

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





DESCRIPTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Erbil Citadel is located at the centre of the city of Erbil, in northern Iraq, in the Kurdistan Region, at coordinates 36° 11' 23" North – 44° 00' 35" East. Erbil Citadel town is a large (nearly 11 hectares) urban complex built on top of an archaeological mound resulting from the accumulation of historical layers throughout at least six millennia of occupation. Although placed on a human-made mound, its physical configuration may be associated to a hilltop town, laid on the relatively flat surface on top of the *tell*.

Its urban pattern features an ovoid-shaped plan with an internal labyrinthine system of narrow roads, which generate from a main gate and ramify through the built fabric. Major alleyways fan in all directions starting from the southern Grand Gate and are interconnected by an organic network of smaller pathways which give access also to more secluded houses. The nature of the winding alleys and irregular shapes of the plots is the result of incremental development and the resulting urban fabric is typical of an organically evolved settlement.

Most of the Citadel is now occupied by houses and a few public and religious buildings, although there is documentary reference to the previous existence of other administration and religious buildings and military structures as well. These included in particular fortification walls which have now disappeared: the perimeter of the Citadel is characterized today by house façades which were built on top or in front of earlier fortifications. These façades are contiguous to each other, so that the impression, looking towards the Citadel, is still that of a mighty fortress. This configuration is in contrast with other fortified citadels that have maintained their ancient form, featuring a massive enclosure wall.

The majority of historic buildings on the Citadel date to between the middle of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, but some are older, dating back to the middle of the 18th century onwards. Many houses contain fragments of older buildings and none are of a single construction date. The historic building stock in the Citadel comprises mainly houses, but also includes several mosques, a *hammam*, and other buildings of religious or social nature, such as *takiyas* (buildings dedicated to the gathering of *sufi* religious societies) and *diwakhanas* (houses used by important families for receiving guests or conduct community meetings). The masonry of all these historic buildings is in fired bricks, mostly laid in mud mortar. These were generally built over the existing structures and foundations, in a continuous and typical regeneration process of an archaeological *tell*.

The houses are arranged in blocks, mostly with shared walls. All houses have courtyards, which in a few cases are enclosed by buildings on all sides, but more frequently are defined by rooms on two sides and walls belonging to another house or limiting the side along the alleyway. The typical house plan in the Citadel is two rooms side-by-side, entered through separate doorways. The earliest houses are characterized by elaborately decorated brickwork. In later houses, the façade can be protected from the sun by a colonnade or *tarma*, some of which have timber columns with decorated capitals and in the case of some large houses appears as an arcade with columns and arches in alabaster.



According to historical research, the Citadel was surrounded by a substantial lower city at the times of Erbil's greatest prosperity, such as in the Neo-Assyrian period and, almost certainly between 1190 and 1235, when the town expanded around the bazaar, located at the foot of the Grand Gate, at the south. The presence of a large number of historic buildings and the street layout in three districts (Arab, Taajeel and Khanaqa) around the bazaar as well as historic maps are a witness to the overall urban form of Erbil at the end of the Ottoman period.

In modern times the city has dramatically expanded around the Citadel and lower historic districts, based on a model of road network composed by a series of concentric ring-roads surrounding the Citadel and cut by radial roads. In this configuration, the Citadel marks physically and symbolically the centre of Erbil.

Although no major excavations have yet been undertaken, archaeological research confirms the great antiquity of the location, with remains near the Citadel dating back to the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods. The presence of Ubaid period (c. 4500 – 3800 BC) finds witnesses the presence of this early period in the lower layers of the Citadel *tell*.

In antiquity Erbil was an important provincial capital during several phases in its history. During the Middle Assyrian period there is the first mention of a temple of Ištar, which became very important during the Neo-Assyrian period, when king Ashurbanipal (669 – 627 BC) made Erbil possibly the second capital. Later, it became the capital of a satrapy during the Achaemenid period (539 – 330 BC) and in its vicinity the famous battle of Gaugamela (also known as Arbela) was fought, where Alexander the Great defeated Darius III in 331 BC, spelling the end of the Achaemenid Empire.

The city maintained an important administrative role during the Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanian periods. From the 1st century AD, the city became an important centre of Judaism and Christianity. It was conquered by the Muslim armies in 642 AD. Its importance grew under the later Abbasids (the battle of the Zab which ended the Umayyad caliphate in 750 AD was fought in its vicinity), eventually becoming the capital of an emirate under the Begteginids, whose most notable leader was Muzaffar al-Din Kokburi (1190 – 1232), brother-in-law of Salah ad-Din.

Erbil had intermittent contact with the Mongols during the second quarter of the 13th century before its firm incorporation into the Ilkhanate in 1259. In the following two centuries the city was ruled by various local and ephemeral Turcoman dynasties and by the Persian Safavids until 1535 when the entire region became incorporated into the Ottoman Empire until 1918. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire the entire region was controlled by a British mandate until 1932.

In 1921 the Kingdom of Iraq was proclaimed. In the following years, the Country was not spared by other turmoil until the Second Gulf War in 2003. In 2005, the new Iraqi Constitution, which recognizes the Kurdistan Regional Government, was ratified.

THE CITADEL IN RECENT PERIODS

During the 1930s the wealthier families, followed by much of the rest of the population, started to leave the Citadel, partly due to its difficult sanitary conditions. In the second half of the 20th century, several waves of immigration affected the city. Their settlement in the Citadel was accompanied by the abandonment by the local population and by phenomena of squatting into empty homes, or by building shacks made out of locally available materials.

Some infrastructures improvement, funded by UN agencies, included the upgrading of the water supply system and the installation of an electricity network. These works, undertaken at the beginning of the 1990s, have caused physical and visual disturbance, including the waterlogging of the *tell*: in the absence of correspondingly efficient drainage system, increased volumes of water seeped into the ground, undermining house foundations, especially around the perimeter of the Citadel.

Squatter occupation was accompanied by difficult social and health conditions which led the Kurdish Regional Government to the decision to evacuate the site at the end of 2006, also decreeing the establishment of the *High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalization* (HCECR), in charge of ensuring that this millenarian historic heritage of the Citadel is scientifically and systematically explored, conserved, enhanced, repopulated, and revitalized.

The HCECR and UNESCO signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* (in two phases) with the aim of revitalizing the Citadel through programmes of conservation and planning. Emergency conservation and restoration projects have been conducted, together with a thorough documentation of the Citadel's characteristics and features, as well as the compilation of three major documents: a *Conservation and Rehabilitation Master Plan*, an *Erbil Citadel Management Plan*, and a set of *Urban Design Guidelines for the Buffer Zone of Erbil Citadel*.

These documents are supported by in-depth studies and analyses on various aspects of the Citadel (from its history and intangible values, including oral histories, to the detailed analysis of its architectural and urban characteristics) and its buffer zone, as well as by the preparation of guidelines and implementation of capacity building and training programmes for the professional staff of HCECR and other concerned institutions/authorities.

The final objective is to revitalize the Citadel mixing cultural, commercial, and residential uses, according to the indications and recommendations of the *Erbil Citadel Management Plan*.

JUSTIFICATION FOR INSCRIPTION

The Citadel of Erbil is a rare surviving example of an urban ancient settlement which developed on an archaeological *tell*, following, layer by layer and time after time, a spontaneous, non-planned growth that was influenced by a combination of previous urban layouts and successive architectural and



urban elements, in a continuous process of addition and transformation extending back at least six thousand years, to the earliest phase of urbanism. It is also a rare site where the process of *tell* formation has continued up to the present.

Erbil Citadel is an imposing archaeological *tell* in which the artificial topography is a determinant of the urban form of the settlement still standing on its top. The structure of the Ottoman-period urban fabric is clearly legible, being characterized by a maze of alleys and *cul-de-sacs* radiating from the main Grand Gate. The Citadel town handed down throughout history is the result of an organic evolution and of a process of decay and reconstruction which is at the very core of the development of the Citadel hill. The original fortifications were in time replaced by houses which were built on top or in front of the ancient city walls, but the imposing character of the uninterrupted line of brick walls makes this site one of the most dramatic urban landscapes in the Middle East.

Defined by Erbil's inhabitants the 'crown of Erbil', the Citadel is today both physically and symbolically at the centre of the modern city, which has expanded in concentric rings at the foot of this iconic site. The Citadel stands still powerful in the image of a mighty fortress, and strong in the memory of its previous inhabitants and of the citizens of Erbil. In fact, the significance of Erbil Citadel is given not only by its archaeology, the historical events it has witnessed, and the historical figures that have lived in, reigned over, or conquered the city, but also by the stories, feelings, and relationships that the inhabitants of Erbil still have with their Citadel. Erbil Citadel is mentioned, with a remarkable continuity of its name (Irbilum, Urbilum, Urbel, Arbail, Arbira, Arbela, Erbil / Arbil) since pre-Sumerian times, in many historical sources providing evidence for the reconstruction of the events that shaped its form.

The criteria selected to justify the nomination of Erbil Citadel for inscription on the World Heritage List are (iii), (iv), and (v). According to these criteria:

(iii) Erbil Citadel bears an exceptional testimony to cultural traditions and to civilizations which have disappeared, as it contains the layers of thousands of years of human occupation and diverse civilizations, while also being a rare witness to an organically evolved *tell* settlement, continuously remodelled on the traces of previous layouts.

(iv) Erbil Citadel is an outstanding example of multilayer archaeological mound still physically emerging from the surrounding landscape. The physical structure of the Citadel town is characterized by the permanence of the urban form on top of the mound. Its shape with definite boundaries has in part dictated the transformations of the urban fabric while, at the same time, has allowed the adaptation to changing needs throughout the millennia.

(v) Erbil Citadel is an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, which has not survived elsewhere in this form due to irreversible changes brought by modernization. Its most distinguished feature is its urban form on top of an artificial mound, circumscribed by a circle of perimeter houses

(with façades looking towards the lower city and the surrounding fields) and characterized by a network of alleys radiating from a main gate and by a dense agglomeration of buildings.

The comparative analysis of this site shows that, although archaeological *tells* are a very common occurrence in the cultural landscape of the region, Erbil Citadel stands out for the peculiarity of its continuity of settlement and the remarkable authenticity of its urban form. No other archaeological *tells* in the region match the occupational history and the substantial continuity of settlement of the Erbil *tell*, making it one of the very few sites where the process of *tell* formation can still be observed and documented. Parallels with sites such as the nearby Kirkuk, or with Aleppo, confirm a substantial difference between Erbil and these sites as it concerns continuity of use, function, or structure.

The authenticity of the site is ensured by the preservation of its urban layout, which was not substantially modified by the 20th century interventions, and that maintains all its characteristics of an organically evolved settlement enclosed within definite boundaries created by the human-made topography of the *tell* and the circle of perimeter house façades. Its integrity was somewhat affected by the abandonments and some deliberate destructions that occurred in the past thirty years, but this does not impact the urban form and the legibility of the urban fabric and is being addressed by a comprehensive programme of conservation and rehabilitation spearheaded by the HCECR with UNESCO's assistance.

STATE OF CONSERVATION AND FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROPERTY

At the time the site management agency (HCECR) was established in 2007, the Citadel was affected by deterioration phenomena due to the consequences of changes of population's composition, which brought about an increased lack of maintenance. To this, one must add some deliberate demolitions which had occurred under the previous regime, although not to the extent suffered by nearby Kirkuk Citadel. Another cause of deterioration was the waterlogging of the *tell* due to poorly built water pipes and sewerage. This has caused walls to crack, also due to a structural weakness connected with masonry materials and construction techniques. These consist of two external leaves built of regular fired bricks, with a core made of rubble masonry set in dry mud mortar. The conditions of the slope are also a factor in the deterioration of the houses on the edge of the *tell*, which seem to have been built in front of the ancient fortifications, too close to the edge of a steep slope.

After over five years of studies, plans and concrete undertakings initiated and managed by the HCECR, the situation has highly improved. The causes of degradation with the higher risk have been or are being removed, a maintenance and preventive conservation programme is now functioning and critical structural issues are being addressed. A project aimed at stabilizing the slopes and ensuring the stability of the perimeter houses is almost ready for implementation. Emergency stabilization of all the critical issues on the Citadel is completed, and several buildings are now being conserved



and rehabilitated with a view of their adaptive reuse for various purposes. Although rapid development is taking place in the city at the foot of the *tell*, the setting of the Citadel is protected by the definition of a Buffer Zone divided into two sub-zones and with the compilation of specific guidelines for their management. Further recommendations contained in the *Erbil Citadel Management Plan* are intended to control the transformation of the areas surrounding the Citadel and make them compatible with the historic character of the neighbourhood.

PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PROPERTY

The Citadel is a protected site under the legislation of Iraq and of the Kurdistan region. The activities of conservation and protection of Erbil Citadel are coordinated by the HCECR, working in a strategic partnership with UNESCO. The past five years have seen a flurry of activities aimed at stopping decay and providing the opportunity for a comprehensive programme of conservation, restoration, adaptive reuse, and resettlement of the Citadel area. The formula of an adaptive reuse along the lines of a mixed-use approach based on cultural activities, tourism-related businesses, and residential areas was adopted, following the completion of two major studies, a *Conservation and Rehabilitation Master Plan*, completed in 2011, and an *Erbil Citadel Management Plan*, completed in early 2012.

The *Conservation and Rehabilitation Master Plan* documented in detail every structure on the Citadel, including conditions, and providing options for their repair and reuse. The *Erbil Citadel Management Plan* defined policies, strategies, and actions for the implementation of a five to ten years programme aimed at achieving, in phases, the reuse of the Citadel as a residential, tourist, and cultural centre for Erbil.

Besides these two plans, other plans, projects and activities conducted by HCECR and its partners are presented, in order to provide a complete overview and understanding of the philosophy and approach that is guiding the conservation and regeneration of this unique site.

These efforts to revitalize the Citadel and the strong relationship that the people of Erbil have with it, will be determining factors in returning the Citadel to the role and position it has always held in its history, as a place central to the life of Kurdistan and the northern regions of Iraq, and an urban landscape of importance for all humanity.