

GUIDEBOOK



English version

The  
**Citadel**  
of Aleppo

Description, History, Site Plan & Visitor Tour



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History, Site Plan  
& Visitor Tour

# The Citadel of Aleppo

Text by Julia Gonnella

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is publishing this guidebook  
in cooperation with the Syrian Directorate  
General of Antiquities and Museums  
as part of a programme for the  
revitalisation of the Citadel of Aleppo  
and the surrounding areas.*

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**Frontispiece:** A detail of  
the iron horseshoe doors  
at the Gate of the Serpents  
in the entrance complex.

**Opposite:** A detail  
of a relief above the Gate.

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## The Citadel of Aleppo

The Citadel of Aleppo is one of the most remarkable examples of military architecture in the Middle East, and certainly one of the most ancient. The newly-discovered Temple of the Storm God dates human use of the natural hill from the early beginning of the 3rd Millennium BC.

Today, the Citadel rises majestically from the centre of the Old City, and while many of the currently visible structures originate from the Ayyubid period (12-13<sup>th</sup> Century AD), the Citadel bears evidence of the multiple historical eras including those of the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Zangids, Ayyubids, Mamluks and Ottomans.

Historic and archaeological sources refer to ancient settlements in Aleppo, especially on the present Citadel Hill where the acropolis and the widely venerated Temple of the Storm God were located. Aleppo itself benefited from an ideal geographical location. The nearby Quwaiq River ensured a steady water supply, and the easily-fortifiable rocky outcrop east of the river – today's Citadel Hill – provided protection from enemies. Proximity to the Syrian steppe and the fertile hinterland provided favourable conditions for a town whose population depended for thousands of years on farmers and nomads. Aleppo flourished most during periods when the city



*(Top and left) The Citadel of Aleppo is one of the most popular tourist sites in Syria. (Above) Aleppo, with a population near 2 million, is the second largest city of Syria.*

enjoyed trans-regional trade links to the Mediterranean and to Mesopotamia. Whenever political circumstances were favourable, foreign trade thrived and Aleppo established itself time and time again as an important commercial centre.

### - Ancient Era -

It is very difficult to determine exactly how old Aleppo is as ancient traces of the city have been obliterated by modern development, and archaeological finds are limited. Current knowledge of ancient Aleppo originates in cuneiform texts from various other nearby ancient centres such as Ebla, Mari and Alalakh. According to texts found in Ebla, the origins of Aleppo date back to the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. The texts refer to a shrine to the storm god, Hadda, in a site called Khalab. The Storm God was venerated in an important temple in which the Royal Court of Ebla offered sacrifices, an indication of his far-reaching influence.

Since these early times, the name of the storm god has been closely associated with Aleppo. Later known as Addu, he gained importance in the 18<sup>th</sup> century BC when Aleppo enjoyed its first political and economic peak as the capital of the kingdom of Yamkhad. At one time, Yamkhad territory extended from northern Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean but the large empire was short-lived, and Aleppo was soon dominated by the Mittani and, later, from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Hittites. The city then fell into a decline and became a centre of only regional importance. By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, a time when immigrant Semitic Arameans and Indo-European Luwians shaped the history of Syria, Aleppo continued to be famous as the spiritual home of the storm god, whom the Hurri-Mittanians worshipped as Teshub, the Luwians as Tarhunza, and the Arameans as Hadad. Reliance on the weather among sedentary populations in areas of rain-fed agriculture ensured the continued importance placed on the storm god. Recent excavations led by an archaeologist from Berlin University uncovered remains of the extraordinary



*(Above) Made of baked clay and engraved using a stylus, cuneiform tablets have been valuable sources of information on ancient Aleppo. (Below) Citadel Hill, as seen in its modern urban context, with the Madrasa al Khosrowiyya in the foreground.*



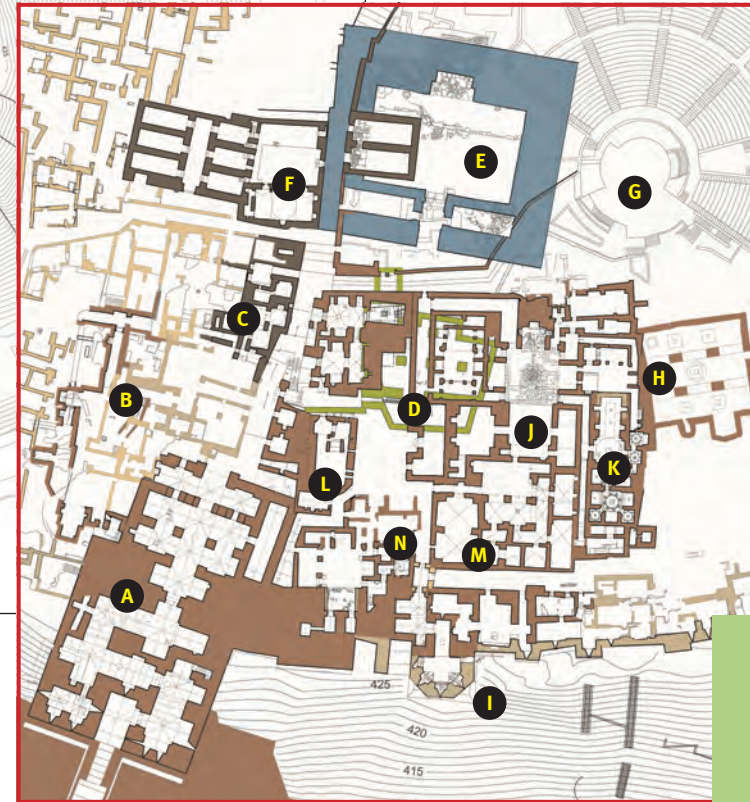
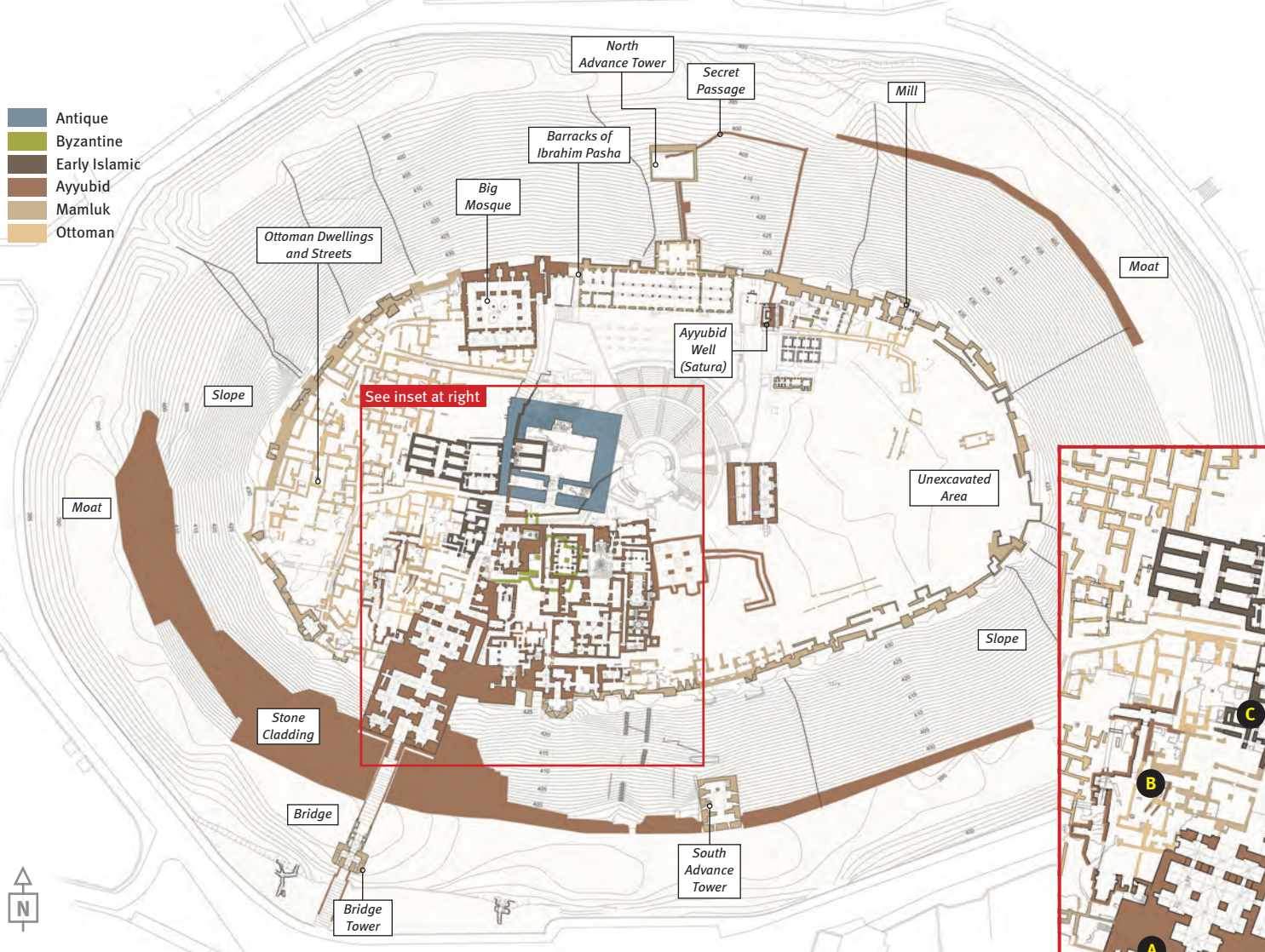
*Aleppo, known in ancient times as Khalab, occupies a strategic trading point midway between the sea and the Euphrates.*



# Citadel of Aleppo

## Historic Layers in Plan

- Antique
- Byzantine
- Early Islamic
- Ayyubid
- Mamluk
- Ottoman



- |  |                                       |                      |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| (A) Entrance Complex                     | (E) Excavations of the Ancient Temple | (J) Ayyubid Palace   |
| (B) Souk and the Excavations to the West | (F) Mosque of Abraham                 | (K) Palace Hammam    |
| (C) Hammam Nur ad-Din                    | (G) Modern Theatre                    | (L) Hellenistic Well |
| (D) Persian-Byzantine Hall               | (H) Ayyubid Cistern                   | (M) Arsenal          |
|  | (I) Mamluk Tower                      | (N) Tawashi Palace   |



(Top) Reliefs of the podium wall from around 900 BC.  
(Above) Profile of the storm god at the inner elevation of the temple wall.

monumental Temple of the Storm God with rich decorative reliefs. One of the most important recent archaeological discoveries in Syria, the Temple documents for the first time Aleppo's history for the entire period between the Early Syrian and the Aramean eras.

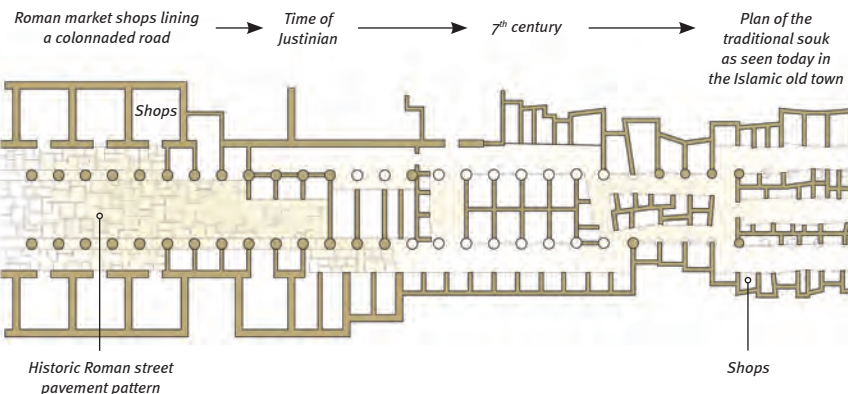
Written sources also confirm the far-reaching importance of the storm god during later periods. According to Assyrian documents, he was one of the seven great storm gods of the Middle East. In 853 BC, the Assyrian King Salmanassar III offered him a sacrifice before entering into battle against a Syrian-Palestinian coalition. By the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Assyrians had integrated Syria as a province of their empire. Following the collapse of the Assyrian empire in 612 BC, Aleppo became part of the neo-Babylonian (Chaldaen) Empire and, after it was conquered by Cyrus, in 539 BC, the city was brought under Achaemenid Persian rule. There is no documentary evidence about the role of the storm god at that time.

## - Hellenistic-Roman Age -

The conquest by Alexander the Great and the subsequent rule of the Seleucids marked the beginning of Syria's Hellenistic age and blended Mediterranean/Western with Mesopotamian/Eastern religious values. Seleucos Nikator, one of Alexander's generals, revived Aleppo between 301 and 281 BC under the name of Beroia. According to mediaeval Arab historians, the history of the Citadel as a fortified acropolis begins at that point in time. The new Hellenistic city was located between the river and the Citadel Hill, and the current street system in the souk (bazaar) illustrates the ancient orthogonal road network with its grid layout, in sharp contrast to the maze of dead-end streets in the Islamic town. The wide main axis – perhaps a colonnaded road – led towards the foot of the Citadel. On the Citadel itself there are layers of evidence of the Hellenistic settlement, some up to two metres high. It is suspected that a larger building, possibly a later temple, is located northeast of the Temple of the Storm God.



(Above) The souk in the old city is still a central marketplace of modern Aleppo. (Below) Scheme of the progressive transformation of the monumental colonnaded street in the souk.



In 64 BC, Pompeius deposed the last Seleucid ruler and created the Roman province of Syria. So far, few traces of Roman times have been found on the Citadel. In 363, Emperor Julian came to Aleppo and noted: "I stayed there for a day, visited the acropolis, offered a white bull to Zeus according to imperial customs, and held a short talk with the town council about worshipping the gods." Julian's notes attest that worship of the storm god was transferred to Zeus and survived into Late Antiquity.

### - Byzantine Age -

In 395, the Roman Empire divided in two and Syria came under the control of Byzantium. According to records from the early 7<sup>th</sup> century describing clashes between Beroia and the Sasanian Persian king, Chosroes II, the Citadel Hill was still relatively well fortified during the Byzantine period. Under an attack, the population of Aleppo took refuge in the Citadel because the city wall was in a deplorable state. However, after the only available water source had been contaminated, the fortifications became obsolete. In spite of the desperate condition of the besieged Chosroes II is said to have spared the Citadel because the Aleppians convinced him that they no longer had any money.

With the exception of several architectural fragments kept in the Citadel Museum or across the site, there are hardly any traces of Byzantine buildings on the hill. We know from written records that the two present-day mosques were originally churches founded in Byzantine times.

There are, however, splendid remains of the Byzantine period in the city itself, for example those incorporated in the Madrasa al Halawiyya which lies west of the Great Mosque in the souk. This was the site of the 6<sup>th</sup> century



*(Above) Remains of columns and capitals of the apse from the Byzantine Saint Helen Cathedral built by Justinian, destroyed by the Persians in 540 and now part of Madrasa al Halawiyya. (Below) A reused block found in the masonry of the Citadel's entrance block features a symbolic Byzantine form in relief.*



cathedral built by Justinian and dedicated to Saint Helen, mother of Emperor Constantine. Remains of the original church with its superbly decorated capitals can still be seen today. The cathedral was used for Christian worship until 1124, when it was reconstructed as a mosque, and later used as a madrasa.

### - Early Islamic Age -

An important event in Aleppo's history was its conquest by Muslim troops in 636. Exactly what the Citadel looked like during early Islamic times is unknown. Written records mention only that the Arab conquerors found the walls destroyed by an earthquake and that they subsequently repaired and maintained them. In those days, Aleppo was a provincial town on the boundary of the territories of the Umayyad and Abbasid rulers. The conquerors erected two mosques, one of them being the Great Mosque of Aleppo, which still ranks as the principal mosque of the city. Only under the Hamdanid prince Sayf ad-Daula, who conquered the city in 944 and made it the capital of Northern Syria, did Aleppo begin to enjoy a political and cultural renaissance.



*(Top) The Mosque as seen in an early twentieth-century photograph, before restoration. (Above) The Great Mosque of Aleppo as seen after recent restoration work.*



The prince's court was one of the most refined of its time and its praises were sung by numerous contemporary poets. His palace in the river valley at the edge of the city was equally celebrated, but after the Byzantine emperor Nikephorus Phokas' troops destroyed Aleppo in 962, Sayf ad-Daula's son, Sa'd ad-Daula, abandoned it and moved his residence to the much safer Citadel. Up to now, no architectural evidence from the Hamdanid period has been found at the Citadel.



*(Above) In the courtyard of the Mosque of Abraham, a corbel from a vanished well provides evidence of financial donations for the mosque's upkeep during the Zangid period.*

*(Below) Abu Salama Mahmud b. Nasr b. Salih's stone block was rendered in an animated Kufic script common in Arabic building inscriptions of the period.*

This short period of prosperity was followed by troubled years, bringing several invasions by Byzantine troops and regular raids by Bedouin tribes. Following the rule of the Hamdanids, the city was temporarily under the control of the Egyptian Fatimids and later under the rule of two Arab nomad dynasties, the Mirdasids and the Uqailids. The oldest epigraphic evidence in the Citadel, a building inscription by the ruler Abu Salama Mahmud bin-Nasr bin-Salih, dates from the Mirdasid dynasty in 1073. It is displayed in the Arsenal Museum. The Mirdasids are said to have erected palaces in the Citadel and converted the two churches into mosques.



## - Zangids -

The 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Near East were marked by the Crusades. Aleppo was on the route to Jerusalem and the city was attacked in 1100 and 1103 shortly after the Crusaders had conquered Antioch. Under the leadership of Imad ad-Din Zangi (ruled 1127-1146) and his son, Nur ad-Din (ruled 1146-1173), the Muslims succeeded in stopping the expansion of the Crusaders and Aleppo was not taken. Both father and son were feared military commanders and strong-willed politicians, devoted to the ideals of Jihad (holy war) and the unification of all Muslims between the Euphrates and the Nile. Several famous Crusaders were incarcerated in the Citadel of Aleppo, among them being the Count of Edessa, Joscelyn II, who died there, Renauld de Châtillon, and the King of Jerusalem, Baldwin II, who was held for two years.

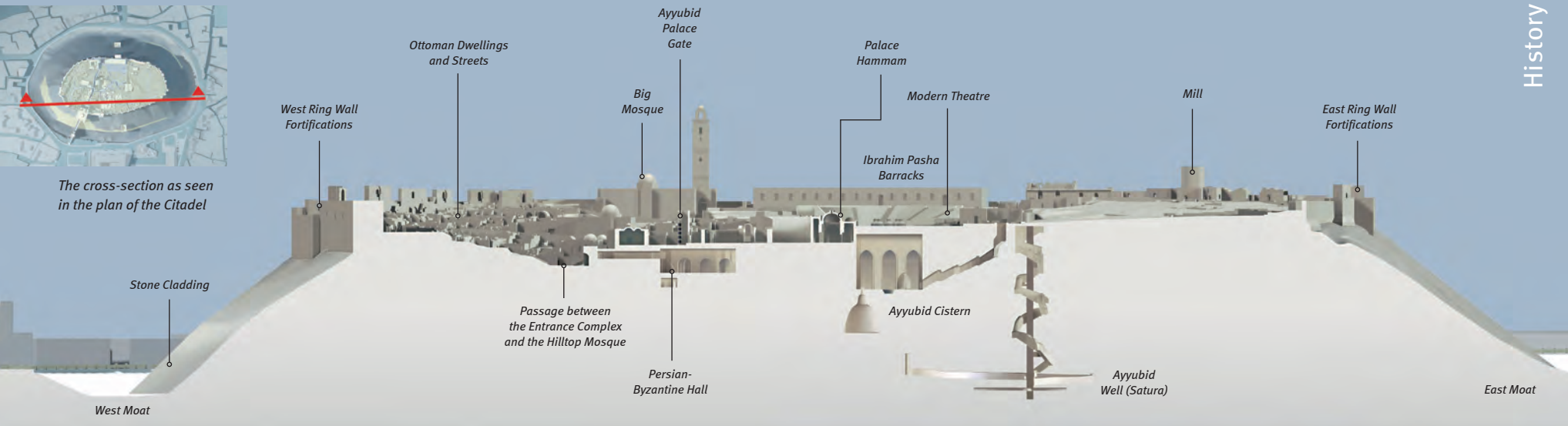
For the first time in centuries, Nur ad-Din succeeded in unifying Damascus and Aleppo under one rule. He exerted great efforts to develop both cities. In Aleppo, he fortified the city walls and the Citadel. Arab sources report that he built a high, brick-walled entrance ramp which was without a roof, leading up to the Citadel. Consequently, when he rode his horse up the hill, his face was still visible to his subjects. Traces of the wall halfway up the southern side of the hill may well date back to this era. In the Citadel itself, Nur ad-Din built the "Golden Palace" and the "Green Hippodrome," a racecourse that was probably covered with grass. The two mosques founded by the Mirdasids were restored or rebuilt. Nur ad-Din also donated an elaborate wooden mihrab (prayer niche) to the Mosque of Abraham. The mihrab unfortunately disappeared without trace during the French Mandate.



*The 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries marked a period of relative stability and a cultural revival in Aleppo. The city became a chief production centre of pottery, as can be seen in the brilliant glazing on these potsherds.*



*A drawing of a battle scene during the Crusades.*



### - Ayyubids -



*(Top) A cross-section of the Citadel Hill showing surface landmarks and underground spaces.*

*(Above) Al Malek az-Zaher Ghazi's rebuilding plans for new construction of the city's south fortifications included Bab Qinnasrine.*

The Citadel's importance peaked during the period of Ayyubid rule, in particular under Sultan al Malek az-Zaher Ghazi (1186-1216) who was appointed by his famous father Salah ad-Din (Saladin). Sultan Ghazi re fortified Aleppo into a strategically important stronghold against the Crusaders in the north. He also had to protect the city from raids by his rival and uncle, al Malek al Adel, the Ayyubid prince ruling in Damascus.

Initially, Sultan Ghazi's plan envisioned a total rebuilding of the city wall, including new gates. The new wall was to follow the course of the previous one that circumscribed an irregular rectangle with the Citadel in the east. Sultan Ghazi subsequently changed his plans and decided to extend the city wall towards the south and the east in such a way that the new suburbs were also enclosed. The Citadel no longer formed part of the city wall, but was now located in the centre of the fortification itself.

Sultan Ghazi strengthened the walls, smoothed the surface of the outcrop and, most importantly, covered sections of the slope at the entrance area with stone cladding. The moat was deepened, filled by water canals and spanned by a tall bridge-cum-viaduct, which today still serves as the definitive entrance into the Citadel. The result is one of the most spectacular examples of mediaeval Islamic military architecture.

The work of the Ayyubid ruler is extensively documented in Arab sources. According to these sources, a large water reservoir, an arsenal, grain silos and a deep well were built within the Citadel. The well was probably also meant to serve as a secret escape route into the city. In addition, there was a covered secret passage through which Sultan Ghazi could reach his court of justice located at the foot of the Citadel. Under his rule the Citadel was not only a formidable barracks, but also the luxurious residence of the Ayyubid court, consisting of several palaces, baths and gardens. The main palace, generally thought to be the famous "Palace of



*A winding staircase, cut from solid rock, accesses a deep well 52 metres below the hill surface that provided both water and access to the north bastion.*

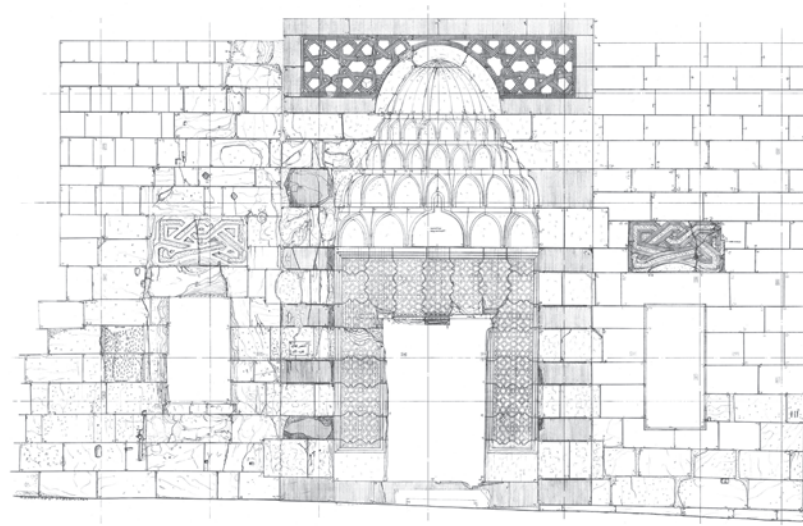
Glory” was destroyed by fire on the ruler’s wedding night and was immediately rebuilt. Sultan Ghazi also had the two mosques on the Citadel restored, the larger one featuring a lofty minaret overlooking the city.

Some of the work carried out by Sultan Ghazi’s successors is also documented. His son, al Malek al Aziz (1216-1237), restored part of the collapsed outer wall, although this work was carried out so poorly that in 1260 the Mongol invaders had no difficulties in capturing the Citadel. Two recently discovered inscriptions from Sultan Ghazi’s grandson, the last Ayyubid ruler, an-Naser Yusuf II (1237-1260), suggest that he also had work carried out on the Citadel, but further details are not known.

The Mongol conquest of 1260 brought Ayyubid rule to an end. Aleppo and Damascus were conquered and devastated, and the Mongols succeeded where the Crusaders had failed: they stormed the Citadel. The severe damage they inflicted is documented in numerous Arab sources. Indeed,



**(Top)** Located at the highest point of the Citadel, the minaret of the Big Mosque stands 21 metres above its courtyard and doubled as a military watchtower.  
**(Above)** The main palace courtyard as seen before the recent restoration work (see also page 46 for an “after” image of this view).  
**(Right)** The elaborate portal of the palace, also by Ghazi.



today there is very little evidence of the former Ayyubid ring wall. The wall in its present form is mainly the result of subsequent restoration by the Mamluks.

*Prior to the preservation of the palace portal, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture performed a precise architectural and structural survey. As this documentation drawing shows, unlike the entrance block for the Citadel, the main façade of the palace displays no figurative ornament. Instead, it relies on geometric virtuosity and overall restrained decorative use of stone masonry to convey a sense of richness and sophistication.*

### - Mamluks -

Following the victory of Sultan Baybars over the Mongols in 1260, the Mamluks ruled over Syria from their capital, Cairo. Initially they showed little interest in rebuilding Aleppo, but, later, Sultan Qala’un (1279-1290) began restoration work on the Citadel, which was completed under his son, Sultan Ashraf al Khalil (1290-1293). An enormous inscription above the large entrance gate provides evidence of Khalil’s contribution.

A governor resided in the Citadel, but the exact details and usage of the residence remain unknown. It is possible that



**(Top)** The south advance tower is regarded as a hallmark of Mamluk military inspiration.

**(Below)** A Mamluk metal bucket found in a cistern located in the souk area.

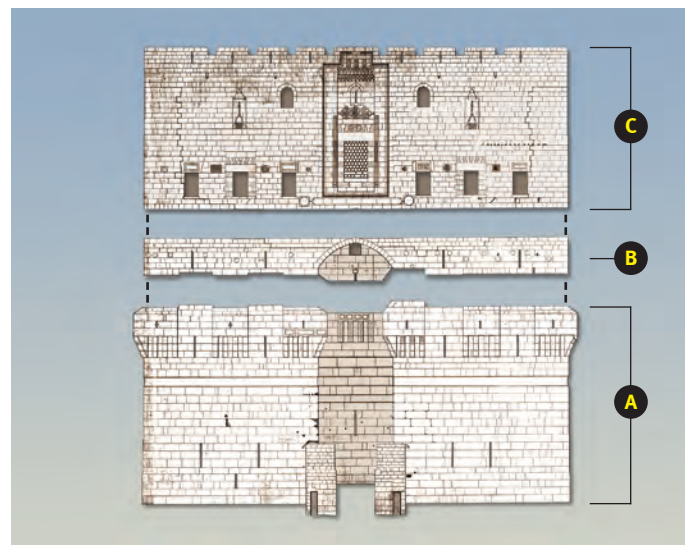


the new rulers adapted the old buildings to meet their own needs. This interpretation is supported by the inscription above the Ayyubid Palace entrance, dating back to the year 1367, which details instructions by a Mamluk governor to build a water supply pipe leading to the palace. One of the old baths, most likely the so-called Hammam Nur ad-Din, south of the Mosque of Abraham, was converted into a mint. A large number of coins dating back to the reign of the last two Mamluk rulers were found during the most recent renovation project at this site. The mint was probably destroyed during the conquest by Timur (Tamerlane), whose troops conquered Aleppo in 1400 and devastated the city for a second time.

Immediately after this terrible conquest, the Mamluks regained and rebuilt Aleppo. They restored all fortifications and extended the city walls towards the east. In particular, Governor Jakam invested a great deal of energy into the rebuilding of the Citadel and is said to have personally

participated. To the north and south of the Citadel, two forward defensive towers (advance towers) were erected. In 1406-07, the governor had the impressive “Throne Hall” built above the Ayyubid entrance complex.

Even after the reconstruction, the Citadel had to be well-maintained against regular revolts and uprisings. The octagonal tower, east of the entrance gate, probably dates back to Sultan al Ashraf Barsbay (1422-1438). Sultan az-Zaher Jaqmaq (1438-1453) ordered part of the western wall to be newly fortified and the stone cladding near the bridge to be restored. Sultan al Ashraf Qaitbay (1468-1496) also initiated restoration work, in particular in the large Throne Hall. However, the most important fortification efforts were initiated by the last Mamluk Sultan, Qanswah al Ghuri (1501-1516), who had the moat and the bridge tower repaired and the two massive advance towers to the north and the south of the Citadel replaced with larger



**(Top)** The Bridge Tower constructed under al Ghuri's reign. **(Above and left)** Before Mamluk alterations, the entrance block looked much more like the massive city gates with double salients:

**(A)** Built in 1190-1212

**(B)** Beginning of the Mamluk period

**(C)** Mamluk Throne Hall 1406-07/1506

constructions. The collapsed wooden roof of the Throne Hall was replaced by nine stone cupolas. The extensive building activities during Qanswah al Ghuri's reign were almost certainly an attempt to withstand growing threats from the Ottomans in the north. But despite systematic fortification of the main outposts on the northern frontier of the Mamluk Empire, the Ottoman armies took Syria in 1516.

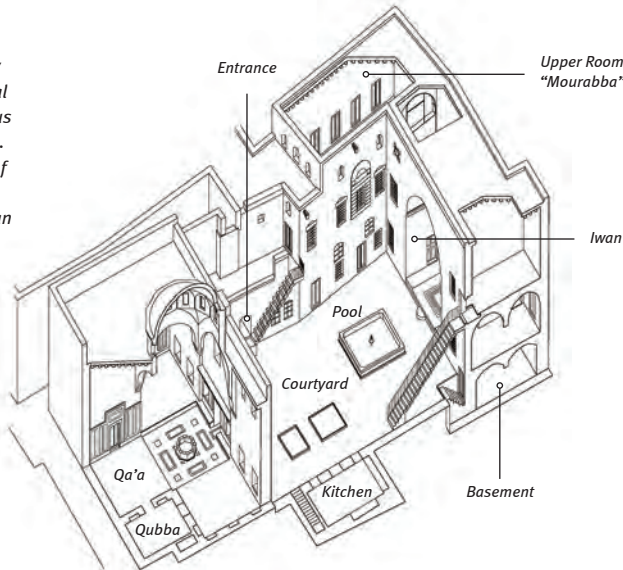


- Ottomans -

The Aleppians welcomed the conquest by the Ottomans. The city was gradually integrated into the extensive trading network of the large empire and began to benefit from its favourable position between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates. Aleppo was now located in the heart of the empire and threats from external enemies subsided. The importance of the Citadel diminished, and it was primarily used as a garrison. It is not known how many soldiers were



(Top) The ruins of al Ghuri's nine-domed cupola remained until construction of the new Throne Hall (above) completed during the 1980s. Although richly decorated in the traditional "Adjami" style of Damascus it is a totally new structure. (Right) Axonometric view of a house in the old quarter of Bab Qinnasrine. Ottoman houses inside the Citadel might have followed a similar design.



Excavated area of Ottoman houses in the western part of the Citadel.

stationed there or what the interior looked like. In the early Ottoman period, the Citadel was likely still in good condition. In 1521, it was restored once again by Sultan Süleyman. Leonhart Rauwolff, the European traveller who visited Aleppo in 1547, describes the Citadel as being sound. An anonymous Venetian traveller mentions some 2000 people living in the Citadel in 1556. In 1679, the French consul, d'Arvieux, reports 1400 people there, 350 of whom were Janissaries, the élite military corps of the Ottoman Empire. The English physician, Alexander Russell, an Aleppo resident from 1740 to 1753, commented at the time: "When you climb up past the fourth gate, there are some shops on your left and, opposite, some cells with iron doors. Further up on the left, there are some large old houses which are sometimes used as a prison. Opposite them are some streets with pretty houses for the barracks".



The iwan is a typical architectural element of Aleppian houses and seen in the foundations excavated at the Citadel as well.

The foundations of Ottoman residential buildings have recently been excavated and consolidated by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities,

In 1999, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, in cooperation with Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, began conservation work on the citadels of Aleppo, Salah ad-Din and Masyaf. The objective was not only to restore the monuments, but to create conditions in which the citadels could become catalysts for social and economic development. Structural stabilisation and conservation were complemented by the training of Antiquities staff and the creation of museum and tourist facilities. In Aleppo, an urban project, including pedestrian areas, reinforces the link between the monument and the local souks. Conservation works at the Citadel were partially funded by the World Monuments Fund (Kaplan and Wilson Grants).



(Top) Restoring the courtyard as part of the conservation work at the Ayyubid Palace and (above) the new tourist facilities at the cafeteria. (Right) Excavations of the Ottoman residential quarter in the west portion of the Citadel revealed hundreds of artifacts such as these clay pipes.



and Museums, exposing the upper layers of the western part of the Citadel site. These were traditional courtyard houses arranged in terraces. Among the small archaeological finds are numerous pipes and small coffee bowls, which give us an idea of how the soldiers must have spent at least part of their time. In Ottoman times, the two mosques were restored, and the Portuguese traveller, Pedro Texeira, who visited Aleppo in 1605, mentions that silver and gold coins were minted on the Citadel. The fortifications, however, were increasingly neglected. D'Arvieux reported that the Citadel would not be able to withstand a 24-hour assault. The French traveller, Volney, who stayed in Aleppo in the 1780s, confirms "...its walls are in ruins, and the old narrow towers are little better." However, some of the old arrow-slits were enlarged, indicating that the Citadel was at least adapted for the use of firearms.

In 1822, Aleppo was tragically hit by a devastating earthquake. Most of the inhabitants left the Citadel and settled in the city below. The Egyptian governor, Ibrahim Pasha (1832-1840), used stones from the Citadel ruins to build his large barracks in the north of the city.

Only soldiers remained on the Citadel. The barracks on top of the hill were restored in 1850-1851, under the reign of Sultan Abdulmajjid. The mill, east of the barracks, was probably erected around the same time. In 1873, the Mosque of Abraham was once again restored. Several Ottoman tombstones suggest that the Citadel had its own cemetery.

## French Mandate - and the Syrian Arab Republic -

During the French Mandate, soldiers were once again stationed on the Citadel and it remained temporarily closed to the public. Graffiti inside the minaret containing French names is a reminder of this period. During the Mandate, the French carried out the first archaeological digs and began to excavate the mediaeval buildings. In the 1930s, extensive restoration work was carried out, particularly on the exterior wall. After Syrian independence, excavation and restoration work continued. During this time, the Throne Hall was partially removed and rebuilt and then completely covered with a modern wooden roof.



(Above) At one time the mill, built by Ibrahim Basha, provided flour for the Citadel. (Below) The main gate of the Citadel as seen around 1930.



# Citadel of Aleppo

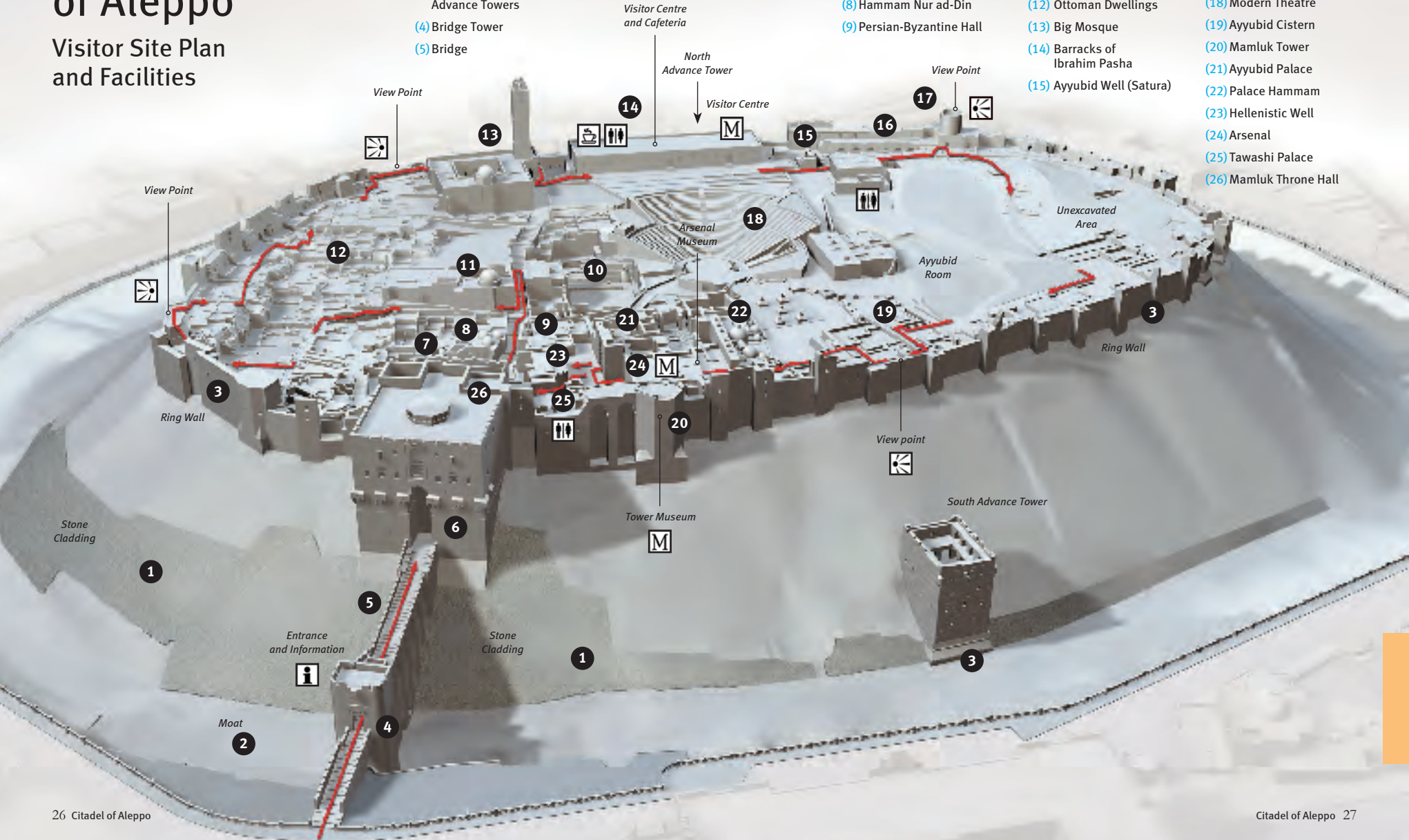
## Visitor Site Plan and Facilities

- (1) Slope and Stone Cladding
- (2) Moat
- (3) Ring Wall and Advance Towers
- (4) Bridge Tower
- (5) Bridge

- (6) Entrance Complex
- (7) Souk and the Excavations to the West
- (8) Hammam Nur ad-Din
- (9) Persian-Byzantine Hall

- (10) Excavations of the Ancient Temple
- (11) Mosque of Abraham
- (12) Ottoman Dwellings
- (13) Big Mosque
- (14) Barracks of Ibrahim Pasha
- (15) Ayyubid Well (Satara)

- (16) Excavations along the Fortifications
- (17) Mill
- (18) Modern Theatre
- (19) Ayyubid Cistern
- (20) Mamluk Tower
- (21) Ayyubid Palace
- (22) Palace Hammam
- (23) Hellenistic Well
- (24) Arsenal
- (25) Tawashi Palace
- (26) Mamluk Throne Hall



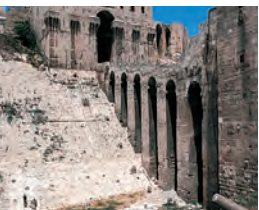
## - 1 The Slope and Stone Cladding -

The Citadel sits on the summit of a natural mound, 40 metres above the city. This striking hill, with its plateau measuring 160 by 280 metres, is formed partly from natural rock and partly from the layered ruins of various cultures, which can reach heights of up to 15 metres. Its remarkable appearance is mainly due to the Ayyubid Sultan, al Malek az-Zaher Ghazi, who made physical improvements to the hill and covered big areas of its slopes with large stone slabs. A solidly paved slope made enemy intrusions more difficult and prevented the walls from eroding. The raised wall and the stone cladding also offered effective protection from the newest projectiles which, due to moveable counterweights, could be catapulted up to 300 metres, and posed a greater threat than traditional siege machines which the enemy had to pull along with ropes.

Today, only parts of the stone cladding remain, to the east and west of the citadel entrance, as well as a narrow, partially earth-covered belt around the foot of the Citadel Hill. There is still some dispute as to whether the entire hill was covered with slabs, but recent excavations seem to indicate that the paving was not limited to the entrance area. However, an 18th-century engraving shows the slightly stepped course of the stone cladding as it is today, suggesting that large sections of the paving must have disappeared even before the earthquake in 1822. East of the entrance complex, subsequent improvements using smaller slabs are visible. These may date back to the reign of the Mamluk Sultan az-Zaher Jaqmaq (1438-53), to whom written sources attribute the restoration of derelict sections. Higher up, to the right of the entrance complex, are traces of an enormous basalt-inlayed inscription that probably stretched like a ribbon along the upper part of the stone cladding. This inscription is associated with al Malek az-Zaher Ghazi.

## - 2 The Moat -

Sultan Ghazi's comprehensive building programme also included the moat around the hill, which was apparently dug



*(Top) The Citadel stands on a natural outcrop topped with many metres of accumulated debris. (Above) Ghazi wrapped the mound with a revetted stone cladding that gave the Citadel a powerfully singular exterior form.*



*In Ghazi's time, the moat was deeper and he flooded its entire length by tapping groundwater levels.*

down to ground-water level. Al Malek az-Zaher Ghazi had prison cells built in caves above the moat on the city-facing side, but no clear traces of these remain. In the course of time, the moat has largely filled up with debris.

## - 3 The Ring Wall - and the Advance Towers

The ring wall, composed of over 40 towers linked by curtain walls, is approximately 900 metres long and sits high above on the mound. Before the modern restoration, the ring wall was mainly the work of the Mamluks, who found the old Ayyubid wall in ruins after the Mongol conquest of 1260. The octagonal tower east of the entrance, which probably belongs to the reign of Sultan al Ashraf Barsbay (1422-1438), and the wide flanking tower in the north erected during the rule of Sultan Qaitbay (1468-1496) are particularly striking. An angular, basalt-inlayed inscription on the front wall dates the northern flanking tower to the years 1472-1473. Large sections of the ring wall were again restored under the rule of the last Mamluk Sultan, Qanswah al Ghuri. The late-Mamluk restoration works are easily identifiable from their characteristic embossed stonework with its smooth edges.

In the late-Ottoman period, the ring wall fell into disrepair and the severe earthquake in 1822 inflicted further damage. Not until the French Mandate was it thoroughly restored and, in some places, rebuilt. The Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums has also consolidated further sections of the ring wall. The ruins of the earlier fortifications are halfway up the present Citadel slope, and probably date back to the Zangid period. It is likely that Sultan Ghazi rebuilt not only the enormous entrance complex, but also the entire ring wall, higher up the hill.

The two multi-storey advance towers north and south of the Citadel also date from the reign of the last Mamluk Sultan, Qanswah al Ghuri. They too replaced previous buildings from the early Mamluk period, which marked the junction with the earlier city walls. The southern tower is considerably more decorative, with circular openings for cannons and rounded



*(Top) View to the ring wall which was constructed over different periods. (Middle) The multi-cornered tower also known as the Mamluk Tower (see also number 20 on the tour, page 44). (Bottom) The present detached north advance tower, which is much later, marks the former course of the east city walls in Nur ad-Din's day.*



machicolations (defensive projections in the walls). Both towers were connected to the Citadel by secret passages and both carry inscriptions and nameplates identifying Qanswah al Ghuri as the ruling Sultan.

#### - 4 The Bridge Tower -

The lower archway in the Citadel entrance is also attributed to al Ghuri. According to an inscription above the entrance, in 1507 the Sultan instructed his governor, Sayf ad-Din Abrak, to restore the building. Inside the building, on the left, a further inscription from the same period instructs armoury blacksmiths and cast-metal workers to observe the prescribed alloy proportions in the production of cannons. For centuries, the Mamluk army, which traditionally fought on horseback using bows and arrows, had rejected the use of firearms, and it was Sultan al Ghuri who first ordered large numbers of cannons to be built. The reluctance to use firearms was certainly one of the reasons why the Ottomans finally defeated the Mamluks in 1516.



*Passing through the Bridge Tower leads visitors into a system meant to both restrict access and visually convey strength. This Mamluk tower was added on the Ayyubid Bridge in place of a movable pier.*



*Although the towers at either end have gone through numerous modifications and reconstructions, the 8-pier bridge as seen today is still the original Ayyubid-built design by order of Ghazi.*

#### - 5 The Bridge -

The tall bridge, supported by large pointed arches spanning the moat and the stone cladding is the work of the Ayyubid Sultan Ghazi. Below the ascending ramp a sewage drain was installed to prevent pollution of the moat water. On the way up the hill, the course of the sophisticated Ayyubid drainage system can still be retraced today by following the modern drain covers. The drains were well built and some are still in working order.

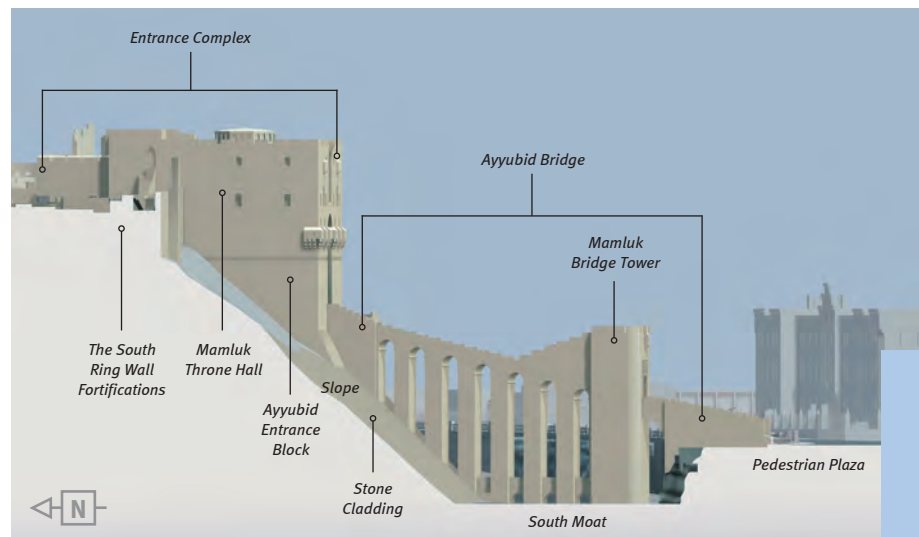
#### - 6 The Entrance Complex -

The bridge leads to Sultan Ghazi's fortified entrance complex, complete with embrasures and machicolations, which is certainly one of the most spectacular examples of Islamic military architecture. The building work probably began in 1182-83 and was completed over 30 years later. However, only the lower section of the impressive entrance complex with its two massive rectangular towers belongs to the Ayyubid period. The upper section, the Throne Hall, was completed in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century under the Mamluk Sultan Mu'ayyad Shaikh (1412-21). Used for official functions and entertaining, the chamber was originally covered by a flat roof, but the last Mamluk Sultan, al Ghuri, had nine cupolas built in its place, which were probably destroyed by the earthquake in 1822. The present domed roof is new.

Both the Mamluk and Ayyubid portions of the façade are impressive; the Mamluk section, covering the upper part of the building, has ambitious designs and richly decorated windows reminiscent of northern Italian architecture, and the lower Ayyubid section is noted for the quality of the huge, almost



*(Above) The entrance complex façade with the bridge and Bridge Tower.*



seamless stone-block masonry work. The enormous and once gilded inscription in the upper third of the Ayyubid section added during Mamluk rule in 1292 speaks of the extensive restoration work that was required after the devastation caused by the Mongols. The Mamluk Sultan Ashraf al Khalil self-confidently describes himself as the “...Alexander of his era who puts Frankish, Armenian and Tartar armies to flight, the destroyer of Akka and the coastal towns...”. Above the entrance gate is a second, shorter version of this inscription and below it an inscription dating from 1384-1385 by Sultan Sa’id Barquq, who also carried out restoration work on the Citadel.



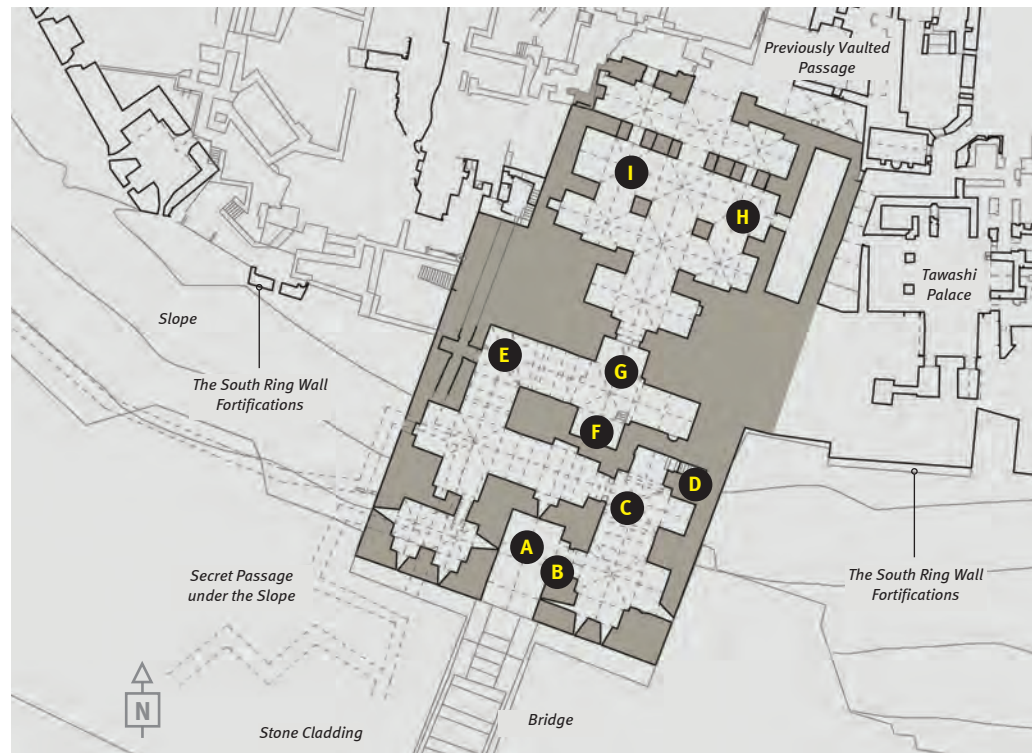
*When visitors reach the Gate of the Serpents, with its paired dragons, they finally arrive at what was the limit of a powerful precinct.*

**THE FIGURATIVE RELIEFS** / The relief above the gate depicts two intertwined dragons, each with two heads and gaping jaws. It forms part of the original decoration of the Ayyubid entrance complex and is one of the most important examples of North Syrian-Mesopotamian figurative art of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Figurative representations have played an important role in Islamic architectural décor throughout history. This relief is in the artistic tradition of the Anatolian Seljuks and North Mesopotamian Artuqid, who frequently used figurative décor on citadels, city walls and caravanserais. Often placed above an entrance, these decorations were likely designed to ward off evil. Other sculptures, however, support astrological interpretations. The second gate of the entrance complex shows a stylised lily flanked by two lions sitting on their hind legs. The third and last gate is flanked by the so-called “laughing” and “weeping” lions, in three-quarter profile. The tradition of using lions as symbolic guardians and protectors at entrances and portals can be traced back to ancient eras.



*A detail from one of the two iron horseshoe doors found in the entrance complex.*

**THE VAULTED RAMP** / The obvious purpose of the entrance complex was to make access to the fortification as difficult as possible. Hence, the ramp leading up to the Citadel takes five turns and is protected by portcullises, machicolations and three gates that were each apparently guarded by an officer and his deputy. Further sentries were probably placed in the high-vaulted side recesses. Archers were positioned behind the embrasures from where they could defend the outer flanks. The two strong wrought-iron doors decorated with horseshoes at the first and the last gates are Ayyubid.



- (A) Inscriptions
- (B) First gate with interlocked snakes and horseshoe doors
- (C) Second gate with figurative sculpture of lily and flanking lions
- (D) Stairway to the mezzanine
- (E) Door to secret passages
- (F) Shrine of Saint al Khidir
- (G) Third gate with “laughing” and “weeping” lion reliefs
- (H) Storage spaces
- (I) Ventilation shaft for a secret passage

*As seen in the ground floor plan of the entrance complex, invaders would have to penetrate three doors and change direction six times while being subjected to a barrage of missiles and hot liquids being poured through the slit openings on the upper floors.*

The Citadel's entrance complex is certainly one of the finest pieces of Ayyubid military architecture. Slightly less spectacular, but of similar design and equally well preserved, are some of Aleppo's Ayyubid city gates such as the Bab an-Nasr in the north, Bab Antakya in the west and, in particular, the Bab Qinnasrine in the south-west with its two massive towers of unequal height. Beyond the city walls, the fortress of Qala'at Najm at the Euphrates and the castle of Harim in the Amq plain on the lower Orontes, both comprehensively restored under Sultan Ghazi's rule, are also worth a visit.



*(Top) The secret passage from the entrance complex that leads below the moat towards the city.*

*(Above) The shrine of al Khidr marks the appearance of the venerated ancient saint noted for guiding the lost, including, according to the Quran, even Moses.*

**THE MEZZANINE** / Near the second gate of the ramp, some steep steps lead to the former upper floor of the Ayyubid towers where projectiles were stored. Today, this floor is a mezzanine. The machicolation slits allow an impressive view on to the entrance ramp below. Several of the machicolation bays, some of them connected by a low narrow corridor, can be visited. Further stairs lead up to the Throne Hall.

**THE SECRET PASSAGES** / Between the second and the third gate of the ramp is a door which leads to two secret passages, one of which runs below the moat towards the city. They formed part of a sophisticated underground escape system which was partially built in pre-Ayyubid times. Both passages are inaccessible today. A further secret passage begins at the "Satura" well built by Sultan Ghazi in the north of the Citadel. Many Aleppians living in the old city still claim that their house was originally connected to one of the escape routes leading from the Citadel.

**SAINT AL KHIDR** / Just before the third gate, on the right, is the maqam (place of appearance) of the Islamic saint al Khidr. The saint is revered by many Muslims in Syria and beyond, and his shrines are frequently visited. It is said that al Khidr drank the water of life and, from time to time, appears to believers who are travelling or in need. It is no longer known to whom the saint revealed himself in the Citadel. Al Khidr is one of the few Islamic saints also venerated by Christians, as Saint George. The main function of al Khidr's shrine, like that of several others that can be found at Aleppo's city gates, was to protect the entrance.

**THE THIRD GATE** / The third and last gate leading to the interior of the fortress is flanked by the above-mentioned "laughing" and "weeping" lions. Sultan al Malek az-Zaher Ghazi, who instigated the building work, had himself immortalised in a seven-line inscription above the gate: "In the name of Allah, our Ruler Sultan al Malek az-Zaher, the Wise, the Just, the Warrior, protected by Allah, the Victorious, the Saviour of the World (and Religion), the Lord of Islam and Muslims, the Lord of Lords and Sultans, the Conqueror of unbelievers and heathens, the Conqueror of sectarians and rebels...has ordered this gate to be erected." The inscription dates back to the year 1209. Behind the gate, the vaulted passage continues for a short distance. The rooms behind the side recesses were probably used for storage. The last recess on the left has an opening in the floor. This is not a well but the ventilation shaft for a further secret passage.



Back in the open, the present-day impression is deceptive because, in former times, the vaulted passage probably continued all the way to the Big Mosque and possibly even branched out to the left and the right. This interpretation is supported by the remains of vaults on either side of the now open alleyway. The two above-mentioned Ayyubid fortresses, Qala'at Najm and Harim – both better preserved than the Citadel – still show that the entire lower storey was originally covered, probably to protect the inhabitants from enemy projectiles. Covering the lower storey also meant that enemies who had successfully scaled the walls were denied a quick overview of the fortification as a whole.



## - 7 The Souk - and the Excavations to the West

After leaving the entrance complex, visitors can view a site plan of the Citadel. In this section, west of the central route, the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums excavated a large area in the late-1990s. In this period, several connected rooms were uncovered which are believed to be part of Ayyubid or even earlier palaces. It is probable that there were also shops in the entrance area. A weathered inscription carrying the name of the famous Salah ad-Din (1169-1193) was recently



*(Top) Lion at the third door in the entrance block. (Middle) A vaulted path may have continued up this route. (Bottom) Remains of an early Islamic palace.*

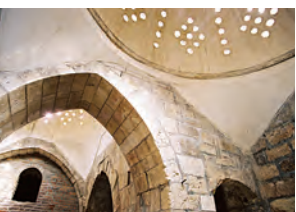
discovered above one of the buried entrances. This inscription is, to date, the only written evidence found on the Citadel that mentions Salah ad-Din's name.

### - 8 The Hammam Nur ad-Din -

On the left side of the ascent, the visitor reaches the Hammam Nur ad-Din, named after the Zangid ruler. In 1973, the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums began excavating and restoring the baths. Whether the hammam does indeed date back to the Zangid era is not entirely clear. Written sources speak of a Mamluk mint being established in one of the two pre-Mamluk baths. The large number of 14<sup>th</sup>-century coins found during restoration supports this interpretation. The mint itself was probably destroyed during Timur's conquest.

### - 9 The Persian-Byzantine Hall -

Passing through a mediaeval room on the right side of the ascent, a modern staircase leads to a large subterranean room. The hall is a large trapezium-shaped rock chamber supported by three rows of massive pillars with three pillars to each row. Arches spanning the pillars support a barrel vault. This space was originally a cave that may have been used as an early place of worship, and was later converted into a large storage space. The massive pillars suggest that the structure served as a foundation for a further building erected above. Beyond the last nave is a deep shaft with one chamber to the north and one to the south. This shaft was probably used as a water-storage facility, at least temporarily, but also served later as a dungeon. The period in which the Persian-Byzantine Hall was built remains unknown. Only the last modification which separated the first nave from the others can be dated. During this alteration, presumably during the Ayyubid or Zengid period, the brick floor was replaced and the vaults were repaired. Horizontal marks on the heavy plaster suggest that the room was then used to store water. Since one of the openings in the ceiling corresponds directly to the Ayyubid Palace above, the hall was probably converted into a cistern at the same time as the palace was built.



(Top) A deteriorated stone inscription, still located at the entrance of a tunnel in the souk area, provides the only written evidence of Salah ad-Din. (Above) Arches and domes in the Hammam Nur ad-Din.



Massive stone pillars and brick arches of the Persian-Byzantine Hall.

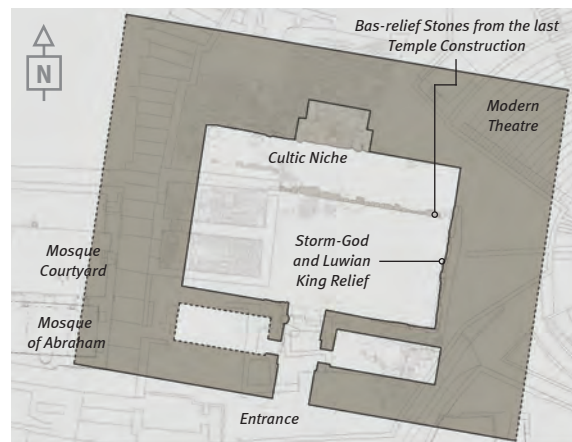
### - 10 Excavations of the Ancient Temple -

Further up, just on the right of the main path is a large excavation site where, in 1996, the Syrian-German archaeological mission began its search for remains of the pre-Hellenistic history of Aleppo. At the bottom of the pit there are large stone slabs showing the corner of a massive building covered by unfired mud tiles. Research efforts were initially focused on an exploratory section cut, which was carried out during the French Mandate and later refilled. Not far from there, a 10<sup>th</sup> century BC basalt relief block was found which is now in the National Museum in Aleppo. The relief shows two mythical winged creatures next to the crescent moon and the sun.

In the course of the recent excavations, the original exploratory cut was reopened. The surrounding area was then cleared level by level until the ancient layer was reached and the northern part of the temple of Aleppo's famous storm god was discovered. The oldest layer dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. The building underwent several restorations, one early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, another probably during the second half of the same millennium, and a further one in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. More significant are the temple's decorative reliefs, some of which are still in their original location and position, and date



(Top) The discovery of the entrance temple with structures and reliefs still in situ, including a 2-metre-long fish with hieroglyphic inscriptions, a lion and a sphinx. (Above) Dating to 1100-900 BC, reliefs discovered depict beasts, genies, lions, bull-men, and geometric designs in the Mesopotamian tradition. (Left) The plan of the Temple of the Storm God superimposed over modern features and landmarks.



back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. A series of reliefs, also dating back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, depicts the storm god climbing into his chariot, surrounded by his entourage of various gods, mythical creatures and lions. The northern façade of the temple, with its central ceremonial recess, is visible from the path. With a width of 26.85 metres, this temple was the largest of its kind. Spanning this width required a colossal construction effort and could only be achieved by using timber from Lebanese cedars. Due to safety considerations and the need to protect the finds until a stable protective building is in place, this site is not open to the public at present.



*A photograph taken in 1908 shows the elaborate ornamental mihrab that disappeared from the Mosque of Abraham in the early twentieth century.*

## - 11 The Mosque of Abraham -

Across the street from the temple site and upward from the Hamman Nur ad-Din, the Mosque of Abraham is located, where, according to legend, the stone where the prophet rested was enshrined and venerated. Both mosques on the Citadel Hill are associated with Abraham (Arabic: Ibrahim), who is said to have offered sacrifices at the site and milked his sheep on the hill and distributed the milk to the poor. According to Arab sources, both mosques were originally churches. During the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Mirdasids converted the churches into mosques.


An inscription on a marble slab next to the prayer-hall entrance proves that in its present form the mosque dates back to the rule of Nur ad-Din Zangi (1146-1174). It is therefore the oldest building surviving intact in the citadel. Nur ad-Din donated a precious wooden mihrab to the mosque that was unfortunately lost or stolen during the French Mandate. Old photographs show its intricate workmanship and beauty.

The mosque consists of a courtyard and a small single-nave prayer room with a domed roof adjoined by two side-barrel vaults. The adjacent recess probably held the shrine. The two columns flanking the entrance are of special interest. One of them is of Byzantine origin. It was probably originally part of the previous church and then reused in the mosque. According to some sources, the 15-metre-deep cistern in the courtyard dates back to Nur ad-Din's rule.



*Reuse of a Byzantine column and capital in the prayer hall of the Mosque of Abraham.*

Several inscriptions in the mosque indicate later restorations. The one above the entrance dates from 1179 and was originally placed elsewhere. It refers to Nur ad-Din's son who apparently completed the work his father had started. A further Zangid inscription on the corbel of a former well that was later placed on the right façade speaks of a donation made towards the upkeep of the mosque. A Mamluk inscription on the left façade documents a donation to finance mats, lights and the restoration of the shrine. The most recent inscription, dating back to 1873, is located above the mosque's entrance.

 **VIEW POINT** / Taking the direct route up leading to the highest point of the Citadel or the path which begins south of the Mosque of Abraham, left of the central route, and leads to a view point further west, provides a spectacular view of the mediaeval city. The various levels of the external Citadel fortifications offer a view of the Great Mosque and the medina souk with its covered shopping lanes, inns and smaller mosques. The grid pattern of the souk, reflecting the ancient colonnaded streets, is still obvious.



## - 12 The Ottoman Dwellings -

Between 2000 and 2005, a large area of an Ottoman residential quarter in the west of the citadel was uncovered. The streets, drainage system and houses are clearly visible. After Aleppo's integration into the Ottoman Empire, the Citadel no longer had the same military significance as in previous centuries. It still served as a garrison, but also as extended living quarters for the soldiers and their families. The soldiers were apparently not fully occupied by their military service and earned extra money through trade. The French traveller Volney, for example, mocked the fact that the 350 Janissaries stationed in the citadel were mainly busy in their shops.

The excavations clearly reveal different types of courtyard houses of various sizes. The houses appear to have been well built, with tiled and, in some cases, multicoloured floors. Here and there, even the untrained eye can identify kitchens, bathrooms and toilets. Several layers of plaster on the walls



*(Top) Recent excavations and subsequent conservation work have preserved an expansive Ottoman residential settlement featuring a well-developed street and drainage network. (Above) In many cases, the housing remains show ornamental treatments, such as in this tiled entry step.*

indicate that the buildings were continuously well maintained. Some of the courtyard houses had wood-panelled walls.

**VIEW POINT** / The terrace, built on top of the fortification walls connecting the Big Mosque and the Barracks of Ibrahim Pasha, offers a panoramic view of the city, which today is home to over two million inhabitants. From this view point, the difference between the dense traditional dwellings and the ever-spreading new development of the last decades is clearly visible. The limits of the mediaeval city wall and the adjacent moat are equally obvious, and, on a bright day, the Taurus Mountains (located some 130 kilometres to the north) can be seen in the distance.



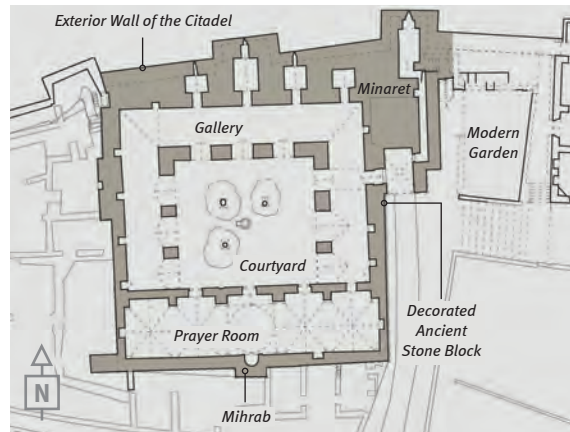
### - 13 The Big Mosque -

The ascent continues to the Big Mosque which, like the lower one, is also associated with Abraham. Apparently, an earlier church had also stood here until the Mirdasids converted it into a mosque. The present building is the work of the Ayyubid ruler al Malek az-Zaher Ghazi, who, according to the large inscription in the tympanum of the entrance gate, had the mosque entirely rebuilt after the disastrous fire in 1212. Written sources document that a relic of the father of John the Baptist was exhibited in the mosque for a number of years. Apparently the relic was found in Baalbek in the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and subsequently transferred to this mosque, where it was the only item that survived the fire. After the Mongol conquest, the relic was transferred to the Great Mosque of Aleppo where it is still exhibited, albeit as a relic of Zacharias.



(Top) The minaret of the Big Mosque as seen through the windswept trees of the arcaded courtyard, and (above) the intersecting vaultwork and mihrab of the mosque.

This mosque was severely damaged during the massive earthquake in 1822. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Directorate of Antiquities carried out comprehensive restoration works, with the result that the mosque has been largely rebuilt. Before entering the mosque, the visitor should look at the geometrically decorated stone block in the eastern exterior wall. This block dates back to ancient times, probably the 2nd millennium BC, and, together with others, was reused in the mosque's foundations.



The mosque consists of a courtyard flanked on three sides by arcades. Five small side rooms open out to the northern arcade and their northern walls form the exterior wall of the Citadel. The single-nave, domed prayer room lies in the south of the complex. The cupola above the nave leading to the mihrab indicates the direction of Mecca. The geometric stellar decoration is the only remnant of the prayer niche. The intersecting vault of the mosque is quite unusual for this age. This type of vault was widely used by the Crusaders; however, Islamic architecture in Syria incorporated this technique only under Mamluk rule. Sultan Ghazi's 21-metre-high minaret also served as a lookout, and its slender rectangular shape echoes the shape of the minaret of the Great Mosque in the old city.

### - 14 The Barracks of Ibrahim Pasha -

**VISITOR CENTRE AND CAFETERIA** The rectangular, one-storey barracks are located east of the Big Mosque. They are now used as a Visitor Centre and Museum, and the western part of the building houses a coffee shop. Its north-facing terraces offer the visitor an impressive view of the city. There are several artefacts exhibited in the open area in front of the newly established museum to help the visitor learn more about the Citadel and its history.



(Top left) Ground floor plan of the Big Mosque and (top) its entrance, with the remains of an ancient temple incorporated into its masonry. (Above) The Barracks of Ibrahim Pasha now provide visitor services including an open air exhibit, museum and café.

The barracks were built by the Egyptian governor Ibrahim Pasha, who ruled Syria between 1832 and 1840 and introduced several changes into the civil and military administration of the time. Three inscriptions above the entrances date a restoration to the rule of the Ottoman Sultan Abdulmadjid (1839-1861).

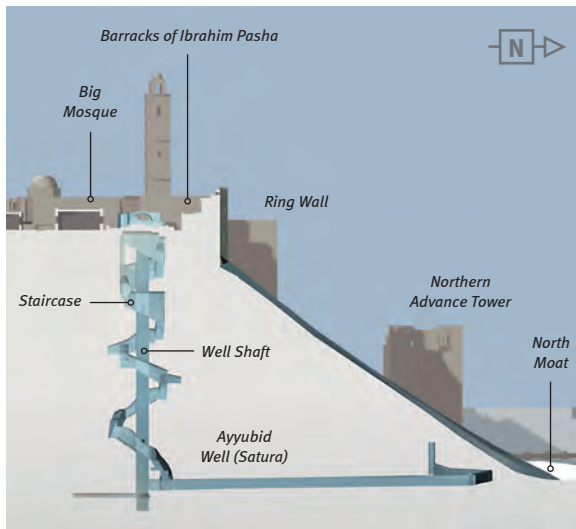


### - 15 The Ayyubid Well (Satura) -

A few metres east of the barracks is a deep well, dating back to the time of Sultan Ghazi. The rectangular shaft, around which runs a staircase lit by windows cut into the shaft, reaches a depth of about 52 metres. The well was fed by channels from several directions. Above it is a domed lifting device, now derelict, dating back to Mamluk or Ottoman times. The well was taken care of by a family said to have been amongst the last inhabitants who left the Citadel after the devastating earthquake in 1822. It is the starting point of several secret passages, not all of which were completed. One of its passages leads to the northern advance tower, and a second to a thermal spring on the northern slope of the Citadel, where its entrance is now closed off by a reused Byzantine basalt door.



(Top) The remains of the entrance to the Ayyubid well (satura) (above) with a staircase going down 52 metres to the level of the moat and water table (right) as shown in the section.




### - 16 Excavations along the Fortifications -

The restored section of wall between the Ayyubid well and the windmill gives a sense of the structure of the fortifications and the adjacent living quarters of the soldiers.




The restored parts of the Ayyubid fortification walls near the Ottoman mill include the stone foundations of quarters for soldiers.

### - 17 The Mill -

 **VIEW POINT** / Further east on the northern ring wall sits a well-built windmill tower which now serves as an observation point. It provides a view across the Citadel, the city, the hills along the Euphrates in the east, the salt lagoon of Jabbul in the south-east and the silhouette of Jebel Sheikh Barakat close to the St. Simeon Monastery, in the west. The mill is attributed to the Egyptian governor Ibrahim Pasha. In the basement, there are remains of former living quarters.

### - 18 The Modern Theatre -

 The semi-circular structure with its auditorium laid onto the slope, built in the centre of the Citadel in 1980, is used for performances and information sessions for visiting groups. Antiquities now considers the amphitheatre problematic because remnants of older buildings were buried under it, but the structure also protects even older layers from further decay. East of the theatre, two long vaulted Ayyubid rooms still remain, but are presently not accessible to the public. Recent excavations in one of the rooms have revealed clay water-troughs and other evidence to indicate that the hall may have been used as a stable.




The subterranean Ayyubid hall used as a cistern measures 15.50 metres in height.

### - 19 The Ayyubid Cistern -


South-east of the theatre lies a large underground hall with three high, barrel-vaulted naves, supported by four large pillars. The once-lockable entrance and the entire lower part of the hall are cut out of the rock; the pillars and the upper part are built with

square stone blocks. A long staircase of 73 steps runs from the southeast and turns towards the entrance of the hall. The room probably dates back to the Ayyubid period and was apparently used as a water storage facility, and later as a storage area for cereals and fodder.

 **VIEW POINT** / The view point on top of the fortifications looks out over the Citadel's entrance area and the important buildings below. The Hammam Yalbugha, the Courthouse, the Government House (New Serai), al Madrasa as-Sultaniya, the Mosque al Khosrowiya and Khan ash-Shuna illustrate a range of architectural styles from different periods.

From this view point, a path leads to a courtyard-like space which forms the entrance to the two palaces and the arsenal, today housing a museum documenting the history of the Ayyubid Palace. Above the palace area lies the entrance to the impressive octagonal tower east of the Citadel entrance. Inside the tower is a small museum exhibiting mediaeval weaponry.

### - 20 The Mamluk Tower -

 The Tower, which probably dates back to the rule of the Mamluk Sultan al Ashraf Barsbay (1422-1438), has been excavated and restored. A great surprise was the discovery of an older, previously undiscovered Citadel entrance, which probably led straight to the palace. In terms of style, the high, angled gate protected by two embrasures dates back to the Ayyubid period and had provided a further approach to the Citadel. The exact function and date of the gate are not yet known.

### - 21 The Ayyubid Palace -

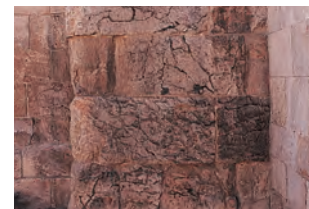
Between the underground hall and the main ascent lies the palace of al Malek az-Zaher Ghazi. It is generally identified as the famous "Palace of Glory," which is mentioned in several mediaeval sources. Tragically, the palace burned down on the ruler's wedding night in 1212 and was later rebuilt as the "Palace of Pictures." On the gate and in the courtyard a few

traces of fire damage can still be seen. Sultan Ghazi was not the first Islamic ruler to build a palace on the Citadel. Written sources mention several previous buildings. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Hamdanid prince Sa'd ad-Daula moved his residence to the Citadel and, during the following century, the Mirdasids built their palaces on the hill as well. The Seljuk ruler Ridwan (1095-1113) and the Zangid prince Nur ad-Din (1146-1174) also had palaces on the Citadel. But Arab sources devote more attention to the Ayyubid "Palace of Glory" than to any of the other palaces. A long eulogy praises its outstanding beauty, its precious interiors and its magnificent gardens stocked with various sweet-smelling flowers and trees. Also listed are a well, a marble floor and a reservoir, as well as 'pictures,' possibly stone or wooden sculptures or even murals which have not survived. Even now, the demise of the Ayyubid residence cannot be dated. It probably suffered considerable damage during the Mongol conquest in 1260-1261 and was further destroyed by Timur's troops in 1400. During Mamluk rule, the complex was still used as a palace. An inscription added to an existing entrance portal in 1367 documents repairs on a water pipe. Written sources mention that approximately 100 years later the palace was once again restored, painted white and newly refurbished. Mamluk alterations or additions to the building are no longer visible.

**THE ENTRANCE PORTAL** / Entry to the palace is through a richly decorated entrance portal with ornamental masonry work made from alternating stripes of limestone and basalt and completed by the superb, scalloped half-domed muqarnas-vault. Muqarnas, a honeycomb motif, built from several rows of small arches placed one above the other, are a striking decorative element of Islamic architecture. They were introduced by the Zangids and were particularly popular during Ayyubid rule. The wide upper panel with its geometric decoration is a reconstruction, but the doorjambs and lintels are well-preserved originals made from different coloured cut-stone slabs placed to form wide alternating bands overlaid with fine geometric ornamental engravings. On either side of the portal are windows that were most likely originally protected by stone lattice-work. Above these appears a decoration displaying a knot motif. The entire right side of the portal is new. The above-mentioned Mamluk inscription of 1367 is placed in the lower part of the muqarnas vault.



*(Top) A view of the so-called Mamluk Tower, which covers an older entrance to the Citadel.  
(Above) The tourist circuit based on the historic path leading from the Mamluk Tower to the Ayyubid Palace.*



*(Top) The entrance portal of the Palace (middle) with typical Ayyubid masonry work of striped limestone and basalt incised with geometric patterns.  
(Bottom) Traces of the fire damage in 1212 can still be seen on the portal and in the courtyard.*



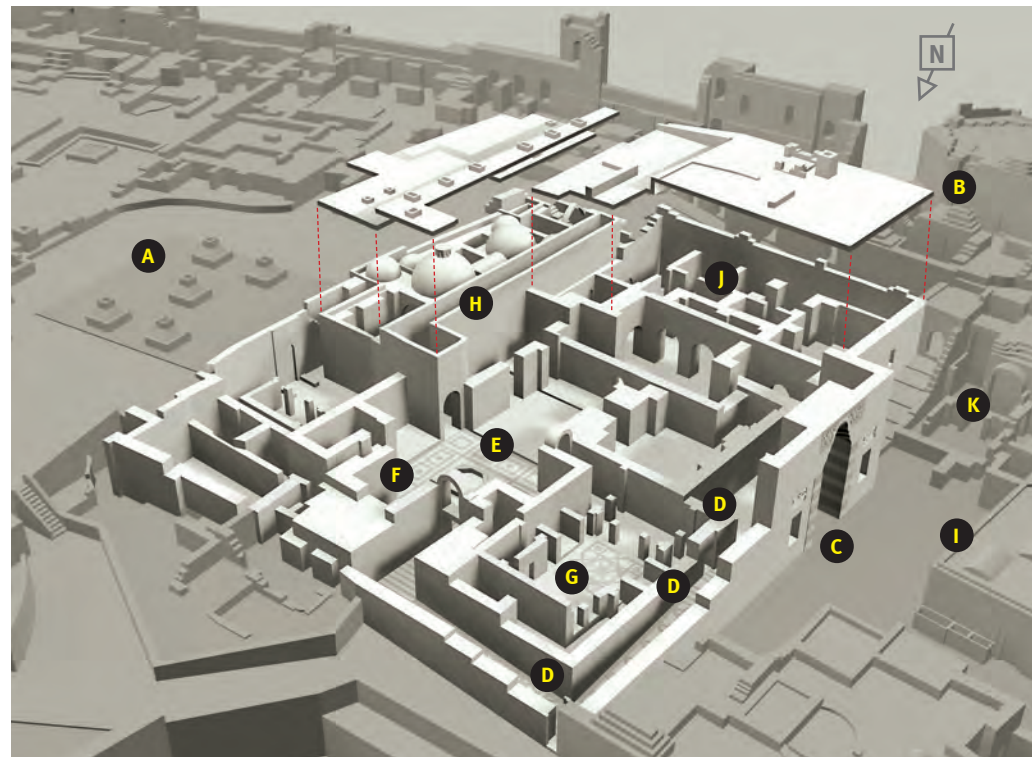
**THE PALACE INTERIOR** / Although the entrance portal was at least partially above ground level, the palace itself was buried. In the 1980s, the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities began to excavate the building and restore or rebuild the lower sections of the walls. So far, the complete site has been excavated, which encompasses the original centre of the palace, two differently sized courtyards, the baths, the arsenal, and service spaces to the north.



(Top) One of the basalt framed portals of the passageway inside the Ayyubid Palace leading to the interior courtyard.  
(Above) The courtyard as seen today after careful restoration.

At the entrance portal, in line with the traditional layout of Islamic domestic architecture, an angled, originally vaulted passage prevents the visitor from seeing directly into the interior. The passage follows the course of the exterior wall, passes three basalt-framed portals, takes two more turns and ends in the larger rear courtyard which served as the main courtyard of the residence, where steps indicate that the palace may have had two storeys. A smaller courtyard that was probably used for public audiences lies behind the door between the first and the second portal. Most visitors were only allowed to enter as far as this point. On the north side of the walkway there is a side entrance leading out of the palace.

Both courtyards are laid out in the same square pattern with an iwan – a high, vaulted space which opens out to an open central space. However, the smaller courtyard originally had a closed room in the south, complete with three entrances. Only the foundations of this room and of the iwans remain. In Islamic art history, this particular architectural feature is described as a variation of the “four-iwan plan” which, under the influence of Seljuk architecture in Persia, was introduced to Syria in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. This aesthetic courtyard design serves a practical purpose – the iwans provide protection from the burning sun and also serve as a wind-break. Both palace courtyards had beautiful mosaic floors made of coloured marble, the remains of which can still be seen. The decoration of the main courtyard, reserved for more intimate gatherings, was considerably more sophisticated. The rear wall of the northern iwan contained a muqarnas-decorated recess and a water fountain featuring a nymph. In the middle of the courtyard was a beautiful octagonal fountain. Overall, the palace complex was relatively small, probably due to the fact that space on the Citadel Hill was limited.



- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| (A) Ayyubid Cistern                     | (G) Small Courtyard  |
| (B) Mamluk Tower                        | (H) Palace Hammam    |
| (C) Entrance Portal                     | (I) Hellenistic Well |
| (D) Basalt-framed Portals               | (J) Arsenal          |
| (E) Main Courtyard                      | (K) Tawashi Palace   |
| (F) Decorated Recess and Water Fountain |                      |

*Axonometric view of the Ayyubid Palace, with the roofs of the adjacent Arsenal and Palace Hammam raised.*

- 22 The Palace Hammam -

Beyond the main courtyard, on the east, lie the baths which the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities restored in the 1970s. The baths are in the traditional design of mediaeval Islamic hammams. The first, slightly larger room was used for undressing and for resting once the bath was over. From here, bathers went into the second unheated but warmer room and then into the hot room. Finally, they went into the steam room which was equipped with alcoves. Hot and cold water flowed from the taps, and there were small stone or tiled benches. Directly behind this room was the furnace. Since early Islamic times, hammams have formed an integral part of Islamic palatial architecture.



*The interior steam room of the Palace Hammam. Several coats of plaster show ongoing maintenance during the mediaeval period.*

- 23 The Hellenistic Well -

Opposite the entrance to the Ayyubid Palace is an apparently late Ottoman building with a deep well. This may be the "Well of Seleucos" that written sources describe as a shaft with 125 steps leading down. As investigations in 2002 showed, the steps still exist but are in a precarious state. During the French Mandate, this was the only well in use, but its water was said to be salty and not palatable. The building houses a Byzantine sarcophagus, later reused as a water trough, with a Greek inscription.

- 24 The Arsenal -

**M** From the square in front of the entrance portal of the Ayyubid Palace, on the southern side of the Palace, some deeper rooms are located and identified as Sultan Ghazi's former Arsenal. Excavations carried out by the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities uncovered several projectiles. The Arsenal, like the Palace, was also destroyed by the fire in 1212. According to an inscription above the locked entrance on the western side of the complex, the Arsenal was subsequently restored by Sultan Ghazi's son. In the museum newly established within the Arsenal, the visitors can learn of the history of the Ayyubids and the architecture of the Ayyubid Palace.




*The collection of cannon balls and other projectiles found in the Arsenal of the Citadel.*

- 25 The Tawashi Palace -

Written sources report that, in 1230-1231, a further palace was erected next to the Arsenal. They may refer to what are now the remains of a larger courtyard complex with iwans and mosaic floors that were excavated in this area in 1994. They are located on the left-hand side on the approach to the Throne Hall.



- 26 The Mamluk Throne Hall -

 After Timur's troops had destroyed the Citadel in 1400, the Mamluk governor Jakam Sayf ad-Din, who resided in Aleppo, had it restored. In the course of his ambitious building programme, he had a magnificent hall erected on top of the two Ayyubid towers. According to mediaeval sources, this hall was the most beautiful in the entire Islamic world. Its floors were apparently covered with mosaics, and through the side windows there was an impressive view across the city. The original plan was to build the ceiling from Baalbek timber, but the trunks proved too short to span the width of the chamber. It was only when longer trunks were brought from Damascus under the rule of Sultan Mu'ayyad Shaikh (1412-1421) in 1417 that the building was able to be completed. In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Sultan Qaitbay had the Throne Hall restored once again. During these works, part of the façade, including the splendid windows, were rebuilt. In 1508, the last Mamluk Sultan, al Ghuri, had the flat wooden roof replaced by nine cupolas. Some remains of the arch supports are still visible.



*(Top) The remains of the Tawashi Palace, an early Islamic palace in the Citadel. (Above) A view from the Throne Hall courtyard through its ornamental Mamluk door with the minaret of the Big Mosque in the background.*

Visitors enter the Throne Hall by passing through a forecourt. Several Byzantine and mediaeval Islamic building fragments are currently exhibited here. The north wall of the forecourt is decorated with ornamental stones, and has a multi-coloured stone portal. The actual entrance to the Throne Hall leads through a magnificent portal on the south side of the forecourt, decorated with muqarnas and an ornamental medallion made of different-coloured cut stone. The large inscription in the portal's recess praises the beauty of the hall.

The Syrian Directorate of Antiquities restored the Throne Hall in the 1960s, and the hall is now used for public receptions. The painted ceiling, the marble floor with the fountain and the large chandelier echo the popular style of the Damascene domestic architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some fragments of the original Mamluk wall paintings can still be seen on the side walls. The beautiful Mamluk bronze latticework on the magnificent main window deserves special attention. The northern back wall, with its large stone blocks, dates back to the Ayyubid period.

From the Throne Hall, there is a shortcut across the mezzanine floor which leads down to the exit.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) implements cultural initiatives aimed at revitalising the heritage of Islamic communities and contributing to their social and economic development. Its programmes include: the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, which recognises examples of architectural excellence; the Historic Cities Programme undertakes the conservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings and urban spaces in ways that act as catalysts for social, economic and cultural development in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, India, Mali, Syria, Pakistan and Zanzibar; the Music Initiative works to ensure the preservation of Central Asia's musical heritage and its transmission to a new generation of artists and audiences; the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, based at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is an endowed centre of excellence. ArchNet.org, based at MIT, is a comprehensive archive of materials on architecture. The Museums Project, which is creating museums in Toronto, Cairo and Zanzibar, also provides support services for museums in the developing world.

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*(Top) Mamluk entrance to the Throne Hall from its courtyard. (Above) Al Azhar Park and its related programmes in the adjacent Darb al Ahmar district of Cairo are recognised examples of other Aga Khan Trust for Culture initiatives in the region.*



Listed as a World Heritage Site in 1986, the Citadel dominates the ancient trading city of Aleppo. Merchants of the Silk Road started or ended their journeys in its shadow, bringing silk from China, frankincense from Oman and olives to Byzantium. The Citadel was to encounter the Hittites, Romans, Byzantines, Mongols, Mamluks and Ottomans, but the Citadel's monumental grandeur is largely the work of the Ayyubids in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1999, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, in cooperation with the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, began conservation work at the citadels of Aleppo, Masyaf and the Castle of Salah ad-Din. The objective was not only to restore the monuments, but to create conditions in which the citadels could become catalysts for social and economic development. Conservation was complemented by new museum and tourist facilities. A large urban project at the foot of the Citadel, including pedestrian areas, parking and a tourist bus station, reinforces the link between the monument and the local souks. As part of the programme, this book is intended to provide visitors with a fresh look at the Citadel, the city of Aleppo, the nation of Syria and – more broadly – the rich architectural traditions of the Muslim world.

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