

# Al-Qahira Fortress

## A star above Taiz

Sana'a - Khalid Al-Dhababi

If one wants to organise a tour of Taiz, Al-Qahira Fortress is a must. Without seeing the fortress the history of Taiz cannot be understood. This dream city was built around the remarkable fortress.



When one looks at this fortress from far away it is easy to understand why it was built on this particular mountain in the old Yemeni architectural style: it dominates the famous commercial routes passing Al-Jund to Assawa on its way to the Red Sea - one of the well known trade routes in the old days. Today the fortress is one of the most important sites of Taiz. Its new found fame is largely due to an instruction from the president to the leaders of the district, to make the fortress a tourist site. They did their district proud and the fortress is visited by thousands of tourists annually. The tourist project, currently under construction, consists of a small park, an open air theatre, a swimming pool and a showroom. The path to the fortress is steep but the journey is worth it. One only has to head south out of Taiz on a tar sealed path. There is another path, through the old city, for those who like walking. Through this stone stairway, one can see many historical sites, such as Al-Modaffar mosque, the mosque

and the school Al-Ashrafiya, and the Al-Hussainiya dome.

At the top of the fortress the view is magnificent. One can read from there the history of Taiz which has been, deservedly, named Yemen's "cultural capital". The defensive wall is a living testimony to the historical role that the fortress played through the centuries.

The fortress is located at the foot of Mount Sabr, on a rocky, 120m mound overlooking Taiz. Once it was known as the fortress of Taiz, but was soon renamed "Al-Qahira Fortress" and the former name was given to the city. It is also called the "Red Fortress", and "Dar Al-Adab" (House of Culture).

There are varying accounts about the history of the fortress and the year in which it was built. The first affirms that it was built in the time of the Himiarites, before-Islam, as suggested by the studies of the palace, and the archaeological findings, such as the Misnad engravings. The second account dates its construction from the time of the

Salia dynasty (436 -532 A. H., 1045 -1138 A. C.) Sultan Abdallah Bin Mohamed Al-Salihi the brother of King Ali Bin Mohamed Al-Salihi, founder of the dynasty, was thought to have been responsible for its construction.

The fortress is surrounded by a wall which Niebuhr, head of the Danish mission to Yemen, mentioned in his book "From Copenhagen to Sana'a". He also included a plan. Recently most of the wall has been renovated, conserving its original form and lighting the exterior: this makes the fortress look even more beautiful at night. From a distance it resembles a luminous star in the sky.

The higher wall is 355 meters long. There is a square construction, in the middle of the wall, with three rooms which has two entrances: the main entrance in the north and the other to the south. Some meters from the northwest corner there is a closed water tank and, next to it, a half circular dome. The remains of a destroyed palace can be seen. On the eastern side, there is a pond which is now used as swimming pool. ■