

Erbil Citadel



The Citadel from the air (photo: Jack Pascal)

Erbil Citadel is both the origin and the heart of the modern city. The archaeological mound, 32 metres high at the highest part, is the result of the natural accumulation of the remains of successive civilisation and cultures over at least 6,000 years, including the Ubaid culture, the Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, Median, Achaemenid and Sassanian empires, the Ommayad and Abbasid caliphates, the Mongol and finally the Ottoman empires. The city was first mentioned in written documents in about 2,300 BC. Erbil survives as one of the oldest-inhabited city in the world because of its position on important roads – the ancient “Royal Road” from Babylon and the south east, which ran northwards, and another road which ran eastwards over the Zagros mountain range. During this long period, Erbil has witnessed important historical events, such as the victory at the nearby Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BC over



Erbil, the Citadel and the Temple of Ishtar in 657 BC – alabaster panel in the Louvre, Paris (AO 19914)

Darius by Alexander the Great (Alexander's brother became Governor of Erbil ten years later) and in 750 AD, when the Battle of the Zab ended of Ommayad Caliphate. Although it has been inhabited from the first period when people started to live in towns, Erbil has enjoyed a number of "golden ages" when it was more important than at other times.



The Battle of Gaugamela, 331 BC – mosaic from Pompeii (National Archaeological Museum, Naples, 10020)

The "golden ages" of Erbil Citadel

- From 1595 to 612 BC, when it was one of the most important cities and sometimes the capital of the Assyrian empire. At this time the Temple of Ishtar in the Citadel was one of the most important religious centres in Iraq and contained an astronomical observatory and priestesses who foretold the future.
- During the 1st century BC and 1st century AD, Erbil was prominent as the capital of the Kingdom of Adiabene (Hedyab).
- From 1190 to 1232 it became a centre of culture and learning during the rule of Sultan Muzaffer Ed-Din Kokburi.
- Now again Erbil is the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as enshrined in the new Iraqi Constitution of 2005.

Citadel Architecture

The Citadel is also notable for the buildings it contains. At the centre is the Great Mosque, next to which is the hammam, built in 1775. We do not know when all the houses were built, but it is thought that the oldest were reconstructed after the Citadel was besieged for 60 days in 1743, when the encircling city walls were destroyed and were replaced by houses. The earliest buildings have exteriors richly decorated with pierced and recessed brickwork. Some of the later houses have arches and carved doorways made from alabaster as well as painted interiors. All the houses are set in courtyards and have distinctive interior features, such as niches in the walls and gypsum shelves for displaying brassware.



View of the Citadel from the west



Exterior of the Grand Gate c. 1925
(Royal Geographical Society, London,
D058-011095)



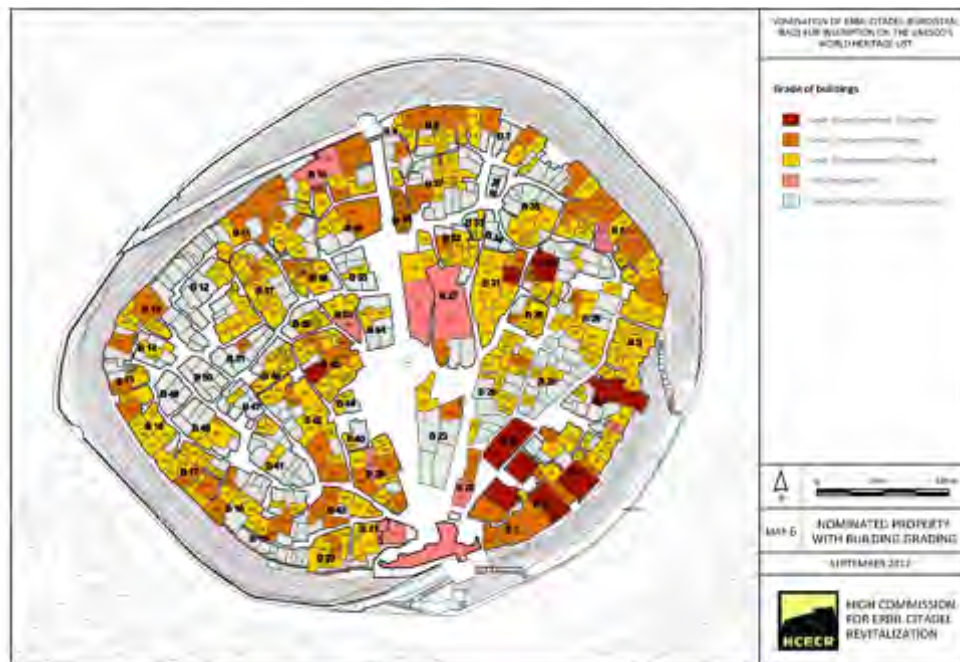
18th-century house with decorative brickwork



House with alabaster arches



Painted interior



Erbil Citadel Revitalisation Project

In 2007 the High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalisation (HCECR) was established, which is part of the Governorate of Erbil, and a partnership was established with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation). All aspects of the Citadel have been extensively studied and detailed plans have been prepared so that new services (sewerage, water, electricity, etc.) can be provided and the buildings can be repaired, rehabilitated and brought back into use. Some buildings will again become residential houses, but many others will be given new functions, including museums, galleries, cafés, restaurants, craft shops and workshops, cultural centres and other facilities, so that it will become the centre for relaxation and entertainment for Erbil citizens, tourists and other visitors. The process of transformation has already begun; more than half of the buildings have received

emergency repairs and the first restorations of houses are completed or underway. In recognition of its worldwide importance, in January 2013 the Citadel was nominated to the UNESCO World Heritage List.



House undergoing rehabilitation



Houses rehabilitated for the Kurdish Textile Centre