From Edessa to Urfa
The Fortification of the Citadel

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Conventions

For the sake of simplification, the modern name of Urfa is used in this publication instead of the various historical possibilities, and instead of the most recent version of it, Şanlıurfa.

For the transliteration of the names of people and places, each chapter dealing with a specific language follows the transliteration system in use in the field of studies concerned. In the rest of the volume, the current version of place names is provided (for example Harran, as it is spelled in today’s Turkey, and not Ḥarrān), while for historical toponyms and people the traditional transliterated version of the language of reference is used (Nūr al-Dīn Zangī; Kāḥtā if we use the ancient Arabic toponym for today’s Yeni Kale).

Years referring to the Muslim and Syriac calendars are preceded respectively by H (hijri) and AG (Anno Graecorum), while those relating to the Christian era are not indicated by AD to avoid overloading the text.

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Abstract

The study offered in this volume is the outcome of an archaeological research project focused on a specific monumental area in the city of Urfa: its citadel.

Urfa is better known to the general reader by its ancient name, Edessa. Most of the studies concerned with Edessa/Urfa have so far been based on the written documentation and are dedicated to the earlier part of its long history. The post-classical period has rarely been the object of dedicated research, especially as far as the material evidence is concerned. This is due in part to the fact that little evidence of the earlier Urfa survives in the modern urban fabric of today. An exception is the city walls, fragments of which can still be seen, including an imposing citadel. An archaeological project was therefore set up to help the potentials of this specific evidence to emerge.

Three seasons of field-work were carried out (2014-2016), concentrating on the study of the evidence preserved above ground and employing the methods of stratigraphic analysis to identify the building sequence of the citadel and to characterise the various building phases. Transformation of the relative sequence into absolute chronology depended primarily on inscriptions in situ, but also on typological elements (masonry type, decorative elements, specific architectural forms). A survey of the abundant written sources from different periods, in different languages (Byzantine Greek, Syriac, Armenian, Arabic, Medieval Latin, Persian and Ottoman Turk) contributed relevant information regarding Urfa and the development of the fortification works.

The volume is organised into three parts. The first contains the results of the survey of written sources, organised according to the language or period involved. The second part offers a study of the inscriptions found at the citadel. The third part presents and discusses the results of the archaeological and architectural analysis, organised in relation to the sequence that was established and arranged into nine different periods. A study of classical decorative elements re-employed in the masonry and a general typology of the masonry of the citadel complete this third part, offering new evidence on the evolution of building techniques through a detailed characterization of the various building phases and their components.