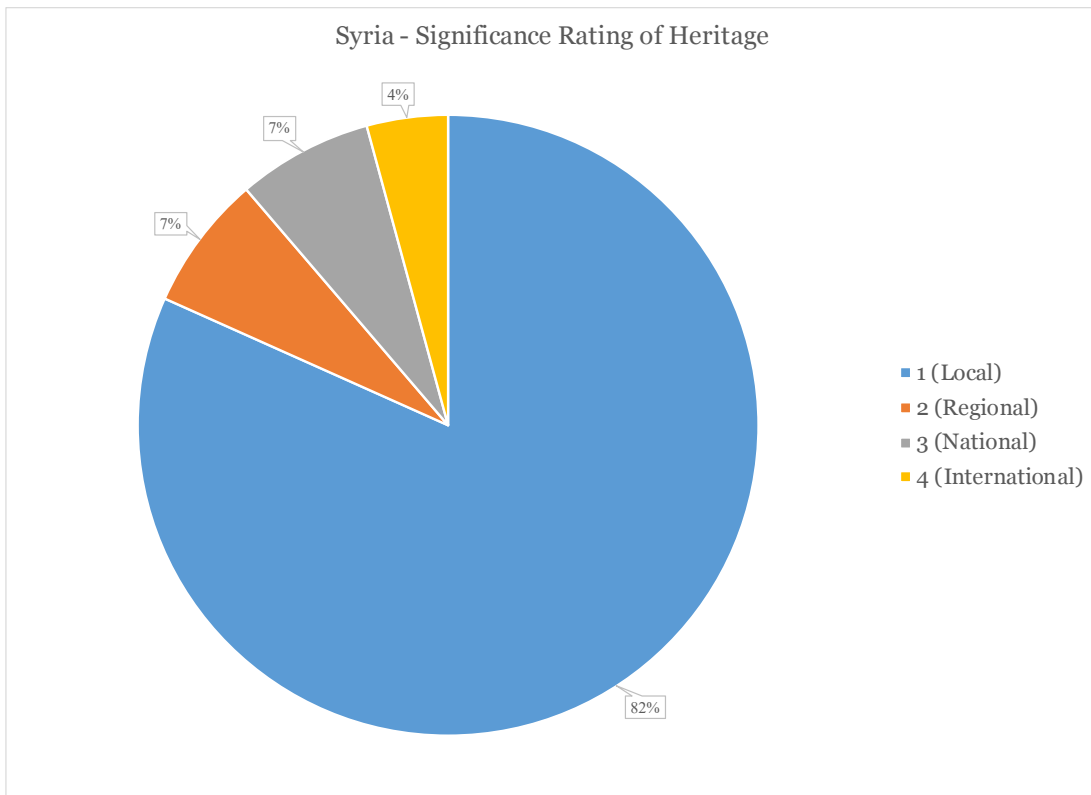


Fig. 13. Ratios of site significance in Syria.

Comparison of the condition of Jewish heritage in Iraq and Syria (Fig. 14) shows a distinct difference in the patterns of preservation in the two countries (see the conclusion for thoughts on why this difference exists). In Iraq, 89% of the sites are labeled as No Return (23%; 68 sites) or No Information (66%; 198).⁵ Of the 11% confirmed as still standing, 7% are in Poor (3%; 9 sites) or Very Bad condition (4%; 12 sites).

The Syrian sites have a lower ratio of extant to destroyed sites. Only 53% of the sites are tagged as No Return (45%; 32 sites) or No Information (8%; 6 sites). Of the remaining 47%, the majority of the sites are tagged as Fair (34%; 24 sites) or Good (4%; 3 sites). Only 7% are in Poor (3%; 2 sites) or Very Bad (6%; 4 sites) condition.

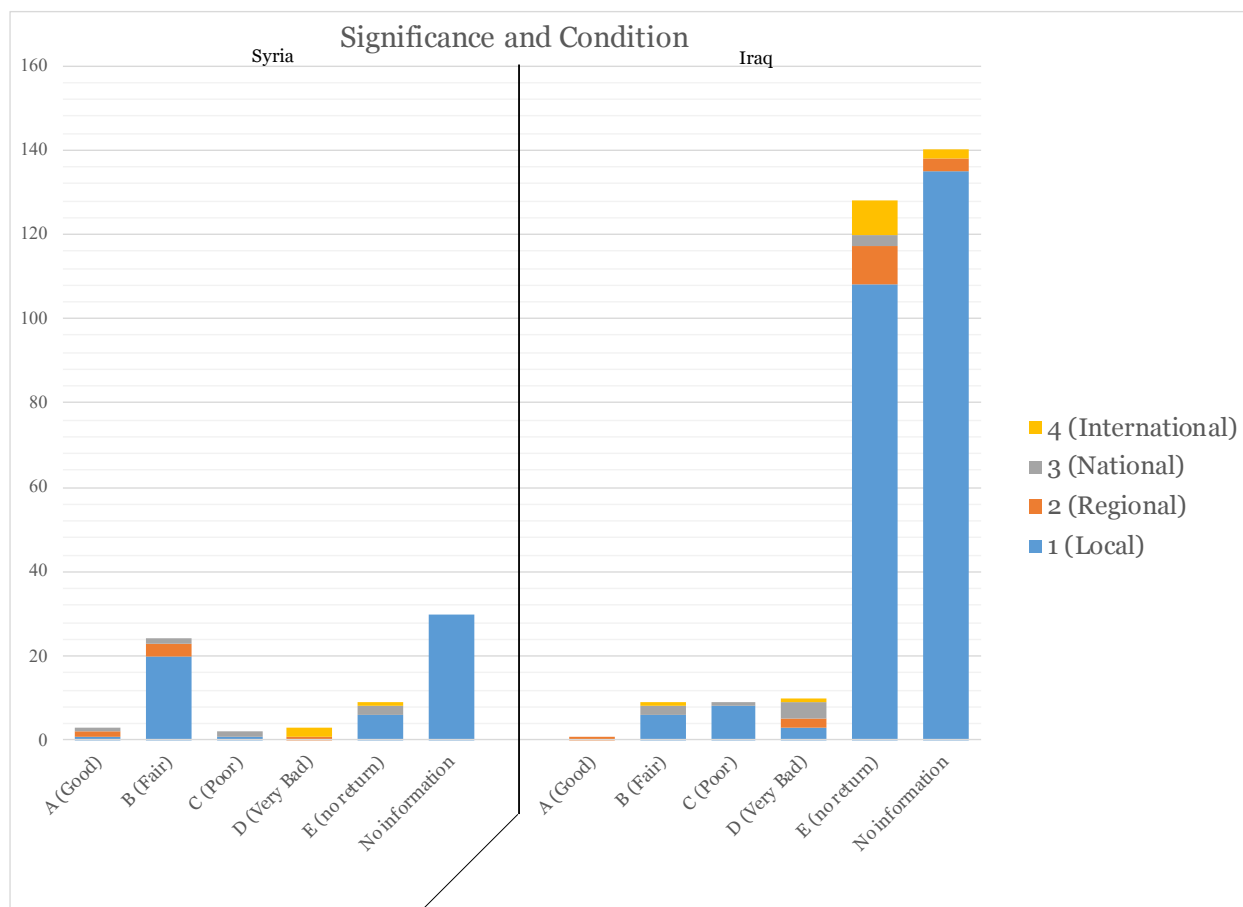


Fig. 14. Ratios of site significance and condition in Iraq and Syria.

⁵ The classification of the majority of the Iraqi sites as No Information is due to the large number of settlements in the database. When nothing was known about the condition of heritage within a settlement, it was tagged as No Information. However, based on patterns of preservation in Iraq and Syria, the overwhelming majority of heritage sites tagged as No Information are likely in very bad condition or beyond repair.

A total of 27 sites (7% of the corpus) are considered endangered (Fig. 15). In this study, endangered heritage equates to sites that have a poor or very bad condition rating; i.e. sites that are at a risk of significant deterioration in the near future. Of these sites, 3 are internationally significant, 7 nationally significant, 4 regionally significant, and 13 locally significant. The international, national, and regional non-settlement sites are as follows:

International Endangered Heritage

Aleppo, Syria: Bandara Synagogue (Very Bad)
Damascus, Syria: The Synagogue of the Prophet Elijah (Very Bad)
Al-Kifl, Iraq: The Shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel (Very Bad)

National Endangered Heritage

Baghdad, Iraq: The Tomb of Sheikh Ishaq Gaon (Very Bad)
Baghdad, Iraq: The Synagogue of Sheikh Ishaq Gaon (Very Bad)
Mosul, Iraq: Mosul Jewish Quarter (Very Bad)
Baghdad, Iraq: Baghdad Jewish Quarter (Very Bad)
Aleppo, Syria: Aleppo Jewish Quarter (Very Bad)
Baghdad, Iraq: Al-Habibiyah Jewish Cemetery (Poor)
Damascus, Syria: Al-Menashe Synagogue (Poor)

Regional Endangered Heritage

Al-Qosh, Iraq: The Shrine of the Prophet Nahum (Very Bad)
Mosul, Iraq: The Sasson Synagogue (Very Bad)
Tedef, Syria: The Shrine of Ezra (Very Bad)

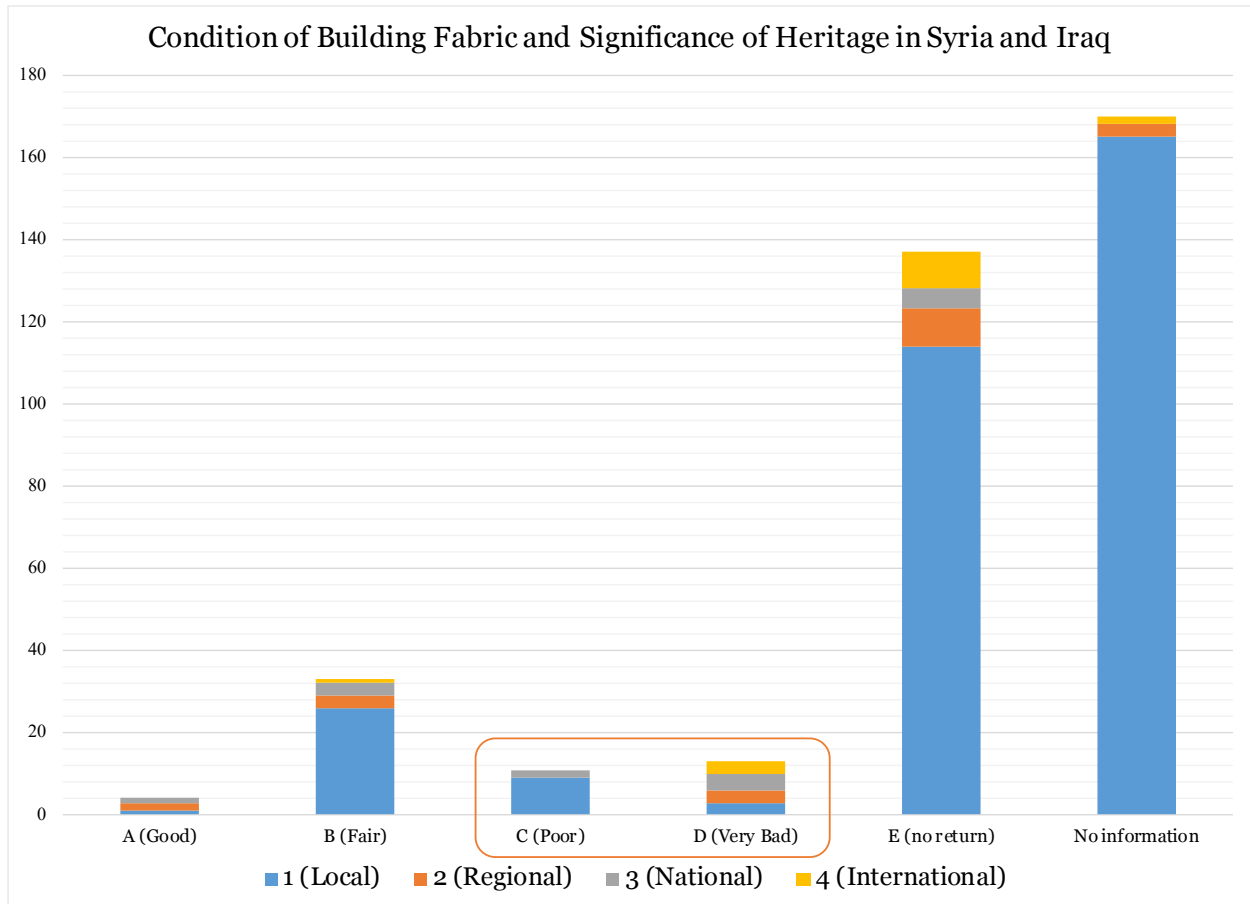


Fig. 15. Endangered heritage in Iraq and Syria.

Prospects for Future Work

This section presents a selection of priority stabilization projects for future work. Both Iraq and Syria contain a number of endangered heritage sites. However, only sites in Iraq are considered here. The current political and military situation in Syria makes near-term work on Jewish heritage sites unviable.

Four sites are priority candidates for stabilization work. These sites were chosen on the basis of their condition, their project viability, and their significance to both the Jewish community and the wider collection of Iraqi and international stakeholders. Ranked in order of priority, these sites are:

1. Meir Tweig Synagogue in Baghdad
2. Al-Habibiyah Jewish Cemetery in Baghdad
3. Sasson Synagogue in Mosul
4. Shrine of the Prophet Nahum in al-Qosh

Meir Tweig Synagogue (JCHI #14)

Meir Tweig Synagogue tops the list because of its significance to the local and international Jewish community, the viability of stabilization work on the building, and the urgency of action due to the precariousness of those in the local Jewish community who have the authority to conduct work on the site. Meir Tweig Synagogue is the last functioning synagogue in Iraq, although the local Jewish community is now so small that a minyan is no longer achievable. In addition to providing a focus for the community, the synagogue also houses material from other synagogues and communal buildings that are no longer active.

Through its collaboration with in-country sources, JCHI made contact with the few remaining members of the Iraqi Jewish community in Baghdad. The leaders of the community indicated that Meir Tweig Synagogue was one of their highest priorities and provided a list of problems that they wanted to address. Overall, the synagogue is in fair condition. However, there is a creeping damp in the walls that has already caused the paint and plaster to peel off in multiple places on the first floor, and additional water damage is visible on the ceiling of the second story. Outside, part of the brick facade of the building has deteriorated and the pavement of the courtyard needs refinishing.

Work on Meir Tweig Synagogue is highly viable. The site is under the control of the Jewish community, which already has a list of preferred contractors that it has worked with on other projects. The main concern for the Jewish community is visibility. They do not want to draw attention to the synagogue's location.

Work on the synagogue is also urgent due to the small size of the Iraqi Jewish community. In total, the community numbers fewer than ten people, most of them elderly. The community's limited size and advanced age mean that the longer stabilization work is delayed, the more difficult it may become to conduct the work due to a loss of in-country partners with the legal right to authorize it.

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Fig. 16. The JCHI record for the Meir Tweig Synagogue.

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Fig. 17. The location of Meir Tweig Synagogue in Baghdad (Google Earth).

Redacted for Public Release

Fig. 18. The boundaries of the synagogue property (Google Earth).

Redacted for Public Release

Fig. 19. The synagogue, seen from the north. Note the water damage visible on the northwest corner of the building (In-country sources; September 2018).

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Fig. 20. Deterioration of the courtyard and stairs in front of the primary entrance to the property (In-country sources; September 2018).

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Fig. 21. A broken stair tread in front of a secondary entrance to the synagogue (In-country sources; September 2018).

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Fig. 22. A deteriorated balcony above the primary entrance into the synagogue (In-country sources; September 2018).

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Fig. 23. The synagogue's interior, looking east (In-country sources; September 2018).

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Fig. 24. The synagogue's interior, looking west (In-country sources; September 2018).

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Fig. 25. Water damage present on the wall and ceiling of the second floor at the northwestern corner of the synagogue (In-country sources; September 2018).

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Fig. 26. Water damage present on the southern wall of the first floor of the synagogue (In-country sources; September 2018).

Al-Habibiyah Jewish Cemetery (JCHI #109)

The second site for future work is the al-Habibiyah Jewish Cemetery, located in the al-Habibiyah neighborhood in eastern Baghdad. Created during the early 20th century, the cemetery has been the main location for Jewish burial in the city since its foundation. The cemetery contains many local Jewish notables, including the bodies of Jews publicly hanged in Baghdad in January 1969 on charges of spying for Israel.

The cemetery has the same qualities of significance, project viability, and urgency of action as Meir Tweig Synagogue. Although ranked second in terms of priority, the cemetery is in worse condition. The interior of the walled property is overgrown with vegetation in multiple places and the space is used as a dumping ground for trash by people on the adjacent properties. Many of the graves are in poor condition. The cement casing on whole blocks of them has deteriorated, threatening to expose the remains within. The local Jewish community seeks to clear the inside of the cemetery of debris, stabilize the deteriorating graves, and improve the security of the site through the erection of additional fencing on top of the existing wall as well as a new gate.

Redacted for Public Release

Fig. 27. The JCHI record for the al-Habibiyah Jewish Cemetery.

Redacted for Public Release

Fig. 28. The location of the al-Habibiyah Jewish Cemetery in Baghdad (Google Earth).

Redacted for Public Release

Fig. 29. The boundaries of the cemetery property (Google Earth).



Fig. 30. Trash and debris discarded along the exterior southwest corner of the property (In-country sources; September 2018).



Fig. 31. The main entrance to the cemetery (In-country sources; September 2018).



Fig. 32. A pile of trash and overgrown vegetation alongside graves in the cemetery (In-country sources; September 2018).



Fig. 33. Trash in between and on top of graves in the cemetery (In-country sources; September 2018).



Fig. 34. A block of heavily deteriorated graves in the cemetery (In-country sources; September 2018).



Fig. 35. A row of deteriorated graves in the cemetery (In-country sources; September 2018).

Sasson Synagogue (JCHI #95)

The Sasson Synagogue, located in the former Jewish Quarter at the northwestern end of the Old City in western Mosul, is the third prospect for future work. Built in 1902, the Sasson Synagogue was not the oldest synagogue in Mosul, but it became the main synagogue in the city due to its central location in the Jewish Quarter.⁶ In addition to religious activities, the synagogue hosted communal events, such as electoral meetings. A school was also located adjacent to the property.

In the decades following the departure of the Iraqi Jewish community, the condition of the Sasson Synagogue has deteriorated significantly.⁷ The roof of the synagogue has collapsed in multiple places, exposing the interior decoration, including wall paintings, to weathering and increasing the risk that the rest of the standing architecture will fall; indeed, multiple large cracks have already developed in the load-bearing walls of the complex. The property has also filled with trash and debris deposited in the building over the past decades. Further, looters have targeted the site, removing some Jewish cultural property.

Although it is in very bad condition, the Sasson Synagogue now represents the best-preserved piece of Jewish built heritage in the city. ALIPH has recently funded a stabilization project at the site; however, the specifics of this project, including goals and timeline, are currently unknown. Given the size and condition of the site, an opportunity may exist for FJH to collaborate with the recipient organization on some aspect of its project, or to conduct stabilization work on a portion of the site outside the bounds of the ALIPH-funded work.

Any work on the Sasson Synagogue will face a number of difficulties. The property is located far from the current focus of reconstruction in western Mosul, which makes access difficult. Additionally, the security situation in Mosul, particularly western Mosul, remains volatile. Alongside environmental and explosive hazards, insurgent cells continue to conduct attacks against military and civilian targets. The legal status of the property is also unclear. The site is currently in private hands and the owner has reportedly attempted to sell the synagogue. However, some activists dispute the owner's right to the property and the site may ultimately fall under the authority of Iraq's State Board of Antiquities and Heritage or another government agency.

⁶ Ezra Laniado, *The Jews of Mosul: From Samaritan Exile to "Operation Ezra and Nehemiah"* (Tirat-Karmel: Makhon le-ḥeker Yahadut Motsul, 1981), 168–169.

⁷ <https://www.france24.com/en/20190423-iraq-mosul-jewish-synagogue-damage-reconstruction>;
<https://www.voanews.com/episode/mosul-residents-visit-synagogues-remains-3783071>

JCHI # **95** Further Consideration Needed

JCHI Site Name: Mosul - The Sasson Synagogue

Hebrew Name: בית הכנסת שסון

Community: Mizrachi

Heritage Type: Synagogue

Street Address: N/A

Neighborhood: Jewish Quarter

Building Date: 1902

Building Active Dates: 1902-1951

Reconstruction Dates: N/A

Construction Material: Brick Concrete Half-Timber Stone Timber

Architectural Style: N/A

Architect: N/A

Artistic Decoration: Sculpture Inscription (Painted) Stucco Inscription (Paper) Stained Glass Windows Textiles Wall Paintings Color-paste motifs Inscription (Stone) Mosaics Inscription (Wood) Wood Carving

Architectural Significance: N/A

Present Usage: Abandoned

Present Usage Details: The site is used by locals to dump trash.

Significance Rating: 1 (Local) 2 (Regional) 3 (National) 4 (International)

Condition of Building Fabric: A (Good) B (Fair) C (Poor) D (Very Bad) E (No return) No Information

Building Condition Details: The building has suffered badly from neglect and the recapture of Mosul from ISIS. Part of the roof had collapsed prior to March 2002.

Stabilization Priority: Low Medium High

Recommendation for Risk Mitigation, Preservation, and Conservation: This building is a high-priority candidate for future work. The building is in poor condition but portions appear to be salvageable based on satellite imagery. Initial documentary work is needed in order to assess whether future work is viable. The location of this site deep within the heavily damaged Old City complicates any attempted work on this site.

Bibliography: Avishur 2006: 74
Laniado 1981: 168-169

CHI # **15293**

Site Name: Mosul - The Sasson Synagogue

Alternate Name:

Arabic Name:

Hebrew Name: בית הכנסת שסון

City: Mosul

Governorate: Ninawa

Country: Iraq

Latitude: 36.346360 Search for Coordinates Coordinates for city area only

Longitude: 43.121410 Unclear Location

Site Type: Religious Site or Monument

Religious Affiliation: Judaism

Site Description: The Sasson Synagogue is located in the center of the Jewish Quarter in western Mosul. It lies immediately west of al-Midrash Synagogue. The Sasson Synagogue was completed in 1902. The original owner ran out of money, so Sasson Abdullah Moha stepped in to finish the job with the help of community volunteers. Local Muslim community resisted the construction but Sasson ultimately secured official approval.

The Sasson Synagogue was built like the Outer Synagogue. It had a large hall that could accommodate more than 500 people and a courtyard that was used for worship during the summer months. The Women's College was located at the southern end of the site.

Dating: 1902

Period of Occupation: Paleolithic Late Bronze Age Byzantine Neolithic Iron Age Islamic Chalcolithic Persian Medieval Early Bronze Age Hellenistic Ottoman Middle Bronze Age Roman Modern

Related CHI#: 15292

Related CHI Notes: Adjacent to the al-Midrash Synagogue

Definitions:

Associated Satellite Assessment

Assessment ID	Image Date	Damage Rating	Condition Description	Types of Damage
19975	10/8/2018	Some Damage	The roof of this building was damaged between 05-11-2017 and 05-22-2017. The roof continued to degrade through June 2017. The roof appears to have been repaired in May 2018.	Explosives Reconstruction/clean-up

Fig. 36. The JCHI record for the Sasson Synagogue.



Fig. 37. The location of the Sasson Synagogue in Mosul (Google Earth).



Fig. 38. The approximate boundaries of the synagogue and adjacent school (Google Earth).



Fig. 39. Video still of the main door into the synagogue property (France 24; April 24, 2019).



Fig. 40. Video still of the synagogue courtyard (France 24; April 24, 2019).



Fig. 41. Video still of the doorways into the synagogue's interior (France 24; April 24, 2019).



Fig. 42. Video still of the center aisle of the synagogue (France 24; April 24, 2019).



Fig. 43. Video still of an aisle inside the synagogue (France 24; April 24, 2019).



Fig. 44. Video still of the heavily damaged roof of the synagogue (France 24; April 24, 2019).



Fig. 45. A video still of the synagogue or the adjacent school (Voice of America; July 6, 2018).



Fig. 46. A video still of fire damage inside the property (Voice of America; July 6, 2018).

Shrine of the Prophet Nahum (JCHI #19)

The fourth prospect for future work is the Shrine of the Prophet Nahum, located ca. 40 km north of Mosul. This site, which consists of a central synagogue with the prophet's tomb as well as a series of subsidiary buildings situated around a courtyard, dates back to at least the 12th century CE. The shrine was an important pilgrimage location for the Jewish community in Mosul and the surrounding region during Shavuot.

The shrine has deteriorated significantly since the departure of the Jewish community in the early 1950s. Despite the maintenance efforts of the local Christian community, the southeastern corner of the synagogue had collapsed by the mid-2000s, exposing the tomb and the interior decorations, including Hebrew inscriptions, to increased weathering. Parts of the subsidiary structures have also collapsed.

The site has been the focus of multiple international conservation efforts. In September 2008, members of the 156th Survey and Design Team, part of the US Army's 94th Engineer Battalion, produced a thorough condition assessment.⁸ Their work ultimately led to the construction of a metal roof over the synagogue. More recently, the Alliance for the Restoration of Cultural Heritage (ARCH), in collaboration with GEMA Art Group, conducted stabilization work on the standing portions of the synagogue and adjacent architecture in December 2017–January 2018.⁹

The shrine is currently the focus of a restoration project led by ARCH, which received \$500,000 from the US government for the work in November 2018.¹⁰ The organization has also received money from private donors and Kurdish Regional Government. In April 2019, the US pledged an additional \$500,000 to support preservation work at the site.¹¹

As with the Sasson Synagogue, the ongoing work at the Shrine of the Prophet Nahum provides an opportunity for FJH to assist with the preservation of an important Jewish pilgrimage site. Although ARCH has ample funding, the actual extent of the planned work is unclear. Thus far, work has focused on the synagogue. A number of complementary projects may exist within the synagogue or elsewhere on the property that FJH could execute under the umbrella of ARCH's authority to work at the site.

⁸ Suzanne E. Bott, "Mapping the Heart of Mesopotamia: A Bittersweet Legacy in the Landscape of War," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 78, no. 3 (September 2015): 162-168.

⁹ <https://www.archinternational.org/projects/standwithnineveh/>

¹⁰ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-to-donate-500k-to-restore-tomb-of-biblical-prophet-nahum-in-iraq/>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/erbil.usconsulate/posts/864325450570142>

JCHI # **19** Further Consideration Needed

JCHI Site Name al-Qosh - Shrine of the Prophet Nahum

Hebrew Name קבר הנביא נחום

Community Mizrahi

Heritage Type Shrine

Street Address N/A

Neighborhood N/A

Building Date Earliest mention ca. 1170 CE

Building Active Dates 12th century CE-1951

Reconstruction Dates ca. 2008; December 2017

Construction Material Brick Concrete Half-Timber Stone Timber

Architectural Style N/A

Architect N/A

Artistic Decoration Sculpture Inscription (Painted) Stucco Inscription (Paper) Stained Glass Windows Textiles Wall Paintings Color-paste motifs Inscription (Stone) Mosaics Inscription (Wood) Wood Carving

Architectural Significance N/A

Present Usage Abandoned

Present Usage Details Though abandoned, the local community looks after the site and tourists occasionally visit it.

Significance Rating 1 (Local) 2 (Regional) 3 (National) 4 (International)

Condition of Building Fabric A (Good) B (Fair) C (Poor) D (Very Bad) E (No return) No Information

Building Condition Details The synagogue is in poor condition. The roof and part of the walls in the southeastern corner have collapsed inwards, leaving a pile of rubble in that section of the synagogue.

Stabilization Priority Low Medium High

Recommendation for Risk Mitigation, Preservation, and Conservation The building is a high-priority candidate for future work. The complex is at risk for further deterioration due to lack of maintenance and exposure to the elements. Recent work by ARCH International has stabilized the site but more work is needed to fully preserve the site.

Bibliography Adler, Marcus Nathan. The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Critical Text, Translation and Commentary. London: H. Frowde, 1907.

CHI # **6701**

Site Name al-Qosh - Shrine of the Prophet Nahum

Alternate Name

Arabic Name

Hebrew Name קבר הנביא נחום

City al-Qosh

Governorate Ninawa

Country Iraq

Latitude 36.738470 Coordinates for city area only Unclear Location

Longitude 43.096390

Site Type Religious Site or Monument

Religious Affiliation Judaism

Site Description

The Shrine of the Prophet Nahum is in al-Qosh, Iraq, ca. 40 km north of Mosul. The shrine is located at the northern edge of the town, directly opposite the slope of the mountain chain that runs east-west just north of the settlement. The current population of al-Qosh is majority Christian. Multiple churches and monasteries exist in the town and its immediate surroundings.

The complex consists of three components: a courtyard, a series of secondary rooms, and the synagogue with the tomb of Nahum. The central focus of the complex is the courtyard, which is accessible via an entrance on its southern side. The northern half of the courtyard is a raised terrace that is accessible via

Dating Earliest mention ca. 1170 CE

Period of Occupation Paleolithic Late Bronze Age Byzantine Neolithic Iron Age Islamic Chalcolithic Persian Medieval Early Bronze Age Hellenistic Ottoman Middle Bronze Age Roman Modern

Related CHI#

Related CHI Notes

Definitions Condition of Building Fabric

A (Good)	no obvious exterior or interior problems, systems of maintenance in place
B (Fair)	small-scale problems and general wear-and-tear
C (Poor)	widespread problems and lack of basic maintenance
D (Very bad)	serious loss of historic fabric, structural failure or major damage
E (No return)	reconstructed beyond recognition, or archaeological site
No Information	No information about the building condition is available

Associated Satellite Assessment

Assessment ID	Image Date	Damage Rating	Condition Description	Types of Damage
19966	8/16/2018	Minor Damage	No changes between 01-06-0218 and 08-16-2018 In the earliest image from 12-21-2013 the area is covered with a large metal cover, protecting the material beneath. The surrounding courtyard and wall	Collapse Reconstruction/clean-up
19437	12/11/1967	Unclear	Unable to accurately confirm the condition of the tomb in CORONA imagery	

Fig. 47. The JCHI record for the Shrine of the Prophet Nahum.



Fig. 48. The location of the Shrine of the Prophet Nahum in al-Qosh (Google Earth).



Fig. 49. The boundaries of the property (Google Earth).

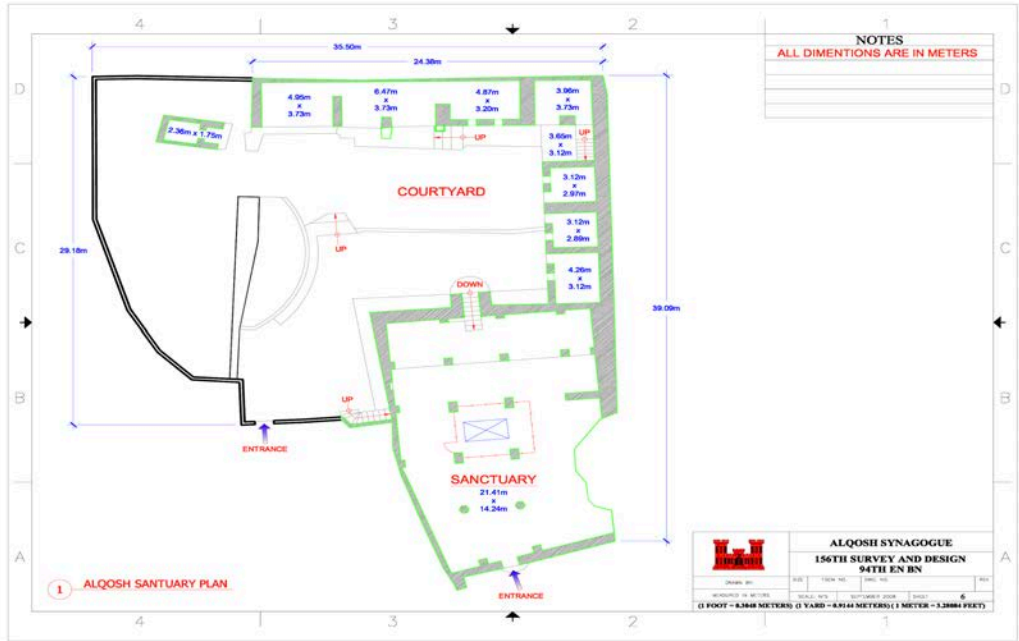


Fig. 50. The layout of the Shrine of the Prophet Nahum (Suzanne E. Bott and US Army (156th Survey and Design Team); September 2008).



Fig. 51. The central aisle and collapsed southeastern corner of the synagogue, seen from the northwest (Suzanne E. Bott; September 2008).



Fig. 52. Stabilization activities performed in the shrine by ARCH in December 2017–January 2018 (ARCH).



Fig. 53. Stabilization activities performed in the shrine by ARCH in December 2017–January 2018; the tomb of the prophet is visible in the foreground (ARCH).

Conclusion

The 368 sites in this database represent a cross-section of Jewish built heritage in Iraq and Syria from the diaspora until the present day. The project was undertaken in a challenging environment and is not a fully comprehensive picture. However, the database includes the major buildings and settlements in both countries alongside a number of additional sites of regional and local significance. Most of the heritage from the 19th and 20th centuries is in very bad condition or beyond repair, primarily due to neglect and urban redevelopment.

A distinct difference in preservation exists between Iraq and Syria. In Syria, 27 sites are in good or fair condition. In contrast, only 10 sites have those ratings in Iraq; roughly a third the number of Syrian sites, despite the overall size of the Iraqi corpus being over three times the size of the Syrian one. Although there are many reasons for the variation in the patterns of preservation in the two countries, two interconnected factors stand out: government policy towards the Jewish population and the timing of Jewish emigration from the two countries.

In Syria, much of the Jewish community fled abroad in response to a rise in anti-Jewish violence in Syria after the foundation of Israel in 1948. Those who remained in Syria faced strict laws that limited their ability to emigrate as well as the expropriation of personal and communal property, such as schools.¹² The level of repression fluctuated over time. By 1974, the Jewish communities were largely left to manage their own religious, social, and economic affairs, although they were still not permitted to emigrate. The Syrian government's decision to lift travel restrictions on the Jewish community in April 1992 led to the emigration of most of the ca. 4,000 Jews who still lived in the country by 1994.

A similar sequence of events occurred in Iraq. After the creation of Israel, the Iraqi government aggressively repressed the Jewish community through such measures as expelling them from government jobs and pursuing death penalties against people deemed to be involved in Zionist activities. This repression led to the departure of most of the Jewish community by the early 1950s. Although Iraqi Jews were allowed to leave the country, they had to relinquish their Iraqi citizenship and much of their assets were open to seizure by the Iraqi state. Only around 10,000–15,000 Iraqi Jews remained in the country by the time emigration was banned in 1952. Jewish persecution continued during the 1950s and 1960s. When the Iraqi government decided to permit further emigration in the early 1970s, much of the remaining Jewish community chose to leave the country.

¹² Walter P. Zenner, *A Global Community: The Jews From Aleppo, Syria* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 51–61.

The different levels of repression and timelines of community departure impacted the preservation of Jewish built heritage. In Syria, a portion of the community was forcibly kept in the country but maintained a degree of control over communal property, particularly synagogues. Further, the relatively recent departure of the Jewish community from Syria as well as the Syrian government's interest in protecting the sites for political purposes even after the majority of the community departed resulted in the protection of Jewish heritage in the major cities of Damascus and Aleppo despite the absence of a Jewish community dedicated to their preservation.

In contrast, nearly all Iraqi Jews left Iraq by the mid-1970s and most communal Iraqi Jewish built heritage passed into the control of the Iraqi state, which neglected it, repurposed it, or passed it on to private individuals for their own use or redevelopment. As a result, most Iraqi heritage has deteriorated significantly, been substantially modified, or been torn down completely. Even heritage still under the control of the local Jewish community has deteriorated significantly due to their limited means and desire to keep a low profile.

The assessments contained in this inventory are a valuable tool to help identify priority stabilization projects in both Iraq and Syria. As the above results show, Jewish built heritage in Iraq is in much greater danger of being completely lost in the next few decades than that present in Syria. Iraq is where immediate stabilization work on Jewish heritage should focus.

We propose that FJH consider working on four sites in Iraq on the basis of their significance, condition, and project viability. Two of these—Sasson Synagogue and the Shrine of the Prophet Nahum—are located in areas of northern Iraq where extensive post-conflict reconstruction work is ongoing. International NGOs have already received funding from public and private sources to conduct stabilization work at these two sites. This situation offers FJH the possibility of collaboration on a project with a group that already has a plan in place and the people to execute it in-country. In both cases, the willingness of these other NGOs to collaborate as well as the nature of possible projects open to FJH's support is unknown. Of these two projects, the work at the Sasson Synagogue seems more likely to produce a fruitful partnership because it is at an early stage; however, the operating environment in Mosul is also more challenging than that in al-Qosh.

In contrast, the other two sites—Meir Tweig Synagogue and the al-Habibiyah Jewish Cemetery—are an opportunity for FJH to assist a local, very small but still living community with heritage protection and to help plan for its conservation after the community ceases to exist. The two sites, both located in eastern Baghdad, stand as a

testament to the Iraqi Jewish community and the extraordinary difficulties that they have faced during the 20th century. They are some of the best-preserved Iraqi Jewish heritage left in the country, their ownership is clear, and willing in-country partners exist that have close connections with members of the local Jewish community and the Iraqi Jewish community living abroad. In addition to conducting preventative maintenance that will minimize deterioration in site conditions, work at both sites offers an opportunity to collect archival information, including who is buried in the cemetery and what type of written material is present in the synagogue's collections. Further, close work with the local (and external) Iraqi Jewish community on site stabilization will enable discussions about how to ensure the preservation of this heritage after the community ceases to exist.

After an existence of approximately 2600 years, the Jewish communities in Iraq and Syria have virtually disappeared. However, significant built heritage remains that bears witness to the vibrant history of these communities. While operating conditions in both countries are very challenging, opportunities should be explored for local and international groups to collaborate in the stabilization and restoration of these sites at this critical point in their use history. Intervention now will save these sites for the appreciation of future generations of Iraqis, Syrians, and international visitors, and preserve the legacy of millennia of Jewish life in the two countries.