

**Abstract:** The Al-Askari shrine, located in Samarra, Iraq, is a remarkable example of a building with ancient Islamic architecture and construction that was heavily damaged by massive bombings. The bombings were carried out by two separate terrorist attacks in 2006 and 2007. This paper summarizes the important undertakings in the identification of shrine buildings in terms of structural and architectural background and characteristics, damage classification and monitoring, site conditions and material properties. Moreover, the shortcomings of a series of previously performed partial restorations are elaborated upon. The results and findings of this study can be utilized as database in other numerical and field observation research. The details of the vulnerability assessment of the existing building, making use of finite element analyses, are presented in the second part of this article.