

# 'Forgotten city:' the identification of Dura-Europos' neglected sister site in Syria

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The Dura-Europos site in modern-day Syria is famous for its exceptional state of preservation. Like Pompeii, this ancient city has yielded many great discoveries, and serves as a window into the world of the ancient

Hellenistic, Parthian, and Roman periods. Yet despite the prominence of Dura-Europos in Near Eastern scholarship, there is another city, only some miles down the Euphrates river, that presents a long-neglected opportunity for study.

A [new paper](#) in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, entitled "The Ancient City of Giddan/Eddana (Anqa, Iraq), the 'Forgotten Twin' of Dura-Europos," identifies the city of Anqa as a near mirror image of Dura-Europos, of the same size, comparable composition, and potentially equal value to scholars of the region.

Anqa is located just across the Syrian border from Dura-Europos, in the present-day Al-Qaim district of the Anbar Governorate in Iraq. Its remains include an identifying tell mound, at the northern end of the site, a polygonal inner wall circuit, and a large outer defensive wall, or enceinte. Situated at a point where the Euphrates floodplain drastically narrows, the city would have controlled movement between the populous section of the valley upstream and the trade route downstream linking Syria, Northern Mesopotamia, and Babylonia, giving it great strategic and economic significance.

However, the site was ignored entirely by archaeologists until the 1850 publication of a British Middle Euphrates expedition survey. A more thorough study of the site was performed in the late 1930s by Aurel Stein, including aerial photographs of the standing structures, but even after these forays, there was little desire to learn more than the geographical location of this twin city to Dura-Europos.

One reason for the disparity in interest between Anqa and Dura-Europos, posits article author Simon James, is the history of British and French colonial intervention in the region. In 1920, as a result of the San Remo conference, Iraq was seized for British control, and Syria for French. As James writes, the "new political, military, and administrative

boundary created a barrier to research and understanding of the earlier history of the region as a whole."

Yet while Dura-Europos and some other sites in Iraq and Syria have suffered from looting, destruction, and civilian death as a consequence of conflict in the region, Anqa has remained relatively untouched. As further archaeological inquiry is performed, Anqa may continue to provide valuable insight into the history of the Middle Euphrates. And furthermore, as methods of digital scholarship bring thinkers together "despite [political borders](#)," the practice of studying sites like it may even, in the words of Simon James, help "address the consequences of colonialism in archaeology."

**More information:** Simon James, The Ancient City of Giddan/Eddana (Anqa, Iraq), the "Forgotten Twin" of Dura-Europos, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (2024). [DOI: 10.1086/729226](https://doi.org/10.1086/729226)

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