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*In memoriam of Professor Ernst Grube*

## THE CITADEL OF ŞANLIURFA AND THE EVOLUTION OF MUSLIM MILITARY ARCHITECTURE

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This paper presents a summary of the results of a new project involving archaeological investigations carried out at the citadel of Şanlıurfa since Autumn 2014. This project is designed to provide new evidence on the history of fortifications in the Near East focusing on the citadel of Şanlıurfa, in south-eastern Turkey. On the basis of a stratigraphic analysis of the archaeological remains preserved above ground at the citadel, together with the study of historical photos and a re-examination of the written sources, it aims to establish a sequence of the building history of the citadel. This research will contribute to an understanding of the evolution process that led to the development of a mature military architecture in the area and of the building techniques that were employed in this context.<sup>1</sup>

The project fits into a specific stream of research – the origin and evolution of fortification in the Mediaeval Near East – which has experienced a period of renewal and intense activity in the last two decades. Within this main stream investigations are also exploring the contextual development of building techniques.

The fortification of settlements, in this region as elsewhere, is undoubtedly a complex process that developed over a long period of time, generated by a number of different concerns that varied significantly over time and involved a number of different actors. A general, comprehensive work on the Near East has not yet been written, although some attempts have been made; if some periods seem to be better known than others, the general history of fortification in the region remains insufficiently defined.

Field projects dedicated to fortifications have concentrated especially on present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel, while research on this topic in present-day Turkey seems to have attracted the attention of scholars less frequently, and often in relation to very specific aspects, such as the fortifications of Armenian Cilicia (Edwards 1987) or those of the Crusaders (Hellenkemper 1976).

The building of a fortification is primarily an expression of power, serving the purpose of establishing control over a given settlement or territory and defending it. The fragmentation of power and the rapid change of political organisation that for decades characterised the territories located in present-day south-eastern Turkey produced a complex network of fortifications. This region can therefore be regarded as having extraordinary potential for investigating the subject of fortifications; it constituted a disputed area over a long period of time, and therefore experienced confrontation, contact and exchange between the various political actors, their cultures and traditions. The extraordinary development of fortifications in the area certainly derives from its fragmented political character, which on the one hand created the need to fortify settlements; on the other, it is the interaction of a number of

<sup>1</sup> This project is being carried out by a multi-disciplinary team, with the present writer as scientific director. *Archaeological and architectural survey and analysis*: E. Reali, L. Tarducci, C. Tavernari, V. Vezzoli. *Building material*: J. Cl. Bessac. *Written sources and inscriptions*: R. Contini (Syriac sources and inscriptions), R. Giunta (inscriptions in Arabic), S. Heidemann (Arabic sources), P. Lucca (Armenian sources and inscriptions), N. Zorzi (Greek and Latin sources and inscriptions). In the field the team was joined by R. Baylan (2014) and B. Üçdağ, Şanlıurfa Kültür Varlıklarını Koruma Bölge Kurulu Müdürlüğü. The project benefitted from funds allocated by the University Ca' Foscari, Venice, and by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAAEE). The first phase of the project will be completed at the end of 2016.

different traditions that stimulated the formulation of a complex military architecture and spurred its continuous evolution.

The major components that are believed to have played a significant role in the development of military architecture, such as the Byzantine, the Armenian, the Muslim, the Crusader and the Mongol traditions were all active in this area.

### *The Citadel of Şanlıurfa*

The written documentation available for Şanlıurfa clearly indicates that the city can be regarded as an extraordinary observatory for the development of a number of research themes, including those related to the history of fortifications and to the evolution of building techniques. As for the history of fortification, it should be possible at Şanlıurfa to detect the transformation of military architecture from the Classical to the Mediaeval period on the one hand; and on the other, since most of the leading actors that contributed to the formation of military architecture in the Near East seem to have had a role in the process of fortification of Şanlıurfa, the site may offer the possibility of singling out the various components and examining their interaction. Then, if we consider the technique of building in stone, Şanlıurfa appears to have played an exceptional role in the preservation and dissemination of this tradition.<sup>2</sup> It is especially when we come to the process of fortification of buildings in the Near East that we often find reference to Armenian builders/architects/masons from Edessa, the most famous and best-documented case being that of the 11th century gates of al-Qahira (Dadoyan 1997; Pringle 2014). Therefore, the opportunity to study first-hand evidence from the actual source of dissemination of this tradition may allow us to develop this topic from a new angle and acquire new documentation.

The written documentation concerning Şanlıurfa is quite abundant (for a survey: Amouroux-Mourad 1988, 1-13; Honigmann & Bosworth 1985; Faroqhi 1985), but it should be noted that very little of it is concerned with the citadel; the same can be said for the architecture of the town in general. It is especially the sources in Greek, Latin and Syriac that give us some topographic indications, while those in Arabic only occasionally mention its celebrated churches (Amouroux-Mourad 1988: 41-43).

However, it must be said that the written sources have not so far been investigated for the purpose of acquiring specific information on the fortification works, and hopefully the review of the written documentation that constitutes an essential part of this project will shed new light on this point and in general on the urban form of this important settlement.

At present it is not known in which period the hill where the citadel is located, north-west of the town, began to be fortified;<sup>3</sup> however, it is hard to imagine that a project of fortification of the town would not have been concerned with defensive measures to be taken on the hill overlooking it from the north-west. The earliest reference to the use of the hill guarding the town concerns the winter palace of the famous King Abgar (end of the 2nd-beginning of the 3rd

<sup>2</sup> Study of the architecture in the neighboring regions controlled by the Muslims has revealed a gap in the cycle of production of new building material in stone, from approximately the 8th up to the mid-11th centuries. A similar situation seems to have occurred in Europe, over a wider span of time. By contrast, study of the architecture in Armenia shows a pattern of continuity. The westward migration of Armenians, and the establishment of the Armenian Kingdoms in Anatolia are a well-known phenomenon. However, significant differences in the building techniques of Armenia and those in use in Armenian Cilicia have already been identified and discussed; the same can be said for the fortifications built by the Armenians from Edessa in the Near East, where the interaction of the Armenian with the Byzantine and Northern-Syrian traditions very probably gave birth to something new, and it is this new tradition that the builders from Edessa seem to have disseminated.

<sup>3</sup> For a general topographical sketch that shows the walled city and the citadel, see for example Sinclair 1987-1990: IV, pls. 1-2, redrawn from earlier plans.

century), apparently located in the area that later became the citadel; the two columns that still mark the horizon of the citadel today may well be the only remains of this palace (Figs. 1, 3).

The fortification of the town and presumably of the hill of the citadel may already have been carried out before the year 525: in this year a devastating flood caused considerable damage to the town and a major restoration project was launched by Justinian. To prevent the occurrence of similar disasters in the future, a dam was built, together with a ditch that flanked the northern and eastern parts of the city walls. It is within this project that the western city wall was extended as far as the hill, possibly to join other defensive works that were already in place (Hellenkemper 1976; Segal 1970: 187-188; Sinclair 1987-1990: IV, 8-12). What corresponds today to the southern curtain of the citadel may already have existed at this time, constituting the southern defense of the town itself, but there is no textual evidence that can confirm it.

Information about the citadel in the following period is equally scanty. That the city had a ditch and a wall when the Arab army conquered it is confirmed in the chronicles of this episode. Şanlıurfa became the theatre of the conflict between the future Abbasid caliph al-Mansur and the Umayyads; al-Mansur is reported to have destroyed the city wall in the year 754; other episodes of destruction took place in the year 812, and finally the written sources report that the city walls were rebuilt by the Abbasid governor in 814 (Segal 1970: 195). Some scholars assume that the citadel was built or rebuilt in this same year, but it must be said that although this can be regarded as a plausible hypothesis, there is no evidence to support it at present; Sinclair even ventures to suggest that the carved ditch that surrounds the citadel from the east, south, west and partly from the north was cut in this period (Sinclair 1987-1990: IV, 8-12). It must be admitted that we do not know much about the military architecture of the period, but to attribute such a major defensive device, cut into the rock, to this specific period would require the support of some more substantial evidence.

Only from the 11th century do the sources provide more information about the citadel, confirming without any possible doubt that by this time it had become an important strategic element. Interestingly, the sources make it clear that control of the citadel did not guarantee control of the town and vice-versa. Until about 1025 Şanlıurfa belonged to the Banu Numayr. As a consequence of a conflict between the inhabitants and the Banu Numayr governor of the town, Utayr, help was sought from the Marwanid prince of Mayafariqin; it seems that for some years the government of the city was shared between these two powers, one in control of the citadel (Banu Numayr), the other in control of what was referred to as the 'lower citadel', identified with what is today known as Bey Kapısı, by the eastern gate. The Byzantine *protospatharios* Maniakes, who was at that time the ruler of Samsat, took advantage of this apparent lack of a strong power, and negotiated the acquisition of the town, gaining control of the citadel first. Once he had managed to consolidate his power over the whole town, repelling the various attempts of the Banu Numayr to recover Şanlıurfa, he re fortified the citadel in the year 1037 (Heidemann 2002: 85-97; Segal 1970: 217-218).

The sources tell us (Segal 1970: 220-221) that the fortifications resisted the Seljuk assaults of Alp Arslan, who attacked the town from the east and tried to fill in the ditch along the city walls; the Seljuks did not manage to conquer Şanlıurfa until the year 1087. A Turkish commander was appointed at the citadel, while an Armenian, Thoros, was in charge of the town and of the territory; Thoros is said to have carried out fortification works at the citadel (Hellenkemper 1976). It is Thoros who opened the town to Baldwin of Bouillon, who very quickly managed to get rid of him and establish the County of Edessa in 1098.

The period of the Crusader County and its Muslim Hinterland has been extensively investigated, especially in relation to the written sources (Amouroux-Mourad 1988; Heidemann 2002: 145-197), but again very little is known of the fortification. Apparently, the citadel served as a refuge for the Count in the context of open conflicts with the population; in general, however, the Count preferred to reside at the much safer citadels of Tell Bichr

(*Turbessel*) and Ravanda (*Ravandel*). The building known today as Bey Kapısı, by the eastern gate, is the only piece of fortification work than can be attributed to the Crusader period at present, confirmed by an inscription still *in situ* (Segal 1970: 236 and note 1). Hellenkemper attributes the cutting of the ditch to this period because of the similarity between this and that of Sayhun (Qal‘at Salah al-Din), but again more evidence is necessary in this respect (Hellenkemper 1976: 36).

That the defensive works of the city, however, must have been well kept or even strengthened is implicit in the chronicle that refers of the conquest of the town by Imad al-Din Zangi, in 1144; Ibn al-Athir describes the city conquered by Imad al-Din Zangi as “the eye of Mesopotamia and the strongest fortress in the Muslim lands” (quote in Segal 1970: 247). The sources also indicate that at the arrival of Imad al-Din Zangi the city had few troops stationed there and was therefore lightly defended (Segal 1970: 244ff.).

Restoration work was carried out immediately after the conquest and was commemorated by inscriptions that are now lost; the restoration seems to have concerned the fortification of the city, but it is not clear if it also involved the citadel; building material recovered from pre-existing buildings was used in the new construction (Segal 1970: 249; Guidetti 2009: 13ff.). A topographic description of the city in 1165 is provided by a Latin source and constitutes an exceptional document: the fortifications of the city are reported to be in excellent condition (Röhricht 1887: 195-199).

The use of *spolia* is also reported in the following period, when the city passed under the control of the Ayyubid family: building material from the cathedral was used for works at the citadel (Sinclair 1987-1990: IV, 6).

Very little is known about the following decades, from the time Şanlıurfa surrendered to Hülegü in 1258, and was spared destruction. The Mamluks probably gained control over the city only in the first half of the 14th century; we are told that they repaired and garrisoned the citadel.

It is from this period that the architectural remains in the curtain walls of the citadel confirm the indications of the written sources: substantial fragments of masonry that can be attributed to this Mamluk phase have been identified in the curtain walls but also in the inner buildings (Sinclair 1987-1990: IV, 8-12; Tonghini 2014); a still unpublished monumental inscription probably commemorating this intervention, currently under study as part of our project, is preserved in the southern curtain wall.

In the early 15th century Şanlıurfa passed to the Ak Koyonlu and then to the Ottomans. Major building works were carried out at the citadel in the following centuries, especially in the northern part; these can be clearly identified today and are commemorated by inscriptions, most of them, unfortunately, moved from their original position.

From the Mamluk period, therefore, the archaeological remains preserved above ground at the citadel today can make a significant contribution to the re-composition of its building history and to an understanding of its architectural forms and building characters.

### *The new project: First results*

In spite of the importance of Şanlıurfa for the history of the material culture of the area, the analysis of its mediaeval archaeological and architectural remains has not been addressed by specific studies. This is also true for the citadel.<sup>4</sup>

Our study of the citadel therefore started with an in-depth analysis of the remains that are preserved above ground; on the basis of the results, future research will then consider the buried deposit. In the course of the 2014 and 2015 seasons some parts of the citadel were subjected to

<sup>4</sup> The most complete overall assessments of its archaeological evidence can be found in a monograph on the Crusader period by Hellenkemper (Hellenkemper 1976) and in the four-volume studies of Eastern Anatolia by Sinclair (Sinclair 1987-1990: IV, 8-12).



stratigraphic analysis. The major difficulty in accomplishing this study at the citadel of Şanlıurfa was the poor legibility of the remains because of the heavy restoration carried out in recent decades. However, parts of the curtain are still untouched, as are the remains of a number of buildings inside the curtain walls (Fig. 2). Combining a preliminary analysis of these with the examination of restored masonry it proved possible to establish a hypothetical sequence of the building history, with the identification of five major periods, a summary of which is offered here.

The remains of Period 1 are very fragmentary today, and they were only identified in parts C and H of the curtain walls (Fig. 2). They are characterised by the use of re-employed blocks that were not subjected to further re-working. Walls of this type also appear in the earliest phases of Complex N (Fig. 3); here the presence of re-employed decorative elements, such as capitals, enables a post-II century date to be established for this early building. It is probable that the fortified area in Period 1 was much smaller than that visible today or had a different lay-out; it is therefore possible that the evidence related to these earlier phases is better preserved in the buildings inside the present-day curtains. The excavations of the buried deposit will hopefully provide more substantial evidence on these earlier periods.

In Period 2 a complex defensive programme was carried out: a ditch and a curtain wall provided with projecting buttresses (Fig. 2, structures 8 and 9, Fig. 4). The ditch was cut in the natural bedrock around the citadel (Fig. 5); only part of the northern side of the citadel, adjacent to the lower town, was left without the ditch: here its presence would have isolated the citadel from the walled town. The extension of the ditch and the distribution of the remains ascribed to this period suggests that the citadel of Period 2 had already reached the dimension of the citadel as we see it today.

The masonry type associated with Period 2 is characterised by the presence of blocks obtained from re-worked, re-employed ashlar. To be noted is the presence of L-shaped joints (Fig. 4), a feature of walls made with re-employed material; they appear in the masonry of various other areas, including Greater Syria, in buildings that are ascribed to the 5th and 6th centuries, but they seem to continue for at least another two centuries (Brogiolo and Cagnana 2012: 147; Gilento and Parenti 2013: 32).

As for the morphology of the curtain, with its square buttresses, it should be noted that these appear in a number of fortifications in relation to a wide span of time, starting from the early Byzantine period, if not before (Northedge 2008); they are still present in the fortification phases of Qal'at Sam'an, in northern Syria, ascribed to the 10th century (Biscop 2006). The polygonal structure located in the western side of the citadel shows similar masonry in its earliest phase of construction (Fig. 6); this structure has been attributed in the past to the Byzantine period (for example Lawrence 1936, 51).

The best-preserved evidence so far identified at the citadel concerns the later Periods 3-5, when major reconstructions of the earlier citadel took place.

Period 3 features a massive reconstruction of the curtain walls. The interfaces of destruction prior to this rebuilding clearly indicate that the citadel was in a ruinous state at this point; hopefully the analysis of the buried deposit and the study of the written documentation will clarify this point and make it possible to understand the dynamics that led to such an important destruction of the citadel.

The re-building of Period 3 can be seen in long stretches of the curtain, provided with arrow-loops, and in projecting elements that can be defined as towers. It should be remembered that the presence of the ditch around most of the citadel did not allow the construction of the massive defensive towers that characterise this period elsewhere. Room to build these towers would have been available only on the northern side, where the ditch is not present (Fig. 2, G, H, P), but on these parts the reconstructions of later periods have covered the remains of Period 3. The reconstruction of Period 3 is also clearly present in a complex identified within the curtain wall, Complex M (Fig. 2).

Three types of masonry appear in the construction of Period 3: one is characterised by the use of ashlar with flat rustication, one using ashlar with a perfectly flat face, and a third type where both types appear (Fig. 7). The internal face of the walls only features ashlar with a flat face.

A long inscription is partly preserved in a stretch of curtain of area D, between buttresses 11 and 12 (Fig. 2); it is severely damaged and heavily restored. It is referred to as Mamluk (Sinclair 1987-1990: IV), but so far it has not been fully published; a study of this important inscription is currently in progress.

In Period 4 long portions of the curtain were rebuilt, following the layout of previous periods (Fig. 8). The masonry of this period is set a few centimetres further back than the remains of the previous periods. As it is the case for Period 3, there are no data that allow speculation on the events that once again led to a significant destruction of the citadel. The reconstruction of Period 4 in most cases employed ashlar blocks with a flat face, and only occasionally rusticated blocks. The finish of the face may vary: the whole face was sometimes dressed with a toothed tool, a *chahuta* in the cases that were examined;<sup>5</sup> or, alternatively, the finish was ornamental, with the central part of the block treated with a pointed tool; in some cases this central part is slightly raised by comparison with the margins of the block (Fig. 8). The tool employed in all of the previous periods, a bladed hammer, seems to have fallen out of use from Period 4 onwards. This constitutes an important technological change that the continuation of our research will hopefully help to clarify. On the other hand, the type of stone used in all periods does not vary, so it can be stated that the change of tools is not related to a change of the lithotype.

The presence of three different inscriptions still *in situ* provides a dating for this important period of restoration; the inscriptions mention a ruler of the Ak Koyonlu, *Abu al-Nasr Hasan Bahadır 'Ali Khan*; one of the inscriptions also reports a *hijri*, 865 (1460-61 AD).<sup>6</sup>

Period 5 corresponds to the long Ottoman period, in the course of which many building activities were accomplished. Various stretches of the curtain were rebuilt, in various phases; Ottoman period arrow-loops occasionally survive in these curtains, though they have been considerably altered by modern restoration. The circuit in the northern part of the citadel, where the ditch is absent, was transformed with the building of massive, projecting towers (Figs. 1, 9). The system of access to the citadel was also completely re-designed in this period, with the enlargement of a strong tower (Fig. 2, tower 4 and Fig. 9); the system in use in the previous periods is entirely concealed by these new constructions.

One of the major difficulties concerning the evidence related to this period is to establish a sequence for the various activities that have been identified: collapse and modern restoration have cancelled the stratigraphic relationship between the various components. Only the exploration of the buried deposit may in future provide some evidence to link the various phases. The masonry typology already provides some indications in this respect and allows us to ascribe the construction of certain parts of the curtain to the same phase. The face of the ashlar blocks is generally flat and features various types of finish, as in the case of the previous period; the blocks seem to be smaller than in earlier periods. Towards the end of Period 5 masonry types characterised by the use of small blocks with an unfinished rustication (quarry faced) make their appearance.

As to absolute chronology, the two inscriptions visible today in the walls of this period have been repositioned in the course of modern restoration works and they have therefore lost

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Claude Bessac examined the masonry typology established for the citadel on the basis of detailed photographs and identified the tools that were used for the final dressing. For the project he will carry out a complete study of the stone building material.

<sup>6</sup> A transcription of these inscriptions is available in Karakaş 1987: 74-76, but they still await a complete edition.

their documentary value;<sup>7</sup> they are at present being studied. It is perhaps the research on the rich textual documentation that will in future provide more information about the fortification work of this period. The completion of the research on the structures preserved above ground, and the exploration of the buried deposit will hopefully enable us to complete the sequence sketched here, and to illustrate the various periods in further detail.

As to the character of the settlement at the citadel, only archaeological excavations and study of the written texts may in the future provide some data in this respect. The sources seem to suggest that the citadel may have been a residential area for the urban élite in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, and it may have acquired its military character only with the fortification carried out by Justinian in the 6th century. In its long history it served several times as a headquarters for the authority currently in power, as it is often the case with medieval citadels in the area, but more evidence is required to put together a more comprehensive picture.

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<sup>7</sup> The case of tower 3 is a good example. This tower has been entirely rebuilt in very recent times, although the team found no record of this important operation. One can compare the photo of the tower taken by Creswell in 1919 (Creswell archives, ICR0555\_N: <http://creswell.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/>), or in Hellenkemper 1976: pl. 3B, with fig. 10, which illustrates the present state of the tower. The tower is not the same as it was, but the inscription has been remounted in a similar position, although one course lower. Study of the inscription, nevertheless, may provide some information about the original tower. This case stresses the importance of studying the historical photos of the citadel. Another important inscription that bears the date 955/1548-1549 (Karakaş 1987: 75) has been removed from its original position in the course of a restoration and is now set in the eastern curtain; it originally belonged to yet another inscription that is today preserved in a wall on the northern side of the citadel, west of the present-day entrance. This inscription is currently being studied.

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#### Turkish Abstract

Bu yazıda 2014 Sonbaharından itibaren sürdürülen Şanlıurfa Kalesi arkeolojik araştırmasının sonuçları özetlenmektedir. Çalışmaların amacı yapıların stratigrafik analizlerin, tarihî fotoğrafların ve yazılı kaynakların yeniden irdelenmesiyle kalenin yapım tarihin kronolojisini belirlemektir. Yazılı kaynaklar kalenin yerinde 2-3. yüzyıllarda bir sarayın var olduğunu, askerî koruma amaçlı surların ise 6. yüzyılda Justinian tarafından yaptırıldığını gösterir. Uzun tarihi boyunca çeşitli devletlerin yönetim merkezi olarak kullanılan kaleye dair ilk güvenilir bilgiler 11. yüzyıldan ulaşmıştır. Şehrin bu yüzyıldan itibaren Selçuklular, Haçlılar, Zengiler, Eyyubiler, İlhanlılar, Memlukler, Akkoyunlular ve Osmanlılar hakimiyetine girdiği bilinir. Memlukler döneminde, 14. yüzyılın ilk yarısında onarım gördüğü ve bir garnizon yapıldığı anlaşılmaktadır. Günümüzde halen toprak üstünde bulunan yapıların morfolojik incelemelerine ve bugüne ulaşmış kitabelerine dayanarak yaptığımız araştırmanın ilk sonuçları doğrultusunda kalede birbirini izleyen 5 ayrı yapım-onarım dönemi saptanmıştır. Modern onarımlarda yerleri değiştirilerek belgesel değerini kaybetmiş Osmanlı dönemi kitabeleri gibi verilerin çözümlenmesi, yüzey araştırması ve kazı gibi diğer arkeolojik çalışmaların ilerlemesi burada sunulan kronoloji taslağının tamamlanmasını ve çeşitli dönemlerin daha iyi anlaşılmasını sağlayacaktır.

#### Biographical Note

Cristina Tonghini (Ph.D. 1994, Islamic Archaeology, SOAS, London) is a specialist of the archaeology of the Near East in the Islamic period. She teaches Islamic Art and Archaeology at the University Ca' Foscari of Venice. Her research focuses on the fortification of settlements in the Near East and on the history of pottery production in the Islamic Mediterranean.



Fig. 1 – General view of the citadel, from the North (©L. Tarducci)

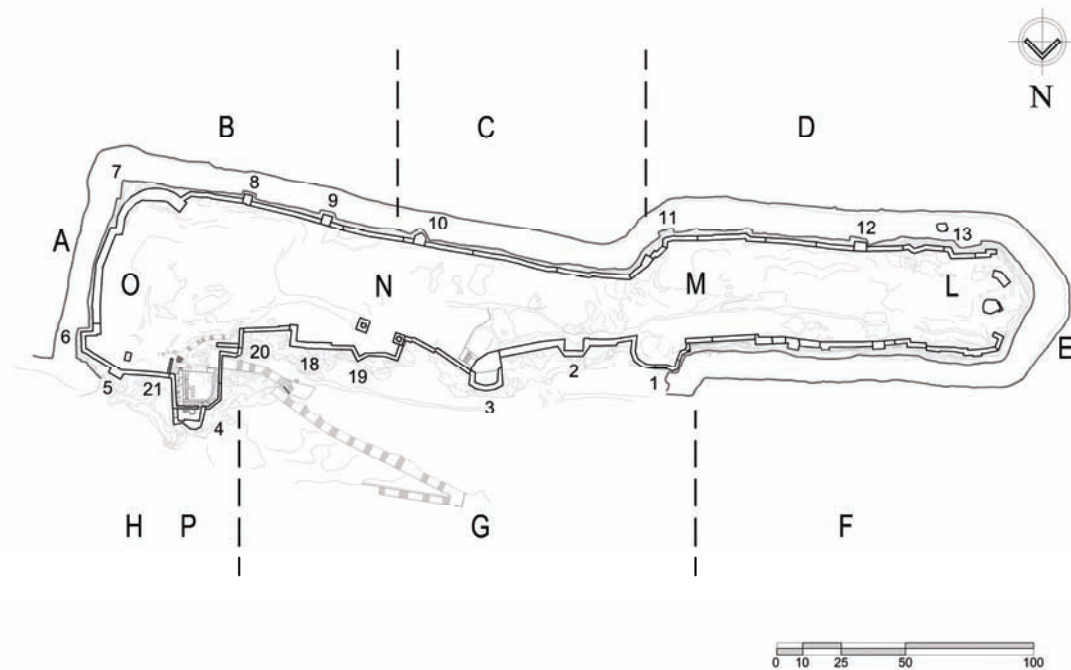


Fig. 2 – General plan of the citadel (redrawn by E. Reali on the basis of a CAD file provided by Şanlıurfa Kültür Varlıklarını Koruma Bölge Kurulu Müdürlüğü)



Fig. 3 – Complex N (Period 1), from the West  
(©C. Tonghini)



Fig. 4 – Buttress T8, from the South. The lower part belongs to Period 2  
(©C. Tonghini)



Fig. 5 – The ditch on the eastern side, from the South (©C. Tonghini)



Fig. 6 – Complex L, from the West. On the left a tower with an early phase, possibly Byzantine (©C. Tonghini)



Fig. 7 – A stretch of the northern curtain (Period 3; see curtain 21 in Fig. 2 (©V. Vezzoli)



Fig. 8 – Eastern curtain  
rebuilt in Period 4;  
view from the East  
(©C. Tonghini)





Fig. 9 – Rebuilding of the access system, from the North (Period 5, tower 4)  
(©C. Tonghini)



Fig. 10 – Tower 3, completely rebuilt in recent years; from the West  
(©C. Tonghini)

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