

Citadel of Masyaf

MASYAF, SYRIA

Located in central western Syria, the town of Masyaf nestles on the eastern slope of the coastal mountains. The Citadel of Masyaf, which is built on a rocky promontory, is the result of several phases and is marked by considerable changes and destruction. The record of these changes is still recognizable in a few structures. The monument represents a unique cultural heritage for the quality of the architecture, the variety and quality of the materials and for the complexity of the historical stratifications. The Citadel rises at the eastern side of the Old City and is a landmark for the whole city. The site is one of the most famous monuments of the Islamic architecture of the coastal region. Furthermore, the Citadel can be the object of important archaeological investigations in the future.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding' with the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums in Syria (DGAM) on 1 December 1999 to present support in the restoration of three citadels in Syria (Aleppo, Masyaf and Salah al-Din). Since that time a considerable amount of work has been completed in the Citadel of Masyaf through cooperation with the Antiquities department.

Most of the areas within the site were selected to become the focus of conservation efforts, with the intention that the DGAM would continue work elsewhere using methodologies and skills acquired during the joint project implementation. The work has been developed following international standards and methodology of conservation, restoration and rehabilitation. The choices made were the result of in-depth analyses of the monument's history, of its present physical and figurative state, and of its conservation status. Surveys were carried out with the analysis of materials and systems of decay.

The Citadel of Masyaf is a very dense complex containing a series of buildings and monuments with different historic elements and features, which called for a diversified approach and different forms of conservation and maintenance targeted to the specific requirements of each structure or category of structures.

The main structures are the barbican, the *hammam*, the stair and the main gateway; the ring wall and the towers; the south-western compound of the outer citadel; the tunnel, the cisterns and the store rooms; the eastern and western terraces; the donjon or inner castle; and the palace complex containing the Byzantine castle.



The facade of the Citadel of Masyaf, seen from the south, after several modern houses that had encroached on it have been removed.

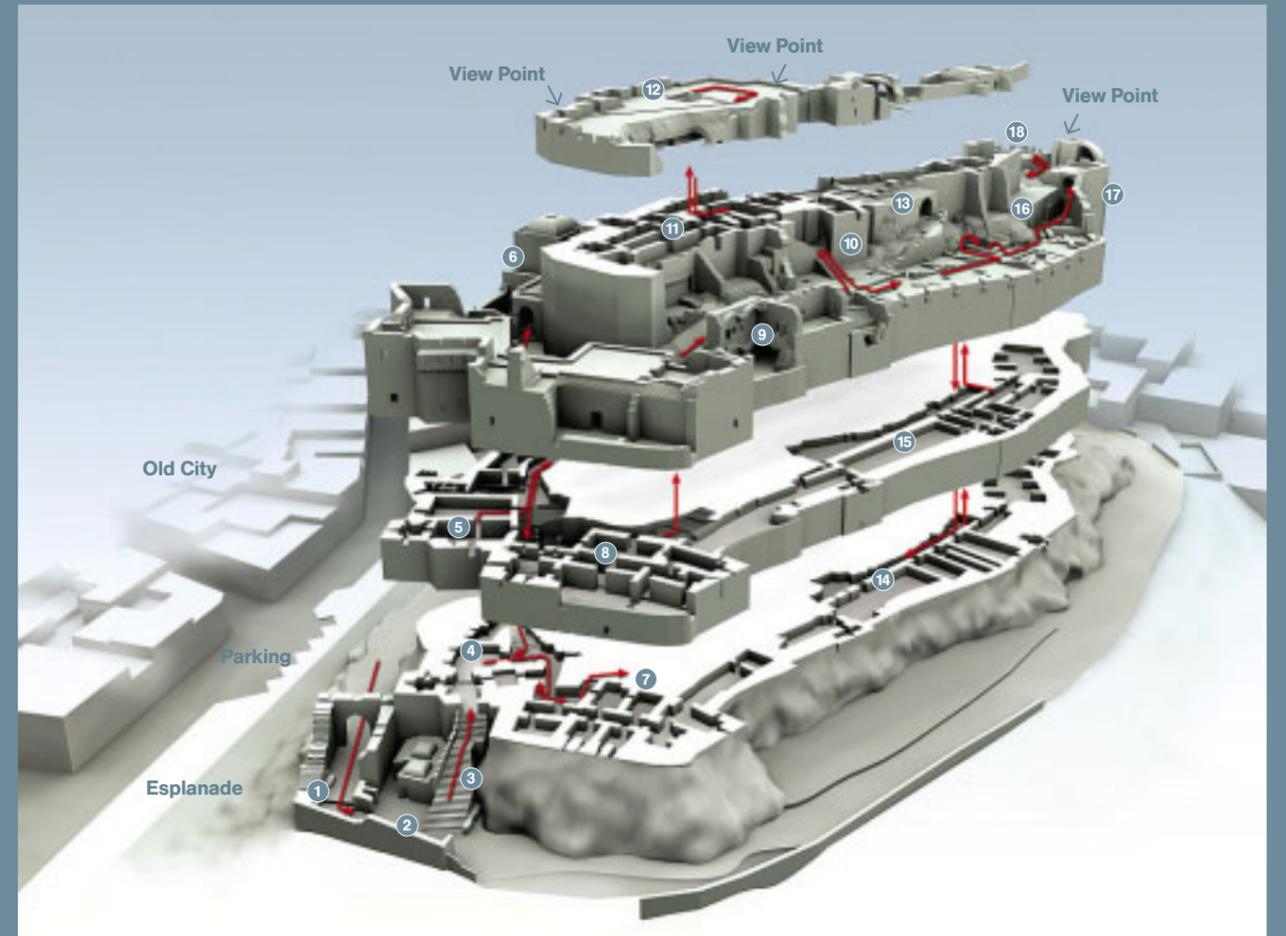
Opposite page:

Above, an exploded axonometric plan showing the various levels and structures contained within the Citadel.

Below, masons are pictured working on the West Terrace.

Preceding pages:

The Castle of Salah al-Din is located on the western slope of the Syrian coastal mountains at an altitude of 400 to 460 metres. The lower town is on the right, the upper plateau on the left, and the remains of the Byzantine citadel can be seen above.



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|---|---|--|--|
| 1 Barbican | 6 Western Ottoman House – visitor centre | 11 Inner Castle-Palace, lower level – northern and southern sections | 15 Eastern Front, upper level |
| 2 Hammam | 7 Southern Defensive Complex, lower level – tickets, information and bookshop | 12 Inner Castle-Palace, upper level | 16 Tombs – hypogea from the Byzantine period |
| 3 Stairway | 8 Southern Defensive Complex, upper level | 13 Quarter attributed to Sinan Rashid ad-Din | 17 Room with distinctive plaster |
| 4 Entrance Complex, lower level | 9 Eastern Ottoman House | 14 Eastern Front, lower level | 18 Defensive Tower Terrace |
| 5 Entrance Complex, upper level, visitor centre | 10 Stairway to Inner Castle-Palace | | |

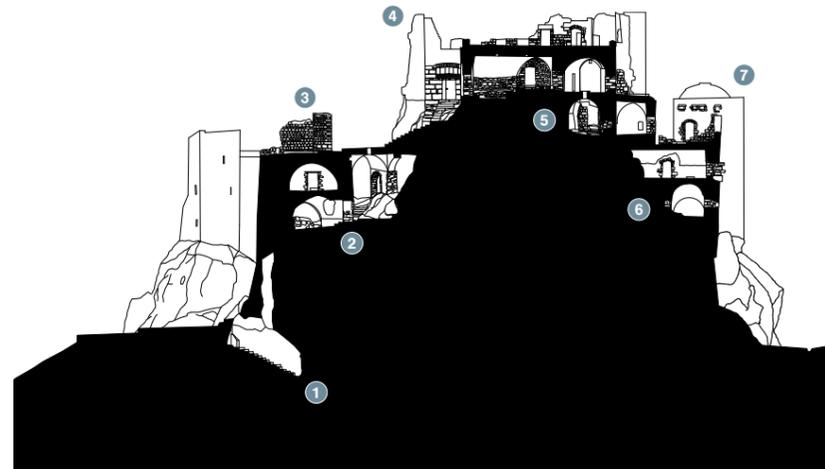
Project Scope/Objectives

The scope of tasks included documentation, historic research and the definition of principles for the conservation of masonry. The project included the development of techniques for stabilization and structural reinforcement, and masonry conservation and major repairs. HCP was involved in the creation of tourism infrastructure and the access esplanade. Brochures and guidebooks for tourists were also created.



Right, east-west section of the Citadel, showing the outer and inner castle erected on the excavated promontory.

Opposite page:
The Citadel seen from the south-west with the town of Masyaf in the foreground.



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|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| 1 Cistern | 5 Inner Castle | ----- 20m |
| 2 Outer Castle Eastern Front | 6 Outer Castle Western Front | |
| 3 Eastern Ottoman House | 7 Western Ottoman House | |
| 4 Entrance to the Palace | | |

The project began in 2000 with the documentation work and the definition of the concept and principles of the preservation process. During the whole mission, detailed documentation was created, including topographical and architectural surveys of the six main levels of the Citadel. Plans of these levels and precise sections were drawn.

In 2001 the consolidation of the eastern wall was executed. As the structural base of the historic Citadel, the rocky promontory was also the object of periodic controls.

From 2001 to 2003 efforts concentrated on the core of the Citadel, and in particular on the western and eastern areas, which presented major structural issues. During this period, archaeological excavations were carried out.

From 2002 to 2004 the Trust completed the work on the upper levels. In the whole Citadel, drainage problems have been resolved by channelling water away from the walls' foundations towards the interior areas of the complex. Rain falls have been redefined to avoid concentration of groundwater near the walls to avoid aggravating the existing problems of erosion and the future occurrence of landslides: although both the ring walls and the walls existing within the Citadel have been repaired and often rebuilt with protective caps. The realization of the screeds on the terraces was executed according to traditional local techniques.

The preservation of the entrance complex, in and out of the portal, was undertaken during 2004 and 2005. Tasks were consolidation of the *hammam*, preservation of the barbican and the removal of the former modern stair access to the Citadel in favour of the rediscovered medieval access.

In 2006 and the beginning of 2007 the Trust concentrated its efforts on the development of visitor infrastructure: access, visitor centre, paths, signage and sanitation facilities. The Historic Cities Programme (HCP) has undertaken a review of the present Master Plan of the city of Masyaf. The project envisaged the improvement of the Citadel's urban context. In this framework, the immediate proximity of the Citadel was considered as an indivisible part of the historic site. The esplanade and the western terraces as well as the eastern terraces were created. Subsequently, brochures and a guidebook were published.



An access corridor in the Citadel is a 60-metre-long tunnel divided into sections separated by raised arches.



Background

BRIEF HISTORY OF PROJECT SITE

The town of Masyaf is located in the centre of the Syrian coastal mountains. Masyaf Citadel is one of the most intact medieval strongholds of the Syrian littoral. Built on a rocky promontory, most of the Citadel's extant structures date to the Ismaili occupation (12th and 13th centuries) when Masyaf was their state capital. A Byzantine structure that pre-dates the Citadel was included in the medieval fortress. In the Ottoman period some constructions were added. During the 20th century the Citadel was the subject of several consolidation campaigns, performed without any historical or architectural basis. Prior to HCP intervention the site was completely abandoned.

Challenges

PROJECT RISKS

The site analysis and definition of new structures and historical ruins represented a challenge, as did the effort of de-restoration (removing former substandard conservation and reinforcement works).

SITE CONDITIONS

Bombardments, erosion, human impact and long-term abandonment caused deterioration to the site. The western approach to the Citadel was blocked by a series of shabby informal apartment buildings.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The site lacked all electricity, water, rainwater and waste drainage infrastructure.

BUILDING CONDITIONS

The Citadel was in an advanced state of decay. Parts of the ring walls had collapsed.

Significant Issues and Impact

DATA COLLECTION/SURVEYS

AKTC carried out architectural, structural and topographical surveys of most of the site, documenting areas of intervention and detailing conditions before conservation or rehabilitation works.

MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

A general plan was defined for strategies related to emergency measures, drainage problems, visitor infrastructure and the phasing of interventions. The objective was to restore the Citadel and make it a catalyst for socio-economic development in the city, particularly through tourism. After its preservation, the Citadel was included within the 'National Plan' defined by the Ministry of Tourism. The number of visitors increased from less than 500 per year to more than 6000 in 2009.

PLANNING ISSUES

To develop visitor facilities, minimal but efficient infrastructure networks were planned and installed in co-operation with the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM). One of the major interventions was the development of tourist interpretation at the site. In addition to the tourist trail and signage, brochures and guidebooks were planned for availability in a new visitor centre. To enhance the appearance of the esplanade, and reproduce a view of the Citadel as it was in medieval times, the natural rock of the site was exposed and cleaned, and electrical networks were installed underground.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS/MONUMENTS CONSERVED

The Citadel and its immediate surroundings were the main conservation project.

NEW BUILDING FACILITIES

The Trust purchased 12 blocks of buildings blocking the western approach to the Citadel in 2003 and

replaced them with an esplanade. Parking for tourist buses and cars was provided. A visitor centre and sanitation facilities were created, and a tourist route was defined and equipped with signage.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING/CAPACITY BUILDING

Accredited international and local experts conducted training sessions and programmes in up-to-date methodologies of documentation and conservation for the benefit of DGAM staff, contractors and craftsmen.

CONTRACTING METHODS

AKTC carried out most of the works with a team directly employed by the Trust in order to upgrade local restoration skills. Contractors were chosen for structural reinforcements of the ring walls, based on tender procedures after selected invitations.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES INTRODUCED

The monument's preservation entailed the revival of traditional building methods (such as lime-based mortar injection) that had disappeared during the last decades.

Partners

PUBLIC PARTNERS

Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, Governorate of Hama, City Council of Masyaf Town.

Authoritative Framework

On 1 December 1999 AKTC signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding' with the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of Syria for providing support to the 'Restoration of Three Citadels in Syria'. One of these three sites was the Citadel of Masyaf. In 2001 the Trust signed a protocol with the Governorate of Hama and the City of Masyaf.