



Al-Khawabi Citadel

A heritage threatened by absent-mindedness and neglect

Tartous- Zeina El-Cheikh

When we talk about citadels and towers, we first think of the particular characteristics of their military architecture and their location, usually on high and rough ground, making it difficult for enemies to reach. The Al-Khawabi Citadel, which is still inhabited, is an invitation to visit this old architecture, full of magic and mystery.



The green environment of olive trees.

البيئة الخضراء وأشجار الزيتون.

Tartous, the coastal Syrian city, is rich in many tourist and archaeological sites, and receives a fair share of visitors from all over the world during summer and winter. Although, Al-Khawabi citadel is as famous as Salah Al-din's (Sahyoun) or Al-Marqab (Magrat), it is unique as it has been continuously inhabited through different historical periods, which have left their imprint on the building.

Location and climate

Al-Khawabi citadel is 20 kms to the north east of Tartous in a mountainous region, built on a rocky hill and surrounded by mountains on all sides. Many researchers described it as a ship

moored in a green sea of olive trees. The dominating climate in this area is Mediterranean (mild to cold and rainy in winter and dry and hot in summer).

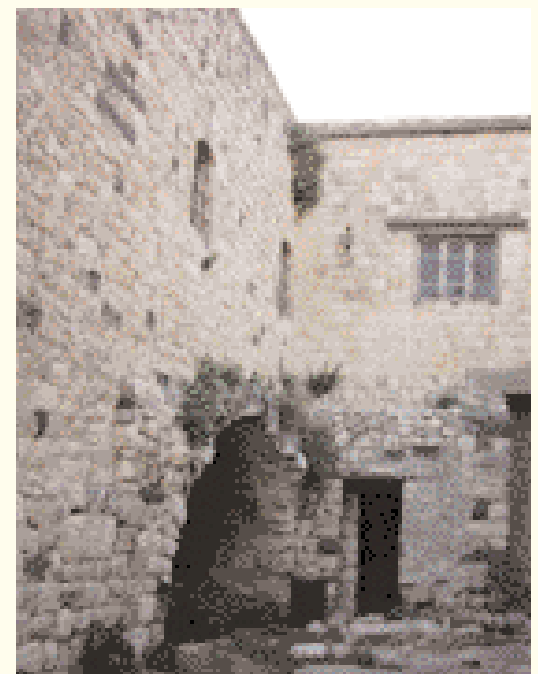
Al-Khawabi throughout history

The original building is attributed to the Phoenicians, like most of the coastal castles. The Byzantines restored the citadel, the Franks (Crusaders) conquered it and handed it over to a local governor in 1140. Afterwards it fell to the Ismailiate. Sinan Rashid Al-din, who renovated it in 1160, removing some walls, building others and constructing the entrance ➤



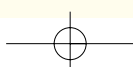
Upper part.

القسم العلوي.



Upper part.

القسم العلوي.





City Tourism



View of the walls.

منظر للجدران.

tower. The citadel was attacked by Bohemond IV, after the murder of his son Raymond in the Cathedral of Tartous (now a museum). The Ismailis asked for help from forces in Damascus and Aleppo and the Crusader siege was removed by this Islamic alliance.

According to a number of historical references, Al-Khawabi Citadel was not used for defensive or military purposes after the XIIth century. During the Ottoman period, the Ismaili presence decreased gradually and it lost its original residents in the 1930s.

Architectural description

Al-Khawabi citadel has a single entrance. The building has two main sections: "Harat Sinan

Rashid Al-din" or, as the residents call it, "The Aghas' houses", situated in the upper part of the citadel, and Harab Al-Saki. Many of the citadel's historical features deteriorated in the early 1990's and new residences were constructed, but it is still possible to recognise the cellars and stables.

"Harat Al-Saki", consists of ruined houses, abandoned by their former inhabitants who have built new residences near by. The remains of the medieval walls and houses, some with cellars, are still visible. New houses, have been built around them.

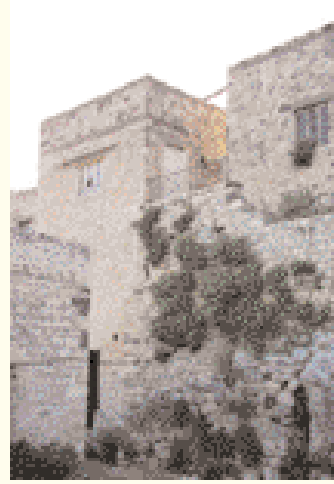
The future of the citadel

Architecture has always been the most



Upper part.

القسم العلوي.



القسم العلوي.
Upper part.



المدخل في فصل
الربيع.
To the entrance
in spring time.

distinctive and outstanding feature of heritage, and the most powerful expression of different aspects of civilisation. Its different styles attract tourists and researchers. We have a great architectural heritage and it is incumbent on us to re-assess our understanding of its value and make a greater and more conscious effort to preserve it.

Al-Khawabi Citadel is an example of traditional architecture, which is unfortunately threatened by absent mindedness and neglect.

Every stone and wall has a story to tell - even the ruins and abandoned houses where interesting souvenirs have been left by the former inhabitants. Our heritage has to be protected and the first step in ensuring its preservation is knowledge about its historical significance and importance. ■

