

G U I D E B O O K



English version

# The Citadel of Masyaf

Description, History, Site Plan & Visitor Tour





**Frontispiece:** *The Arabic inscription above the basalt lintel of the monumental doorway into the palace in the Inner Castle. This inscription is dated to 1226 AD, and lists the names of “Alaa ad-Dunia wa ad-Din Muhammad, son of Hasan, son of Muhammad, son of Hasan (may Allah grant him eternal power); under the rule of Lord Kamal ad-Dunia wa ad-Din al-Hasan, son of Masa’ud (may Allah extend his power)”.*

**Opposite:** *Detail of this inscription.*

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Geneva, Switzerland ([www.akdn.org](http://www.akdn.org))  
© 2008 by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. All rights reserved.  
No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission of the publisher. Printed in Syria.

ISBN: 978-2-940212-06-4

Description,  
History, Site Plan  
& Visitor Tour

# The Citadel of Masyaf

Text by Haytham Hasan

*The Aga Khan Trust for Culture  
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 Masyaf.*

## Contents

Introduction	5
History	7
Site Plan	24
Visitor Tour	26





## The Citadel of Masyaf

Located in central-western Syria, the town of Masyaf nestles on an eastern slope of the Syrian coastal mountains, 500 metres above sea level and 45 kilometres from the city of Hama. Seasonal streams flow to the north and south of the city and continue down to join the Sarout River,

a tributary of the Orontes. Since ancient times, the region has played a significant military role, and the Citadel of Masyaf is strategically situated at the point where several roads converge, enabling it to exercise control over the whole region between the plain of al Ghab in the north and the plain of Buqai'a to the south. West of the city there are two valleys: the northern one reaching the sea and the southern one leading towards the Crac des Chevaliers.

The Citadel occupies a prominent site in the eastern section of the old city, perching on a rocky promontory which stretches 145 metres from north to south and 60 metres from east to west. Viewed from the Hama road, the Castle is a striking spectacle, and, with the verdant beauty of the mountain as background, conjures up the image of a ship floating in the sky. The city itself was encircled by a defensive wall, roughly oval in shape, of which certain sections have survived. Both the Citadel and the city wall reveal a variety of architectural styles corresponding to many different periods of history.



*(Left) The entrance complex, with the hammam and the barbican in the foreground. (Top) Remains of the old city walls and the eastern gate, which dates from 1248-1249 AD.*





### – Early History of Masyaf –

Human settlement at Masyaf dates back to the Aramaic era in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Tablets from this era were found in the archives of the Assyrian capital of Nimrud in Iraq, demonstrating that a military garrison existed at ‘Mansuate’, on the site of present-day Masyaf. Chronicles from the Roman and early Byzantine eras refer to a site called ‘Marsos’ or ‘Marsyas’ which was said to have controlled the plain of al Ghab to the north and the plain of al Buqai’a to the south.

The first contingents of Arab Muslim troops arrived in Syria around 638 AD. Under the first Muslim dynasty, the Umayyads (661-750 AD), a large area in central-western Syria including Masyaf and Shaizar became part of the regional district of Homs. In 673 AD, the two Arab tribes who dominated the region went into battle at Marj Rahit, near Damascus, throwing Syria into turmoil. Cities such

as Homs and Qinnasrin lost their status as important administrative centres and other cities, such as Aleppo, gained importance.

Aleppo became the capital of the north of Syria and its territory included Masyaf. With the fall of the Umayyads in 750 AD, Baghdad, under the Abbasids, took the place of Damascus as the capital of the Muslim Caliphate.

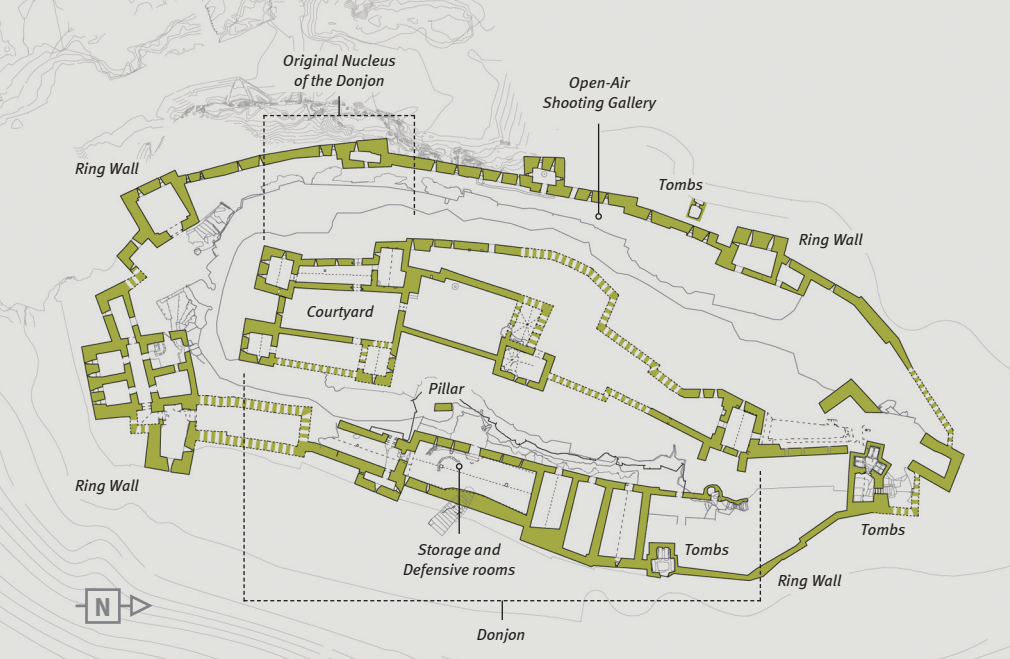
In the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Hamdanid dynasty came to power in the northern parts of Iraq and Syria. It seems probable that the Hamdanids, based in Aleppo from 944 to 1003 AD, first fortified the military outposts, such as Masyaf, guarding the mountain routes, at this time. Geographical and historical documentation on the Masyaf region and northwestern Syria becomes more abundant from this period onwards. In 969 AD, the Byzantines imposed a treaty on the Hamdanids under which the former would exercise control over the whole northwestern region



(Top) General view of the Citadel of Masyaf from the east and the road to Hama. Springing up from the plain of al Ghab to the north and the plain of al Buqai’a to the south. In the foreground are the remains of the old city walls. (Above) In spite of the relatively long Byzantine occupation, only a few remains of decorated pieces of this period have survived, reused in later structures as capitals, columns and lintels.



Except for several hypogaea cut into the bedrock, this simple cross carved in a masonry block in the Inner Castle is the only Byzantine decorated element found in situ.



(Top) Hypothetical reconstruction of the Byzantine donjon.  
(Above) Pillars and arches between the rock and the fortifications are perhaps from the Byzantine period.

of Syria. After this treaty, specific references document a Byzantine presence in the region of Jebel al Bahra, on the eastern slopes of the coastal mountains, as well as in the Citadels of Masyaf, Shaizar, Burzay and Salah ad-Din.

At the beginning of 971 AD the Fatimids (909-1171 AD) began to view northern Syria as a possible extension of their Egyptian domain. In the same year the whole Homs district, including Masyaf, came under Fatimid domination. In 993 AD. their army took Shaizar and Apamea from the Hamdanids and pushed on as far as the outskirts of Antioch.

Shortly thereafter, however, the Byzantine Emperor Basil II (976-1025 AD), the 'Chamberlain', attempted to re-capture Northern Syria. During this campaign he destroyed the Citadel of Masyaf and established a Byzantine garrison at Shaizar on the Orontes. The first reference to a defensive structure at Masyaf dates from this period. 'Hisn Misyath' is described as a fortification protecting a military garrison based in Shaizar.

In the 1070s the Seljuks, of Turkmen origin, expanded their empire from Iran and Mesopotamia to include Syria and Palestine, and Sultan Malek Shah took power in Syria. Emir Munqidh, the Lord of Shaizar, recognised the Seljuks and surrendered himself to them. Thanks to Munqidh's subsequent favourable relations with the Seljuks, Shaizar assumed a pivotal role in central Syria, no doubt aided by its strategic position as the only crossing point on the Orontes. During this period Shaizar controlled the entire central area between the provinces of Apamea and Homs, including Masyaf, from 1080 AD onwards.

### – The Crusaders –

In 1098 AD and 1099 AD, during the First Crusade, the Frankish army marched along the eastern flank of the coastal mountains on their way to the Holy Land from Antioch. An unknown soldier described the various stages of the march into the region of Masyaf, between the castle of Shaizar and the city of Rafaniyya. He wrote:

*"The soldiers arrived in a valley where there was a castle. Within this region they accumulated more than five thousand sheep and great quantities of wheat, among many other items of great use to the Christian army. The castle garrison surrendered to the Frankish count and handed over horses, gold and a safe-conduct to enable the pilgrims to continue their journey safely ... Once over the mountain we found ourselves in the valley of Buqai'a, which also had an abundance of provisions. We stayed there for fifteen days near a fortress which was shelter to many infidel refugees."*

During the anarchy of the years following the arrival of the First Crusade in the Levant, the Nizari Ismailis, a branch of Shia Islam with their base at Alamut in Iran, began to establish a refuge in the mountainous region west of the



In the bedrock excavated to support the fortifications of the Outer Castle, several openings to hypogea are visible.



These hypogea, cut into the bedrock, are composed of a central space, which opens into several alcoves with sarcophagi carved also in the rock. The stone covers have disappeared.



middle Orontes. From the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Masyaf was the centre of the Nizari Ismaili state in Syria and the Citadel played its most important role in the political landscape of the region.

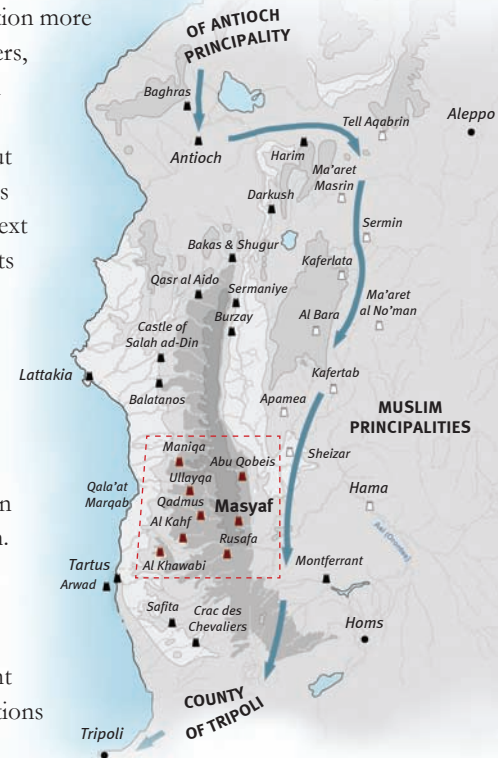
### – Nizari Ismailis in Masyaf – in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries

After their attempts in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century to build a lasting power base in Aleppo and then in Damascus, the Nizaris, under the leadership of Isma'il al 'Ajami, finally secured a safe settlement in the southern part of Jebel al Bahra, a region where they had a prior relationship with the local chiefs, the Bano 'Amroun. Between 1132 to 1133 AD, under their new leader Sheikh Abu Mohammad, the Ismailis took possession of their first fortress in these mountains: the castle of Qadmus, then in the hands of a local lord, Ibn 'Amroun. Other fortresses in the region were to follow; later in 1132-33 AD, the Ismailis bought the castle of al Kahf from Ibn 'Amroun, and in 1137 AD, they dislodged a Frankish garrison from the fortress of al Khariba. In 1140 AD Masyaf was acquired and became their general headquarters and most important possession.

The 1160s marked the beginning of a period of prosperity for the Syrian Nizari community, in part thanks to the dynamic leadership of Sinan Rashid ad-Din, a missionary – da'i – sent from Alamut to support and organise the Syrian Ismaili community. Known as the 'Old Man of the Mountain,' Sinan quickly gained prominence and power. He fortified the Ismaili castles in Syria and built new fortresses such as Rusafa (Abu Qaher) and al Khawabi on strategic sites to secure a permanent territory for his community. Eventually the Syrian Nizaris gained a certain autonomy vis-à-vis Alamut.

In the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century the Crusaders handed over many fortresses near Nizari positions to the Templars and the Hospitallers. The close proximity of these powerful religious orders made the Ismailis' position more delicate. They paid tribute to these orders, and on several occasions they consulted with Amalric I, King of Jerusalem, to annul the arrangement, but without lasting success. Ambivalent relations with the Crusaders continued into the next century, and on-and-off rapprochements and communications with Frederick II, Henry of Champagne, and Louis IV (Saint Louis) are documented. During one of these instances, the Nizaris, between 1250 and 1254 AD, followed a policy of reconciliation with Saint Louis, in Jerusalem, prompting an exchange of envoys and gifts with him. As before, the Nizaris hoped that this growing closeness would enable them to put an end to the payment of tribute to the military orders. On his part, Saint Louis, hoping to maintain good relations with the Nizaris, responded positively to their conciliatory overtures and sent his most loyal ambassadors, such as the cleric, Yves le Breton, who met the leader of the community within the walls of the fortress of Masyaf.

In the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, Salah ad-Din, the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, was reaching the height of his power and earning glory as the defender of Islam against the Crusaders. After ending and replacing the Fatimid dynasty



Map showing the Ismaili territories in Syria during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, along with the route of the First Crusade (1098-1099 AD): In black, fortresses occupied by the Franks, in white are strongholds occupied for a short period by the Franks and in red fortresses occupied by the Nizari Ismailis.



(Top) The impressive site of Alamut in the northern Iranian mountain range. Well known for its famous library, the fortress, from where Hasan Sabbah ruled his territories, was severely destroyed by the Mongol invasion in 1256 AD. (Above) Stairs and gate leading to the Castle of al Khawabi.



(Top) The eastern front of the Inner Castle.  
(Above) Pattern from the remains of a former stone paving. The carved design could be a local symbol, perhaps a tree of life.

in Cairo, he strove to incorporate the independent entities in Syria, who in his eyes represented an obstacle to the unification of the whole Muslim world. In this sense, Salah ad-Din represented a threat to the local state, and several unsuccessful attempts were made on his life under the reign of Sinan Rashid ad-Din. As part of his campaign through western Syria, Salah ad-Din reached the ramparts of the Citadel of Masyaf in 1176 AD. After a brief siege, peaceful negotiations between the two sides, initiated by Salah ad-Din's uncle, al Harimi, the governor of Hama, resulted in a period of peaceful co-existence. Subsequent to the agreement the Ismaili Nizaris, under Sinan, sided with Salah ad-Din's troops in the battle of Hattin in 1187 AD, which ended in a disastrous defeat for the Crusaders. In the treaty drawn up between the Crusaders and Salah ad-Din in 1192 AD, the Muslim Sultan included a clause proclaiming the territory of the Ismaili Nizaris as an area under his protection, a significant demonstration of the close ties that united the two parties.

Sinan Rashid ad-Din died in 1193 AD. According to chroniclers of this era, his successor was not well known. Some sources refer to him by the name of Nasr al Farisi (Nasr the Persian). The new leader of the Nizaris moved the capital of the Nizari Ismaili state to the castle of al Kahf, in the heart of the mountains. The town of Masyaf would, however, regain its status as capital at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Mongols made their assault of the Near East. In 1258 AD, they took Alamut, the main Nizari Ismaili headquarters in Iran, and overthrew Baghdad, which had remained the nominal seat of power of the Abbasid caliphs. Their armies then marched towards Syria where they occupied and destroyed most of the cities and fortifications. Like all other area fortresses, including Aleppo and Damascus, the Citadel of Masyaf suffered some destruction at their hands, and was taken in 1260 AD.



Several stone fragments were found during the archaeological missions at Masyaf, including this finely decorated stone piece possibly part of a wall decoration.



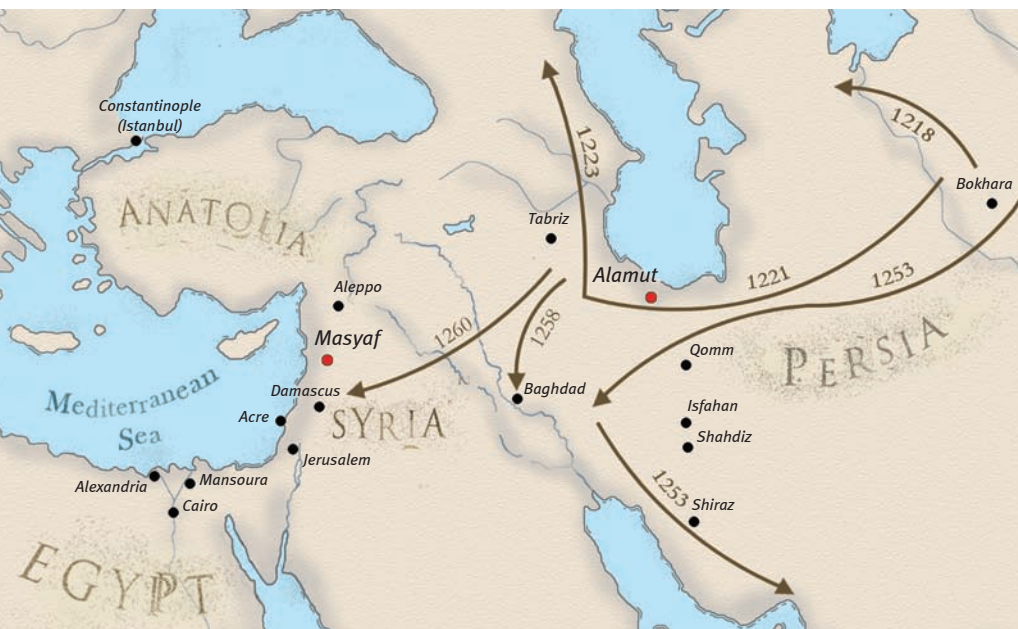
The remains of the impressive fortress of al Kahf, perched on a nearly inaccessible spur, located in a wild and green environment.





(Above) The inscription located above the door to the Eastern Ottoman House.  
(Below) Map of Syria and the Middle East, showing the Mongol invasions.

The presence of the Mongols in Syria was short-lived however, as Sultan Baybars defeated the Mongols later in 1260 AD at the battle of Ain Jalout in Palestine in a move to protect the Mamluk domain of Egypt. He became the undisputed Sultan of Syria and Egypt. The Mamluks swiftly conquered the remaining Crusader strongholds and dominated the entire territory of Syria, including the mountainous area inhabited by the Nizari community. After the citizens of Masyaf refused to yield the town to Sarim ad-Din, the Mamluk-appointed Ismaili deputy, Baybars took the city of Masyaf by force in 1272 AD. The Nizaris continued to exist comfortably enough in the other few fortresses left to them, but were under the permanent vigilance of Mamluk officers. A period of mutual cooperation ensued between Mamluks and Nizaris, similar to that which had prevailed in the Ayyubid period.



With the beginning of the Ottoman period in Syria in 1516 AD, the governorship of Masyaf passed into the hands of persons of local origin. During the Ottoman period, Masyaf is mentioned amongst Ismaili fortresses situated to the west of Hama, of which Masyaf was a county. In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Citadel was the residence of Ismaili emirs. There are two inscriptions of al Amir Mustafa ibn Idris: one from the year 1788-9 AD, relating to the building of a fountain, and the other referring to the construction of a house of the Ismaili emirs. At the end of the Ottoman period, the strategical military role of the Citadel decline.

Soon after the First World War, during the French Mandate (1921-1946 AD), the Ismailis evacuated the Citadel. T.E. Lawrence (also known as Lawrence of Arabia) referred to the Citadel of Masyaf during his stay in the town, remarking that it served as a poorhouse. Some of the rooms in the Citadel were still being used in the 1930s.



Photographs of the Citadel from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, showing a more intact southern elevation and barbican.

## – Construction Phases of the Citadel –

Unlike many of the other military fortifications in the region, Masyaf is the subject of very few surviving written records. As a result, the history of each built section has been traced through archaeological evidence. For many areas, precise details remain a mystery.

### STAGE 1: ARAB-BYZANTINE ERA (10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES)

It appears that the Citadel was first built by local tribes during the 10<sup>th</sup> century, at the same time as the first mountain fortresses, such as Shaizar, Mahalba, Salah ad-Din and Harem, were founded in the area.

The basic elements of a Byzantine donjon, or keep, were established on the summit of the rocky promontory. The original nucleus of the donjon roughly corresponds to the core of the current Inner Castle and consisted of the corner towers at the southern end of the donjon, and a group of adjoining rooms. The dating of this stage of construction remains uncertain as there are no prior epigraphic or historical references to the Citadel; only at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century do chronicles report that this stronghold had been destroyed by the Byzantine army in 999 AD.

### STAGE 2: EARLY NIZARI ISMAILI ERA (12<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)

This period may be divided into two principal phases, in accordance with the development in military construction techniques that emerged in Syria in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the first phase (beginning around 1165 AD), a number of additions to the original Byzantine donjon were

made, distinguished by the use of larger stones, averaging 50 by 70 centimetres in size. The additions include part of the main entrance located in the southwestern corner tower, the two towers on the western side of the donjon and the lower group of rooms along the western and eastern ramparts and near the entrance. This also afforded protection to the existing Byzantine enceinte on the lower level of this tower. The towers and ramparts are equipped with enormous arrow-slits with three or four intermediary lintels and with arches in the outer wall. Large sections of the western wall and the western façade of the donjon belong to this phase of construction.

In the second phase (early 13<sup>th</sup> century), the areas most vulnerable to attack were strengthened, including the pentagonal towers to the south of the Inner Castle. In the 1220s the principal construction took place in the palace on

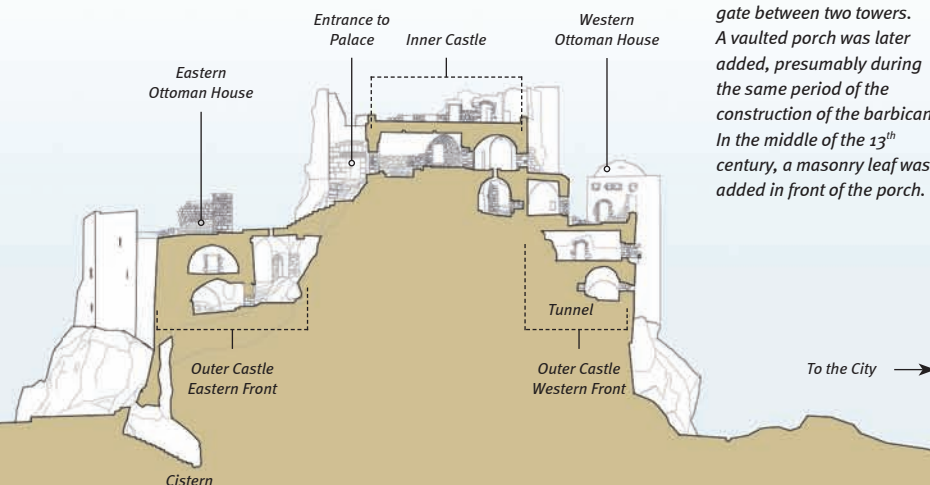


(Top) Showing at least three phases of construction, the vestibule is partially built with reused Byzantine columns and capitals.

(Above) The eastern front also presents reused elements from different periods. (Below right) East-west section of the Citadel, showing the Outer and Inner Castle erected on the excavated promontory.



(Above) The original entrance consisted of a gate between two towers. A vaulted porch was later added, presumably during the same period of the construction of the barbican. In the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a masonry leaf was added in front of the porch.



City Wall



the uppermost level of the donjon, the entrance façade and the additional walls on the western and southern side of the donjon.

### STAGE 3: LATE NIZARI ISMAILI ERA (MID-13<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)

In the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, restoration and fortification work was undertaken both in the enceinte of the city and on the Citadel. Work was carried out on large sections of the external walls of the Citadel, particularly on the western and the eastern frontages. It would appear that this work was carried out over a brief period in the 1250s, at the time when the Mongol threat was first felt in Iran. A number of Iranian Nizaris arrived in Masyaf during this period, fleeing the Mongol invasion. Several inscriptions on the gates indicate that construction of the old city walls of Masyaf was also started in 1248-1249 AD.

### STAGE 4: MAMLUK ERA (SECOND HALF OF THE 13<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)

Following the occupation and partial destruction of the Citadel by the Mongols in 1260 AD, some sections of the Citadel collapsed, including the front wall of the entrance, the northwestern frontage of the inner donjon and the topmost section of the main outer walls. Extensive repair works, likely dating to the era of Baybars after he conquered the Citadel in 1272 AD, were carried out on some of these areas, in particular on the upper part of the frontage of the entrance, including the machicolations and the upper part of the outer rampart on the eastern side. Here, a row of machicolations was constructed and two lines of different-sized arrow-slits were built to reinforce this weaker section of the Citadel.

The defensive sections of the Citadel entrance and the row of machicolations in particular bear a close resemblance to the machicolations at Crac des Chevaliers and those located in parts of the curtain walls at the citadel of Bosra,



suggesting a construction date near the beginning of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The southeastern front was doubled in strength by the construction of a thick wall, and some of the other walls on the western frontage were reinforced. The important alterations to the external walls of this period are characterised by the use of different types of blocks.

### STAGE 5: POST-13<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

Several residential sections dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were added on top of earlier structures, using small limestone blocks. Concentrated on the western and eastern terraces, these structures sit on the top level of the Outer Castle. Former arrow-slits were converted into windows to let in more light on the western end, except for the slits overlooking the stairway leading up to the entrance complex. On the eastern side there are the remains of a substantial palatial residence with an inscription, dated to 1793, over its entrance. Here, several rooms were adapted or added as independent units, accessible from the entrance path to the eastern terrace.



(Top) After the destruction of a part of the entrance by the Mongols, the row of machicolations was added by the Mamluks. (Above) The stairway to the entrance complex.



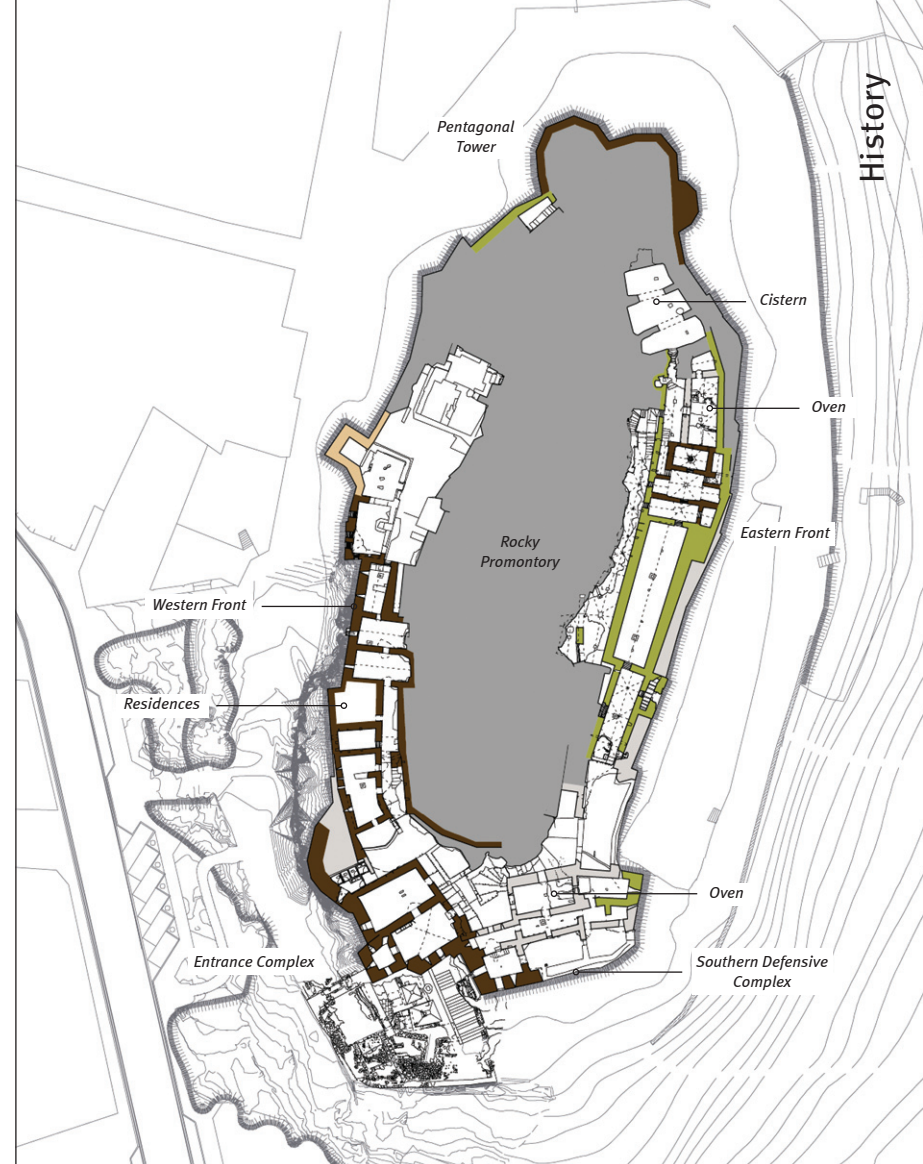
(Top) One of the highest priorities of the Nizari Ismailis was the reinforcement of the Inner Castle. The impressive pentagonal tower of its southern front covers the entire structure of this part of the Byzantine donjon. (Above) Detail of an inscription on one of the gates of the old city walls, dated from 1248-1249 AD.



## Outer Castle Lower Level

- Byzantine Period
- 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Century
- Mamluk
- Unknown

*The western section of this level was mainly reserved for the passages to the eastern and western terraces. The eastern section was presumably dedicated to storage and services.*



## Outer Castle Upper Level

- Byzantine Period
- 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Century
- Mamluk
- Unknown

*The function of this level was related to the defensive structure, especially the protection of the entrance complex. Some sections could have been also used for residential uses.*





## Outer Castle The Terraces

- Byzantine Period
- 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Century
- Mamluk
- Ottoman Period
- Unknown

*Originally surrounded by rows of machicolations, this level contains ruins of several structures. Most notable are the remains of the Eastern and Western Ottoman Houses.*



*This plan shows reinforcement of the Byzantine donjon done in the mediaeval period. In addition to a lower level, the Inner Castle has a terrace, formerly the upper level of the palace.*

- Byzantine Period
- 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Century
- Unknown

## Inner Castle Lower Level of the Palace

## Visitor Site Plan and Facilities





## - 1 The Barbican -

Archaeological excavations reveal that most of the rocky promontory was carved and adapted to be a suitable base for the Citadel. Traditionally, the main entrance point was from the city-side, to the west. Here, the successive occupants excavated and modified the bedrock to establish a comfortable access to the Citadel. On the northern part of the esplanade are stairs carved out of the bedrock. Traces of carved crevices for waterpipes run all along the mediaeval esplanade, punctuated by a recently excavated basin.

The remains of a barbican rise from the bottom of the western curtain walls on the southern end of the Citadel. The stone work of this portal, which was the first element of the defence system of the exterior of the Citadel, is rough in character. The 2.5-metre-high archway was filled with debris, which was cleared during the recent conservation efforts. The two columns reused as door jambs of the entrance arch are surmounted by capitals, one in Corinthian style from the Byzantine era (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century).

Directly inside the archway was a large rectangular vaulted hall, probably used as a guardroom. Only fragments of the vaults remain. From the guardroom, the passage continues eastwards, towards to the long flight of steep stairs leading to the main entrance of the Citadel. The passage was once covered and is paved with thick stone slabs polished from years of use. A series of arrow-slits, of which only a few remain, ensured efficient surveillance of the southern drop of the cliff and the western gate of the old city walls.

Remnants of a door, fitted between the rock and the wall close to the foot of the main stairway to the Citadel allowed for access from the eastern side. The eastern façade of the passage could have been blocked off at this point to form a kind of south-facing barbican, protecting the entrance. On the southern slope of the rock, traces of furrows indicate earlier structures, of which nothing remains save the remnants of wall foundations of a tower-like structure as seen in a photograph taken in the 1930s.



(Top) The façade of the barbican is mainly composed of traditional local masonry work interspersed with reused Byzantine columns and capitals. (Above) The date of the construction of the barbican is uncertain. It may have been constructed at the same time as the porch addition to the original entrance complex.

## - 2 The Hammam -

Recent excavations in the area adjacent to the barbican and under the main stairway have uncovered the remains of a small hammam with two adjacent rectangular rooms, connected by a corridor, reached by steps to the south. Archaeological research in these three spaces confirms that construction took place in two stages. The first stage dates back to the pre-Mamluk era, probably the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and included the two facing walls of the corridor and the water system. The building underwent modifications and two side rooms were added during the main second stage of construction in the Citadel, in the Islamic Nizari Ismaili period in the first half of 13<sup>th</sup> century. The two rooms present rare and delicate brick-coloured painted patterns on the lower part of the plaster. During the archaeological excavations, a reused column was discovered with a classical capital. Looking north while inside the hammam, a small opening around knee-level once led to more rooms. These rooms were likely destroyed during the Mongol invasion and have been left unexcavated to ensure the structural stability of the stairway and the Citadel wall.

To protect the exceptional remains of the hammam, masonry vaults were reconstructed above the remaining walls of the hammam during the recent conservation works, to provide permanent protection of this small but significant component of the Citadel.



(Top) The hammam of the Citadel was located at the outer edge of the fortifications, similar to other fortresses in the area. (Above) Some mural painting on the original plaster has been conserved. (Left) A rare example in Syria of this type of decoration, the sequence of motifs presents variations on a similar frieze.

Outside and to the west of the hammam, it is possible to see remnants of the water cistern and the adjacent furnace. The extramuros location of the hammam is a feature common to other Ismaili castles, such as al Kahf.

### - 3 The Stairway -

The Citadel is entered through the gateway of the entrance complex, which is reached via a steep stairway. Prior to the archaeological excavations, a stairway rebuilt during the French Mandate was used. During these research missions, the mediaeval stairway to the Citadel, probably built after its recapture by Sultan Baybars, was discovered and restored. Under this mediaeval stairway, large stones were found from the upper section of the entrance wall, probably from the time of its destruction in 1260 AD by the Mongols. This stairway partially covers the hammam. The bedrock supporting the eastern wall presents some apertures for a wooden structure. The half-steps to the left were created to facilitate visitor access during the recent conservation process.

### - 4 The Entrance Complex - Lower Level

The sequence of rooms that form the entrance complex is laid out in a chicane pattern, typical of entrances to many of the great 12<sup>th</sup> century Muslim fortresses in Syria such as Aleppo, Apamea, Qadmus, al Najm, Harem and Salah ad-Din. The bent entrance blunts the thrust of an enemy assault and provides opportunities to counter-attack. Recent cleaning work in the hall uncovered two older floors made of smooth blocks, some of them with typical local patterns. The entire entrance complex is the result of a succession of modifications over several periods.

During the early years of the Citadel, the entrance was an open passageway flanked by two towers. In the second phase of construction, the area between the two towers was vaulted and roofed. Two symmetrical iwans with enlarged arrow-slits open to either side into the bases of the former towers. An elegant archway built in front of the vaulted room is ornamented with two

(Top) The stairway was presumably rebuilt just after the Mongol destructions in 1260 AD. (Above) The entrance vestibule is the result of at least three major phases of construction.



■ Byzantine Period  
■ 12<sup>th</sup> Century  
■ 1150-1200 AD  
■ Beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century  
■ After 1260 AD (Post Mongol Invasion)

■ Unknown (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Century)  
■ Unknown (12<sup>th</sup> Century)

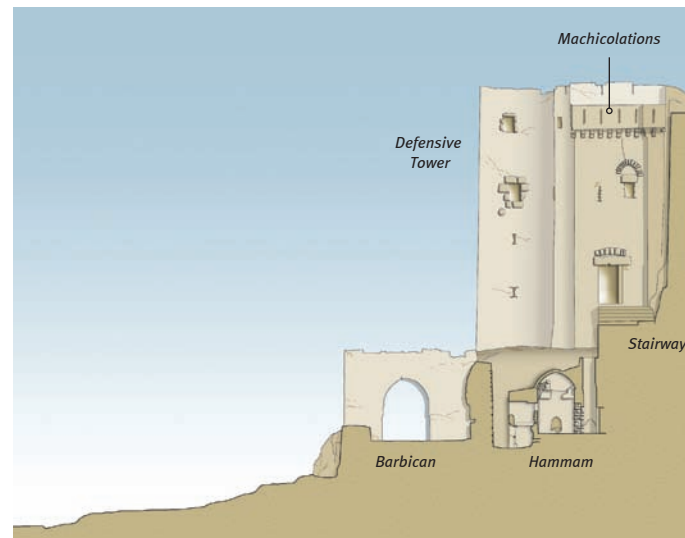
*The plan of the entrance complex illustrates a series of additions and reinforcements built in response to the political-military context of the Citadel.*



raised lines of moulding in the mediaeval style, and is sprung from two Byzantine columns with finely sculpted Corinthian capitals dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Arabic inscriptions are carved into the surface of some of the arch stones (voussoirs), quoting the year 560 h (1164-65 AD) and the name of Ibn Mubarak. Two other inscriptions are not possible to decipher. The arch and cornices suggest a finer, more prosperous phase of construction than the coarser, military construction of previous eras and of the later outer-wall leaf.

In the third phase, during the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a wall was built outside, abutting the arch of the open vestibule. The current door is hung from the outer wall. Looking up from the threshold of the doorway, the two major periods of construction of this section are clearly visible. After the Mongol destruction of 1260 AD, Sultan Baybars rebuilt the upper part of this outer wall, including the machicolation, upon his re-capture of the Citadel in 1172 AD.

An opening, perhaps a murder-hole, is positioned in the ceiling over the doorway to the second room of the entrance complex. The massive basalt lintel of the doorway appears to have

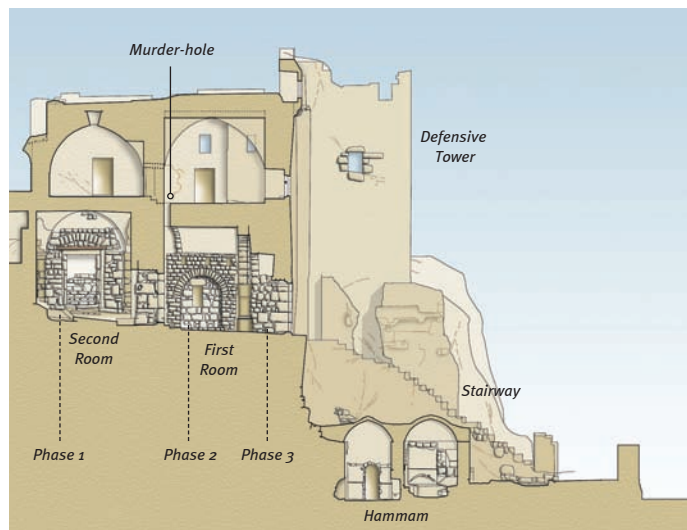


been recycled from another building and bears some surface ornamentation. This room was once the entrance to the Citadel and is built of yellowish sandstone blocks of a type not found in the area. Remnants of a water drainage system lie against the eastern wall.

The third space of the entrance is accessed through a doorway headed by a massive basalt lintel (a recent restoration). This area is partially hewn from the bedrock. A moulded plaster inscription visible in the ceiling bears the name of Qusta, who was responsible for the works in this entry complex. Raised mortaring of this method can be dated to the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. As one reaches the natural rock on the way upwards, the pathway bifurcates. To the left is the beginning of a 60-metre-long passage running the entire length of the western outer wall. This 'tunnel', a semi-continuation of the entrance complex, leads to a meeting or reception hall in the north, and will be visited at the end of the circuit before exiting the Citadel. The circuit begins to the right side, into what was supposed to be the more private part of the Citadel as well as providing a direct access to the upper level of the entrance complex. The ticket office is located in a room on a little courtyard.



(Top) The second room after the vestibule was a former entrance to the Citadel. Archaeological excavations have discovered several levels of pavement. (Above) Bifurcation of the main paths after the second room of the entrance complex, as dictated by the presence of the massive natural rock. (Right) North-south section of the entrance complex.



(Left) Façade of the entrance complex, showing the stairway, the hammam and the barbican. (Top) The inscription naming the commissioner of this space in the entrance complex. The same inscription is also visible in the vault of the 'tunnel', but is written backwards. (Above) The pathway to the upper level of the southern defensive complex.

## - 5 The Entrance Complex - Upper Level –Visitor Centre



*The passage to the eastern terrace between the upper level of the entrance complex and the southern frontage of the Inner Castle leads to several residential units.*

**M** A group of rooms directly above the entrance complex now serve as the visitor centre. The openings along the walls of the first room ensured full control over the outside entrance to the Citadel. The entrance below could be protected through an opening in the floor. From this first room, a tower is visible where cantilevered stones in the corners of the wall once supported wooden floors. To the north are a second hall and some destroyed spaces. These spaces and the tower formed an independent defensive group integrated within this fortified section of the Citadel.

Continuing on the upper level along the western side of the Citadel, there are sets of rooms in a row. The first group of rooms was residential in function, lit through windows on their western side and with doors to the passage on the eastern side. The first room dates to the Ottoman era and could have been an independent house. A narrow stairway under the arches brings the visitor to the upper floor and the remaining rooms of the west Ottoman house, now housing the second section of the visitor centre. Another set of three rooms behind the stairway was also probably residential in function.

## - 6 The Western Ottoman House - Visitor Centre



*This Ottoman residence, built for Ismaili emirs, still conserves traditional elements similar to the architecture of houses in the area.*

**M** This residence of Ismaili emirs from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was added on top of earlier spaces. It is now the upper level of the Outer Castle on the western side, and overlooks the city below. The layout of this residence is characteristic of Ottoman houses in the region, with rooms surrounding a courtyard. This, along with the northern section of rooms, is destroyed. To the south, one room has been well conserved. Here, the walls and dome, with small light holes, still maintain remains of the original plaster. Niches built into the walls are similar to those found in homes in Masyaf. Unusual for domestic buildings of the area, the room has a chimney, a sign of affluence. The visitor circuit continues by returning by the ticket office.

## - 7 The Southern Defensive Complex - Lower Level – Bookshop

**i** The two-level southern defensive complex lies to the southeast of the Inner Castle. A room on the lower level now serves as the ticket office. Recent archaeological work has revealed traces of the Citadel's sophisticated water system, in which a number of channels funnel rainwater into underground cisterns. A part of this network, in the room directly to the north of the ticket office, has a decantation and filtration system. Here, rainwater channelled from the roofs and stairs gathered and cleared in two gravel pools before spilling through the opening into the cistern below. The small channel carved in the floor returned any bucket spills to the gravel pools.

Continuing inside, the visitor comes to a series of rooms, some of which are possibly Byzantine, reserved for defence and residences of the soldiers. A section of the ceiling has been purposefully left without plaster during the conservation process to display the stone vaulting.

## - 8 The Southern Defensive Complex - Upper Level

**VIEW POINT** / A stepped pathway, mainly carved out of the bedrock, leads up to the second level of the southern defensive complex. In the large first room, archaeologists have exposed the remains of two ovens built with clay bricks, possibly dating from the Ottoman era. The larger of the two was for flat-baked items and the smaller for local breads. Wood was stored and fed into the fires from the room directly behind. Remains of terracotta water-pipes are still visible in the walls. The oven and pipes suggest that this complex of rooms might have been used as a kitchen, although it likely also had defensive functions. These rooms have been recently restored. Continuing to the edge of the Citadel, a terrace on the site of a destroyed room provides views to the south and east. Ayyubid troops are said to have encamped in the field directly to the southeast of the Citadel in their brief siege of 1176 AD. A small collapsed cross-vaulted room in the centre of a field supposedly marks the spot where Salah ad-Din



*(Top) Serving a military function as well as providing living and service areas for the soldiers, the southern defensive complex contains the remains of water cisterns and collection systems, and oven facilities. (Above) The decantation and filtration system.*



pitched his famous red tent. Upon exiting the room, the visitor tour turns to the north and follows the eastern side of the Citadel, providing an overview of the upper section of the Outer Castle.

## - 9 The Eastern Ottoman House -



**VIEW POINT** / On the way up to the terrace, a door to the right accesses a loggia of a residence dating from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. With stonework characteristic of the great houses of the late Ottoman period, the residential structure was built on top of two earlier vaulted rooms. An inscribed panel set into the wall over the entrance to a large room refers to Mustafa bin Idris, the emir of Masyaf from 1788 to 1807 AD. Against the southern wall are the remains of a chimney. The easternmost part of the southern section of the house collapsed in the 1940s.

Continuing the circuit to the north leads to the eastern terrace, the highest part of the Outer Castle and which overlooks the eastern plain. Circular openings in the floor are skylights for rooms below. The collapse of the topmost sections of the external wall parapets is likely a result of inconsistent restorations during the early Mamluk period.

## - 10 Stairway to Inner Castle - Palace

Rising up to the west is the Inner Castle, including the original Byzantine donjon, with three levels of construction built around the highest point of the rocky promontory. This part of the Citadel stretches more than 90 metres from north to south and 25 metres from east to west. Its main entrance is reached via a flight of stone steps from the eastern terrace.

The eastern front of the palace complex has two facing entrances, in a chicane plan. Both lead to the Citadel interior and possibly had different functions. To follow the visitor tour, take the stairs on the southern side which lead up to a monumental doorway surmounted by a large basalt lintel bearing a linear moulding. The moulding appears to have been recycled from another

structure, and contains a fine Arabic inscription from 1226 AD: “This blessed abode was constructed during the reign of the great Lord, the venerated king of kings, Alaa ad-Dunia waad-Din Muhammad, son of al-Hasan, son of Muhammad, son of Hasan (may Allah grant him eternal power); under the rule of Lord Kamal ad-Dunia waad-Din al-Hasan, son of Mas’od (may Allah extend his power)”. There are no defensive elements visible in the entranceway, but it would have been possible to monitor the entrance from the upper level.

Under the palace is a group of defensive and storage rooms concentrated in the southern end of the Inner Castle on the edge of the upper rock outcropping. At this level we find the traces of a previous—or additional—entrance to the Inner Castle from the western side. Compared to those of the upper level, these rooms are of a very uniform construction style, both in terms of the materials used and in the type of vaulting.

## - 11 Inner Castle - Palace - Lower Level – Southern Section

This level can be sub-divided into two sections: the remains of the Byzantine Citadel on the southern end and, to the north, the completion of the Nizari palace of the Ayyubid period in Syria.

The outside doorway leads into a vestibule with fine plaster moulding on the ceiling (conserved during the recent conservation programme). This formed part of a sequence of rooms arranged to blunt any assault which managed to reach the heart of the Citadel.

An opening to a cistern partially carved into the rock is near the entry of the second room. Rain water collected on the roofs of the upper levels flowed in via a clay pipe system, also feeding another cistern in the northern adjacent room. Together, the two cisterns could cope with the needs of the palace.

Turning into the long rectangular room to the south (left coming up from the vestibule) visitors enter what was a part of the central courtyard of the original Byzantine donjon.



*(Top) In spite of its dilapidated condition, the Eastern Ottoman House was a large noble residence. (Above) The façade of the main room which perhaps opened onto a courtyard. The inscription dated from 1793 AD, refers to Al Amir Mustafa, governor of the Citadel and the city.*



*(Top) From the eastern terrace, a stairway rises to two entrances which lead to the palace. (Above) the southern gate with its fine geometric pattern and a framed inscription.*

The courtyard was framed by four square embrasured towers, and two long vaulted halls at the east and the north. Later, this open space was vaulted and enclosed during the Islamic era. At the opposite end of the room is a cross engraved in a stone on the side of one of the original Byzantine flanking towers. Next to this tower, toward the east, is another space likely added in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century.



(Top) The vestibule still has traces of a molded plaster decoration, partially conserved in recent years. (Middle) The second room served as a dispatching area, and contains a stairway to the current terrace, which was formerly the upper level of the palace. (Above) Mediaeval structures infill the former courtyard of the Byzantine donjon.

The construction style of this defensive complex is relatively uniform in terms of the materials used (small rubble-stones), the thickness of the curtain walls (85-90 centimetres), the type of embrasures looking out on to the southern and western fronts (rectangular arrow-slits with intermediary lintels), and the type of vaulting (barrel vaults). The precise functions of this group of rooms of the Nizari Ismaili Palace (of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries) are not known, but it is possible that this area with the upper one, today the terrace, contained a part of the Citadel's noble residential quarters.

It is difficult to date with precision the outer northern enceinte of the Byzantine donjon, as many components provide insufficient historical evidence. Architectural features added since the 11<sup>th</sup> century can be seen on the southern and eastern frontages at this level. A solid stonework salient with a pentagonal section, reminiscent of those of the Outer Castle, has been laid along the full length of the Byzantine enceinte, blocking off their arrow-slits and windows. From outside, this salient can be clearly distinguished from the Byzantine donjon by the smooth and regular building materials used. (The smooth-edged bosses laid upside-down in the lowermost course are cut in exactly the same way as bosses in the Citadel of Damascus, which date to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century.) On the western front, the main addition to the original Byzantine donjon is a little defence room, the entrance to which was probably cut from an original arrow-slit from the previous hall. This tower is distinguished by a four-lintel arrow-slit, more refined than those typical of the Byzantine defensive system and reminiscent of arrow-slits found in entrance-ways of the Ayyubid era. The southern section of the western front, covered the original exterior walls of the Byzantine donjon, which blocks off the southern arrow-slit of the adjacent hall.



Byzantine Period  
12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Century

Plan of the Inner Castle lower level showing the mediaeval structures as reinforcements to the still-conserved original Byzantine nucleus of the donjon.



## - 12 Inner Castle – Palace - Upper Level



*The second level of the palace was presumably the location of the noble part of the mediaeval palace, a hypothesis supported by the discovery of marble tiles.*

**VIEW POINT** / The room following the vestibule was developed into a stairway rising to an upper level, which was originally an integral part of the palace. In the uppermost level of the Inner Castle, excavations uncovered remains of marble geometric patterns, indicating an exclusive residential use of the rooms, and a level of luxury above that of other areas. All that survives today is a perimeter wall fitted with a series of large rectangular windows on its western and southern sides. Some of the stonework, likely Ottoman, rests on a pentagonal base dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the southern section and employed blocks of different size and form to those in the lower level. A large part of the building work at this level collapsed at an unknown date. A panoramic view of the city, mountains and surrounding hilly plains opens out on all sides.

## - 11 Inner Castle – Palace Revisited - Lower Level – Northern Section



*(Middle) Showing several levels of occupation, this room also has some water channels. (Above) The northern part of the lower level of the palace.*

Going back down the stairway, the visit of the northern part of the lower level of the palace continues. Most of the construction in this section probably dates to the Nizari-Isma'ili period (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century). The route passes through a large room whose western wall is the limit of the original Byzantine donjon, which was later blocked off on the outside by subsequent structures. At its western end, a long partially-destroyed hall extends along the western front of the donjon. As with all the rooms within the outer defensive circuit, and particularly those in the northern section, two separate phases of pre-Isma'ili Arab construction probably took place. The southern section appears to be an integral part of the western defensive circuit of the donjon.

Situated over the central and northern sections of the upper castle is the palace of the Nizari-Isma'ili period, an architectural complex comprising a group of rooms. This section was integrated into the original donjon as an independent section, and built using irregular rubble-stones. Before descending to exit the palace through the north-facing door, there is a room

which was an advance tower of the original Byzantine donjon, as confirmed by two former external windows near the top of the existing wall to the west. In the second room, i.e., the first room in the northern entrance to the palace, a cylindrical hole in the rock at the turn of the stairs held a wooden column supporting the wooden floor of a second level. The doorframe and stairway are cut partially into the rock.

## - 13 Quarter attributed - to Rashid ad-Din Sinan

A rubble-stone stairway leads up from the terrace level to a group of rooms said to have been used by the 'legendary' Isma'ili leader Sinan Rashid ad-Din, the 'Old Man of the Mountain'. Opening to the east above the terrace, the rooms follow a traditional layout of an iwan-like entrance space backed by a central room flanked by two rooms. The group of rooms is mostly carved out of the bedrock.

Continuing along the terrace to the north are remains of foundations of several rooms. Built of lower-quality stonework than other areas of the Citadel, these spaces were likely used for storage or military functions.

## - 14 The Eastern Front - Lower Level

Not to be missed are the significant 'underground' levels of the Citadel. From the northern end of the eastern terrace, a stairway leads to a series of impressive rooms, particularly a number of cisterns, service areas and storage rooms. The spaces are divided into two levels. Walking south along the internal wall of the Outer Castle defence structures, the rocky promontory is clearly visible, and is faced by a number of spaces which probably served as storage and for domestic facilities. Remains of basins and channels are apparent in the first room to the right, which perhaps served as a tannery or laundry. Two arches at the southernmost end of the passageway are likely the earliest Byzantine remains in the Citadel. The section of the Outer Castle wall collapsed at some point and was restored during the recent conservation programme.



*(Top) This series of rooms attributed to Rashid ad-Din Sinan offers an exceptional view. (Above) Some pillars and arches of the eastern front are presumably Byzantine.*

## - 15 The Eastern Front - Upper Level



*This vaulted room below the eastern terrace contains the remains of an oven, perhaps a bakery. These underground spaces could have been used for a mix of functions – defensive, service areas and residential.*



*Several tombs can still be seen under the terraces carved in the rock, and at the base of the Outer Castle.*

Through an entrance room at the upper level are the Citadel's well-conserved cisterns. The cisterns were built to hold the strategic water supply, which was essential to successfully withstand a siege, a common feature of mediaeval warfare. During the siege of 1176 AD, the Citadel survived without capitulating to the Ayyubids. Turning north and ascending a few steps carved from the rock provides a view of the main cistern, divided into three barrel-vaulted naves. Next to the entrance to the cistern is the opening to another small cistern and the remains of a tomb from the Byzantine period. Directly in front of the entrance is a large room containing the remains of an oven, indicating that this area was used for food preparation.

To the south of the entrance room are two groups of spaces: the first is organised in the qa'a tradition, with rooms and little iwans symmetrically distributed around a central space. This area likely had a formal function. The ceiling of one of these rooms has a raised stucco decoration in the form of an embossed rose with eight petals. The second group to the south consists of two elongated halls aligned along the same axis. The eastern wall of one of these two rooms has two vaulted openings that were blocked off at a later stage from the outside. Going out through the stairway the visitor continues the visit toward the north.


## - 16 The Tombs - Hypogea from the Byzantine Period

Just to the left of the stairway leading to an upper level, a room provides access to a secret passage, cleared during the recent excavation works. This passage is built against the rock and incorporates a hypogeum from the Byzantine period (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century), constructed before the outer rampart of the Citadel. This underground space contains a number of carved tombs, as well as their Byzantine-period access with steps carved out of the rock to the outside Citadel.

## - 17 Room with Distinctive Plaster -

Continuing the visit to the north and up the stairway, the circuit crosses a vaulted room with a raised stucco moulding in the ceiling in the form of an embossed geometric pattern with eight raised petals inscribed in a square recess. This type of mortar decoration, found in several sections of the Citadel, suggests a refinement out of character with the rugged military architecture of the walls. The northern wall of this room includes in its masonry remains of a tower of the Byzantine enceinte as well as reused columns.

## - 18 Defensive Tower Terrace -

 **VIEWPOINT** / Continuing down and then up a small stairway to the northwest, one reaches the terrace at the top of a pentagonal defensive tower where remains of a row of crenellations are still visible. From this point there is a view of the city of Masyaf below, where most of the old buildings have been replaced by modern ones, and the Jebel al Bahra rising to the west, covered by a luxuriant vegetation. The small white building near the ridge of the closest mountain is the Mausoleum of Imam Wafi Ahmed, the eighth Imam of the Ismailis (813-828 AD). Another building nearby on the slope was said to be used for meditation by Ikhwan as-Safa', a group of famous mediaeval Muslim philosophers. Looking back at the inside of the Citadel, it is easy to distinguish the Inner Castle layer built on top of the rock outcropping. Upon descent from the terrace, remains of another Byzantine tower are visible to the west.



*(Top) Few remains of walls survive in the northern section of the eastern terrace, making difficult an understanding of these structures. In the background is the stair leading to the room with the distinctive moulded plaster. (Above) Some remains of moulded plasters are conserved in the Citadel. In addition to several inscriptions, two rosettes in good condition are still visible.*

## - 19 Defensive Tower -

The north façade of the enceinte of the Outer Castle was reinforced from the end of 12<sup>th</sup> century to the 1250s with pentagonal towers. Built outside the Byzantine enceinte, they are typical of military architecture of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and incorporated earlier elements, including vestiges of rectangular towers with recognisable 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century-style stonework. The internal form of the vault represents a complex feat of masonry.



## - 20 Residence -

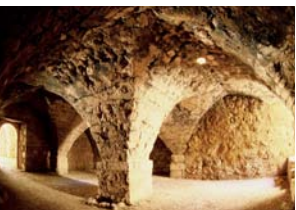
Proceeding toward the south across the terrace, the visitor passes a stairway leading down to a set of subterranean vaulted rooms. These spaces are connected to cisterns and were likely used for storage. Rooms which formed an Ottoman-era residence lie to the south of the terrace. Most of these structures have been destroyed. The collapse of walls in one of these rooms revealed that it was built on a thick bed of embanked earth dating to the Mamluk era. The visit continues by the stairway down into a small open courtyard.



*This little courtyard linked the entrance complex, through the 'tunnel', to the waiting hall and the western terrace.*

## - 21 Courtyard with the Waiting Hall - Stable

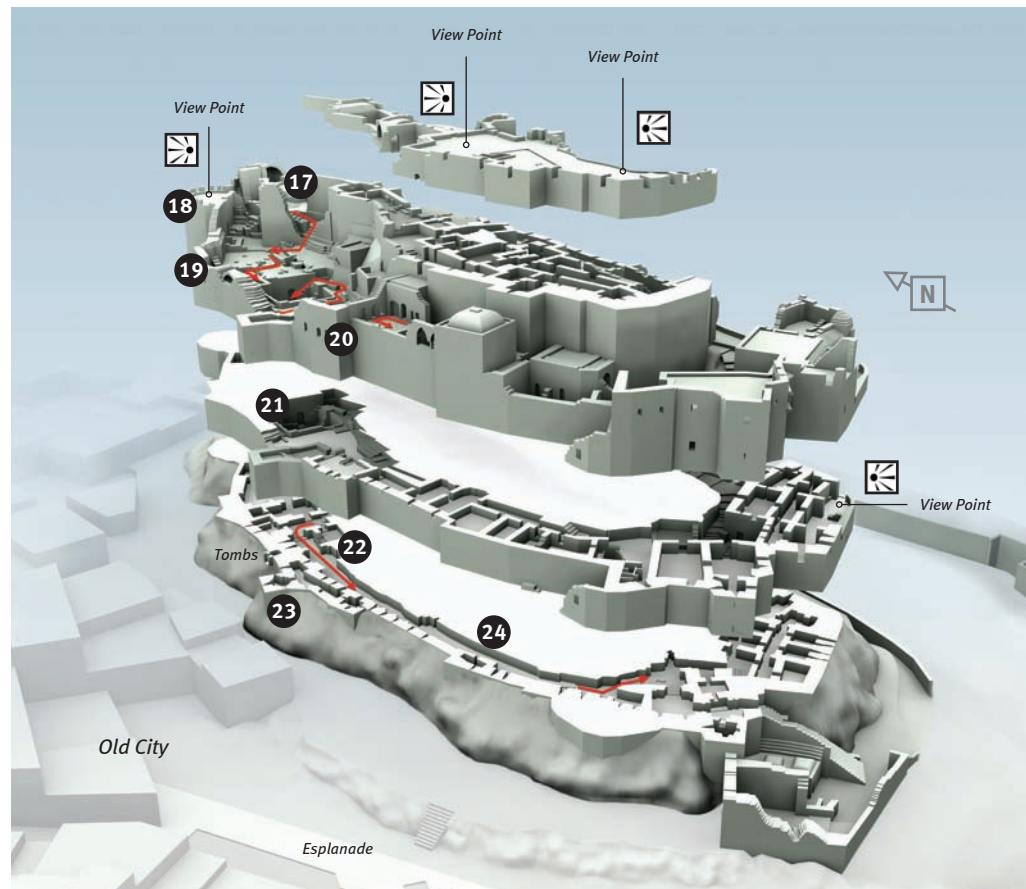
In an important position at the end of the 'tunnel' passage from the main entrance is a little courtyard surrounded by partially destroyed rooms. This unit connected the main entrance with the Inner Castle. To the north is a vestibule room opening to a large hall – 10.25 metres by 8 metres – with a central pillar. The room's handsome door, built of finely cut stone, is similar to that of a tower of the Inner Castle. A stone trough by the eastern wall of the room could have been for the use of horses, and it has been proposed that in recent centuries this room was used as a stable. During the Mamluk period it may have served as a reception hall for visitors waiting to be admitted to the palace, after they had come through the passage from the entrance complex. Architectural remains suggest the existence of a second storey, which would have been reached by a door situated in the northern wall of this room. A defence room, perhaps from the Byzantine period, protects this area from the west.



*This room hosted a succession of functions. Its architectural quality suggests that it could have been a waiting hall during the mediaeval period, but the remains of a manger suggests it may later have been used as a stable.*

## - 22 Last Defensive Hall in the 'Tunnel' -

This hall at the end of the 'tunnel', with its doorway of large stones, which once supported a strong door, formed the final obstacle to gain entrance to the Inner Castle. Raised mortar decorations, similar to those found on other sections of the 'tunnel', emphasise the architectural form of the cross-



- (17) Room with Distinctive Plaster
- (18) Defensive Tower Terrace
- (19) Defensive Tower
- (20) Residence
- (21) Courtyard with the Waiting Hall - Stable
- (22) Last Defensive Hall in the 'Tunnel'
- (23) Defensive Tower
- (24) The 'Tunnel'

*The continuation of the visitor site plan as seen in the western front.*

vaulted arches standing on corner pillars. The same bas-relief decoration can be seen in the town of Masyaf, in particular at the Rafni Mausoleum. Archaeological excavations have uncovered several layers of flooring.

### - 23 Defensive Tower -

Several rooms are connected to the 'tunnel' on the way back to the entrance complex. In the first defensive tower to the west of the 'tunnel', accessible through a steep and narrow stairway, a rectangular pit was discovered during recent excavations. This pit is at least nine metres in depth and could have served for grain storage. This complex could have been added after the completion of the covering of the 'tunnel', perhaps during the Mamluk period.

### - 24 The 'Tunnel' -

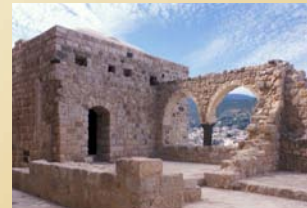
The 'tunnel', 60 metres long, was the main access to the Inner Castle, and is divided into sections separated by raised arches. A number of narrow arrow-slits cut into the outer wall protected the western front of the Citadel. One section of the 'tunnel' is lined with a series of three arches 30 centimetres in width, and similar to those found in the Citadel of Rusafa (Abu Qaher) to the south of Masyaf. Water flowed through channels along the outer wall. Originally an open defensive gallery cut partly into the bedrock along the Byzantine enceinte, the 'tunnel' space was vaulted in the Ayyubid period and later provided the base for upper rooms flanking the Inner Castle. Arabic writing in raised mortar – identical to that of the entrance room but written backwards – is found on the eastern side of the vault and dates from the Mamluk era. The double wall added to support the vault is clearly visible near the entrance complex.

Upon exiting the Citadel, a cleared pathway accessible through the eastern gate of the barbican, makes for a nice walk around the Citadel. This path provides views of the recently restored ring walls, entrances of caves, a cistern and Byzantine-period tombs carved quite high up in the bedrock of the promontory, as well as the city, countryside and the fertile plain to the east.

## Conservation of the Citadel of Masyaf

From 2000 to 2007, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture has led a conservation process in the Citadel of Masyaf, working in cooperation with the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums. Alongside a meticulous documentation effort, indispensable to the definition of the conservation approach, deteriorated towers and curtain walls, along with structures inside the Citadel, were structurally stabilised. Each area had different needs; for example, conservation of the Inner Castle centred on the preservation of the spirit of the existing structures. In all the work, a team of local craftsmen, along with local and international experts, combined traditional processes with modern techniques to ensure the highest standards of conservation.

Visitor infrastructure, including the creation of a walking circuit, visitor centre and this guidebook, was paired with restoration efforts in the historic centre of Masyaf to complete a sustainable and integrated development of the site. Planning and restoration efforts have been undertaken



(Top and above) The Western Ottoman House, rehabilitated as a part of the visitor centre, before and after its conservation.



(Top) This hall was the last defensive space before entering in the Citadel.

(Above) The 'tunnel', vaulted at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, covered an open-air Byzantine gallery.





in the town, including the rehabilitation of the market area and the development of a strategic conservation plan.

At the beginning of the project, a series of recent illegally built houses along the street obstructed visual and physical access to the western fortifications and the mediaeval entry. These structures were purchased and removed to reveal the facade of the Citadel, especially the entrance complex, in its original condition. An esplanade, including parking and visitor paths, is linked to the fortifications of the Citadel with a wild garden of local plants and trees.



(Top and above) The Citadel, as seen from the southwest, before and after intervention.



Al-Azhar Park and 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.

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.

The assembly of this book represents a collective effort of The Aga Khan Trust for Culture and its staff and consultants, as well as external contributors: Ammar Abdulrahman, Baida Ali, Jeff Allen, Bernadette Baird-Zars, Stephen Battle, Mamoun Dayoub, Christopher English, Joerg Esefeld, Khaldoun Fansa, Thierry Grandin, Haytham Hasan, Zeina Hirbli, Bill O'Reilly, Gary Otte, Sam Pickens, Adli Qudsi and André Yacoubian. AKTC would like to express its gratitude to the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums for its cooperation and assistance in this publication.



Perched on the eastern edge of the Syrian coastal range, the Citadel of Masyaf dates to the Aramaic era (8<sup>th</sup> century BC). In the Middle Ages, the Citadel was the centre of a Nizari Ismaili state that maintained, for over 160 years, a tenuous position between the Crusaders and the Arab dynasties. After a period of Mamluk control, the Citadel became the residence of local emirs during the Ottoman period. Today, the Citadel is a uniquely well-preserved testament to the ingenuity of military defenses over the last 2800 years.

In 1999, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, in cooperation with the Syrian Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums, began conservation work at 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. At Masyaf, conservation was complemented by new museum and tourist facilities, the creation of an esplanade including parking, as well as the rehabilitation of a local market in the centre of the city. As part of the programme, this book is intended to provide visitors with a fresh look at the Citadel, the littoral mountain region, the nation of Syria, and – more broadly – the rich architectural traditions of the Muslim world.

ISBN: 978-2-940212-06-4



9 782940 212064



The Syrian Directorate General  
of Antiquities and Museums



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE