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THE KRAK OF THE KNIGHTS



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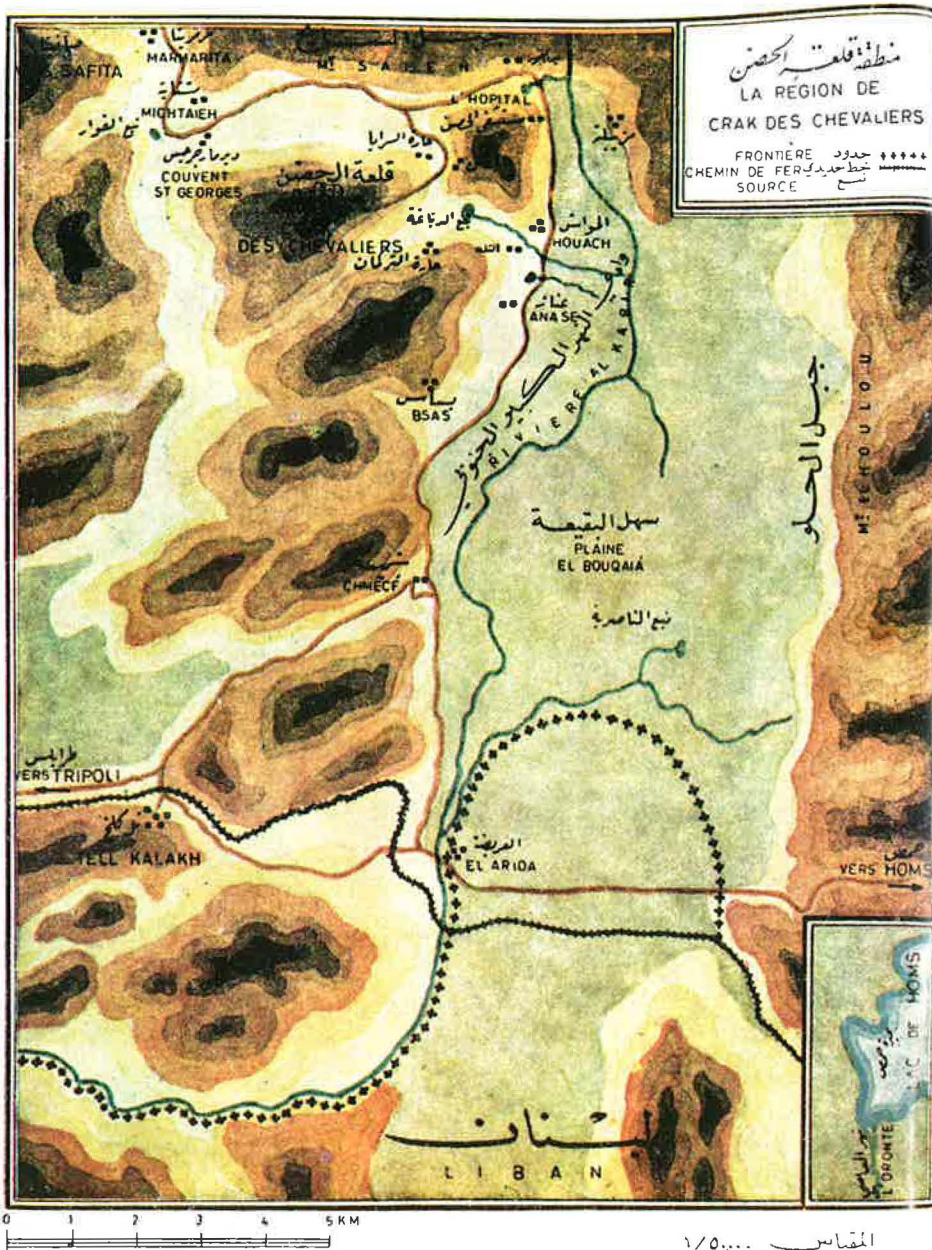
Touristic and Archaeological Guide

By

ABDULKADER RIHAOUI

THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF ANTIQUITIES AND MUSEUMS

DAMASCUS - 1982



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INTRODUCTION

Krak des Chevaliers is one of the most important historical monuments in Syria. It is an important example of military architecture of the Middle Ages. The Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of Syria has restored this monument and prepared it for tourists who come from all over world to visit it.

This castle witnessed an important period of Syrian history, a period of struggle and events illustrated in resistance to the occupation of the Crusaders in the 12th and 13th centuries. It was a long occupation but it did not withstand the liberation movement which put an end to it.

This and the other citadels remain as testimony of the ability of the Arab people of Syria to free themselves under all circumstances.

We publish this booklet as part of our collection to make you aware of our sites and monuments and also as a guide to help the visitor to understand this imposing castle and its architectural importance.

Dr. Afif Bahnassi
General Director
of Antiquities and Museums

PREFACE

On leaving Homs for Tripoli, one soon sees, on the right, far off on the heights, the outline of an impressive fortress (*The Krak of the Knights*) which was built more than seven centuries ago in a peculiarly strategic place. If one left the main road before Tall Kalakh and turned right to follow a road leading to the North, one would soon be face to face with an imposing fortress (Fig. 1) that stands on a high hill, surrounded by deep valleys which make it more inaccessible than an eagle's nest.

When we arrive at this place, we readily understand why, from everywhere, tourists come, in great numbers, to visit the Krak. We then realize why its fame is also well deserved.

The Krak of the Knights is the perfect example of military fortification during those centuries which preceded the invention of powder and cannon and the use of bombs.

The fortifications are characterized by their broad plan and their beauty of architecture.

As you walk through the Citadel, you will probably imagine the kind of vivacious life with which it bustled, when it was alive with soldiers, clad in arms, and when its sheds abounded in victuals and munitions, the time when East and West followed with interest the battles wages for its occupation and the heroic deeds displayed during these battles.

Today, this castle stands uninhabited in a quiet and peaceful place in the bosom of a most picturesque region. As we go through its completely dark corridors and see its donjons and ramparts, we think that we live in the time of the Frankish and the Arabian Knights and that we are about to meet one of them.

Remember, everywhere you tread, how often they had trodden who lived in these places before you. Nay, don't you even hear their foot-steps resounding under these vaults?... You will undoubtedly be struck with admiration, when you see the elegant windows, the well-fortified doors, the loopholes, and when you imagine all that has taken place on the ramparts, in the large assembly-room, the chapel, the refectory and the emporium.

However, your admiration will not be unalloyed; a certain sadness will come over you when you

recall that this fortress had witnessed bloodshed and many a bitter struggle.

While you are visiting the Krak of the Knight, a great book of history unfolds its pages before you.

— At a distance of (4 kms.) East of Tell Kalakh, there is a road leading to the North. After travelling (19 kms.) we come to a bifurcation : the road on the left (5 kms) leads to the Krak of the Knights, while that on the right (4 kms.) leads to the convent of St. George. Both roads are fit for use all the year round.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

We know that, at the turn of the XIth century, the Crusaders came from every part of Europe to invade our lands. They occupied the Syrian littoral from Palestine to Anatolia and laid the foundations of several principedoms, namely, those of Jerusalem, Tripoli, Antioch and Edessa.

They also built numerous fortresses to defend themselves against surprise attacks by the inhabitants of the country.

The Krak in one of those castles which has witnessed the struggle between the Frankish invaders and the local population.

Long before the Krak was built, there was on its site a small fortress called « Château de la pente » (Castle of the Slope). Later, however, it figured in history as « Hisn al-Akrad » (Castle of the Kurds), for in 1031 there was stationed in it, by a certain Prince of Homs, an effective garrison of Kurdish soldiers for the purpose of safeguarding the road that linked the littoral with the interior.

About June 1110, under the command of Tancred, Prince of Antioch, the Crusaders arrived before

the small fortress, which they then occupied after dislodging the Kurdish garrison.

Having found the place suitable for building new fortifications, they set about transforming the Krak into the most important and best fortified. Henceforth, it could house a garrison of 4000.

It should be recalled that the Crusaders did not build all their fortifications at once. It was only when they felt a new danger that they added new ones. Also they restored those parts of the Castle that were shattered by earthquakes, of which several happened during the Frankish occupation, namely in 1157, 1170, 1201 and 1202. The Krak remained occupied by the Crusaders 162 years, during which it first belonged to the Count of Antioch, then to the Count of Tripoli, who, in his turn, yielded it to the Hospitallers in 1142. The latter kept it until it was taken by the Moslems.

In 1163, Emir Nūr ad-Dīn attacked the Citadel, and his troops met the Franks in Buqai'ah Valley below the castle. Then in 1188, Saladin besieged it. But he renounced his plans to occupy it and continued his victorious march on the North, taking several of the cities and fortresses of the region of Lattakia. However, his brother al-Malek al-Adel, was to renew the attempt before the Krak in 1207.

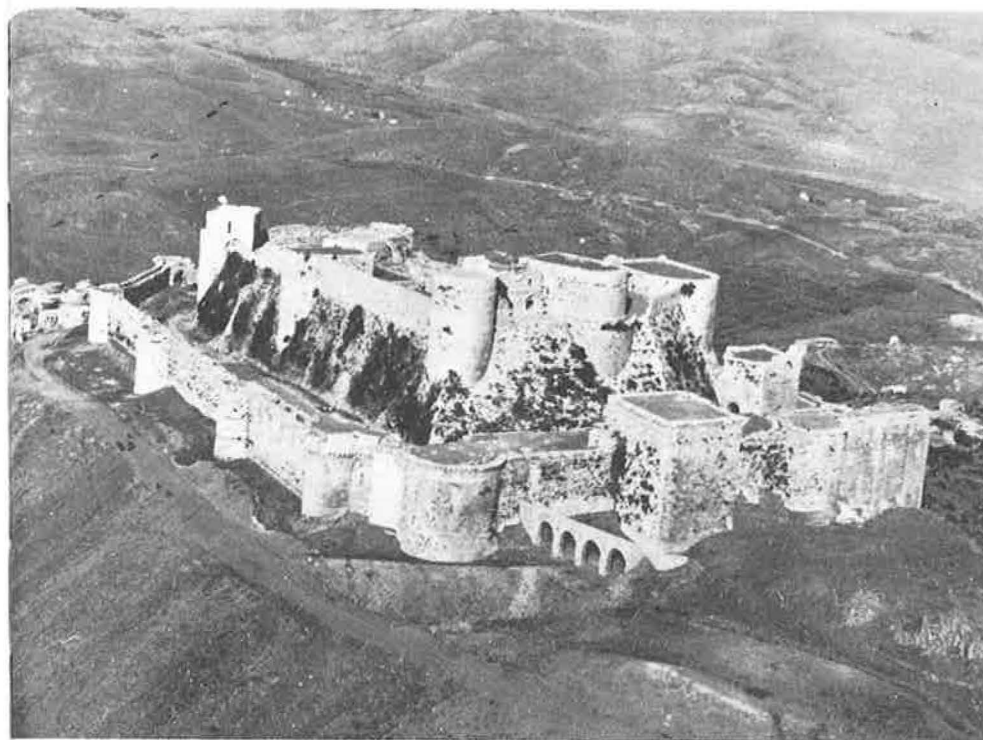


Fig. 1. General View.

Finally, during the winter of 1271, King al-Zaher Baybars, in his endeavours to liberate the region still occupied by the Franks, began with the Krak. He besieged it for several days (3rd March-8th April), harassing it with the bullets of his mangonels before his troops began to attack and occupy the castle, door by door and tower by tower. And when the Franks despaired of maintaining the resistance long, they surrendered Baybars treated the conquered with striking generosity. The news of the taking of the Krak was then joyfully celebrated by the Moslems. Later, Baybars undertook the restoration of the damaged parts and built new towers. The fortress preserved its importance after it had passed under the rule of the Arabs. It became the seat of the Vice-Sultanate, and an important garrison was stationed there.

It should be further remarked that when the celebrated Arab Traveller, Ibn Batuta, was on his way from Tripoli to Homs, he visited the Krak and was the guest of its Cadi towards the beginning of the XIVth century.

In the course of recent centuries, the Krak gradually lost its importance and became a village which was evacuated in 1934.

The constructions which were added by the villagers, have since been removed and the Krak has now become an archaeological and touristic centre. Recently, the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museum has undertaken certain restorations.

Today, the inhabitants of the village are divided into 3 quarters : Quarter of the Fortress, quarter of the Turkomans and quarter of the Serai. The last quarter is the ancient village of al-Hosn which has many monuments : a mausoleum, mosques, schools, etc... dating from the rule of King Zaher and the Mameluks.

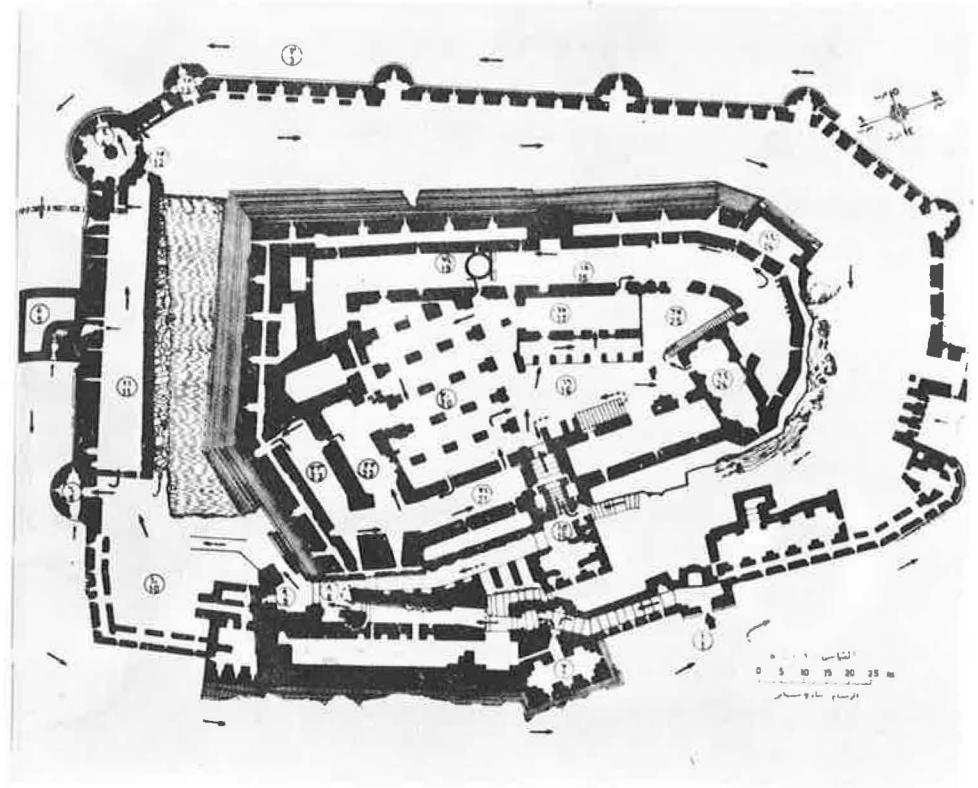


Fig. 2. Plan of the Castel.

General Description

The « Krak of the Knights » is admirably situated. From the top of its high tower stretch wide open, expanses, the splendid panorama of the Mediterranean, the Harbour of Tripoli, the Tower of Safita, the region of Homs with its lake, and the new Oil Refinery. Also, the nearer view is a pleasant and varied countryside.

To the East lies the Buqai'ah Valley where the Southern Nahr el-Kebir glides before it flows into the sea between Tripoli and Tartous. Beyond this plain, Mount al-Helu can be seen, and to the North, Mount al-Sai'h, one of the mountains of the Alawite chain, appears with vineyards and forests and the two villages of Mechtaya and Marmarita on its sides. To the West, the fortress overlooks the historical Convent of St. George (Please see map of the region) and valleys and hills all covered with virgin forests.

The tourist enjoys all this beautiful panorama while passing from tower to tower or looking through the windows of the fortress.



Fig. 3 Western Front.

The Krak is one of the most celebrated medieval fortress in the world. It is distinguished by its wonderful architecture, by its huge size and chiefly by the fact that it is still in good condition, in spite of the centuries which have elapsed since its erection. Built on the ridge of volcanic rocks, it stands on ground that has the shape of an irregular trapeze with dimensions of 200 m. and 140 m. and an area of 3 hectares.

It is approximately 60 kms. from Homs and 35 kms. from the sea-coast. Its altitude is 650 m. above sea level, and it is built of regular and big limestone blocks that have changed colour to a golden yellow. Its Arabic and Frankish constructions of different dates explain the variety of styles and the diversity of ornamental designs.

There were no water springs inside the fortress, but several wells filled with rain-water that flowed from the terraces into the gutters. The latter distributed water to all parts of the fortress. There was, moreover, the pond of the inner ditch, which was fed by the waters of the neighbouring hill, with which it was connected by an aqeduct. The southern part of this ditch still contains water, while the rest is filled with clay and rubble.

There are two very distinctive parts in the stronghold to be considered : the exterior wall, which we shall call the « First wall » and the interior wall, which we shall call the « Second Wall » along with all the constructions of the interior part of the castle.

The *First wall* includes the outer wall and the adjacent constructions. We can see the guard-room, the stables, the sheds. There are thirteen round, square or rectangular towers. These constructions have, at times, more than one storey. The first wall is surrounded by a moat and a glacis in several places.

There are many doors in this wall : there is the main door, which is in a tower connected with the outside by a draw-bridge, as well as other doors leading downward to underground passages.

The *Second Wall* and the central constructions are built on a high and rocky platform surrounded by a ditch that isolated them from the first wall.

We go through a main door connected with the outer door by an access ramp, which we shall mention later. This second wall, which has three other doors opening on the ditch, is distinguished by its high

tower of several floors and the glacis which protects it from outside against attacks and earthquakes.

In this part of the fortress, we have two floors : the first comprises a yard surrounded by large vaulted rooms, sheds, assembly-room, a chapel, a dining-hall, a bakery and oil-mills. In the second floor, there are loopholes and fortified curtains.

The ditch surrounding this second wall is dug in the rock, and the trenches, which bring rain-water from the terraces, lead into it.

A visit to the Castle

The visitor is advised to follow the itinerary provided in this guide which, we hope, will help him to see most of the things possible without losing his way in the intricate labyrinth of the underground and the corridor.

To facilitate the visit, we have set it in three stages :

1. a tour outside the castle.
2. a visit to the « First Wall ».
3. a visit to the « Second Wall » and the building structures within it.

We have provided a plan of the castle (fig. 2). An enlarged copy of this plan is also enclosed at the end of this Guide.

Reference from the text to the plan is by numbers and the route of the tour is indicated by arrows on the plan.

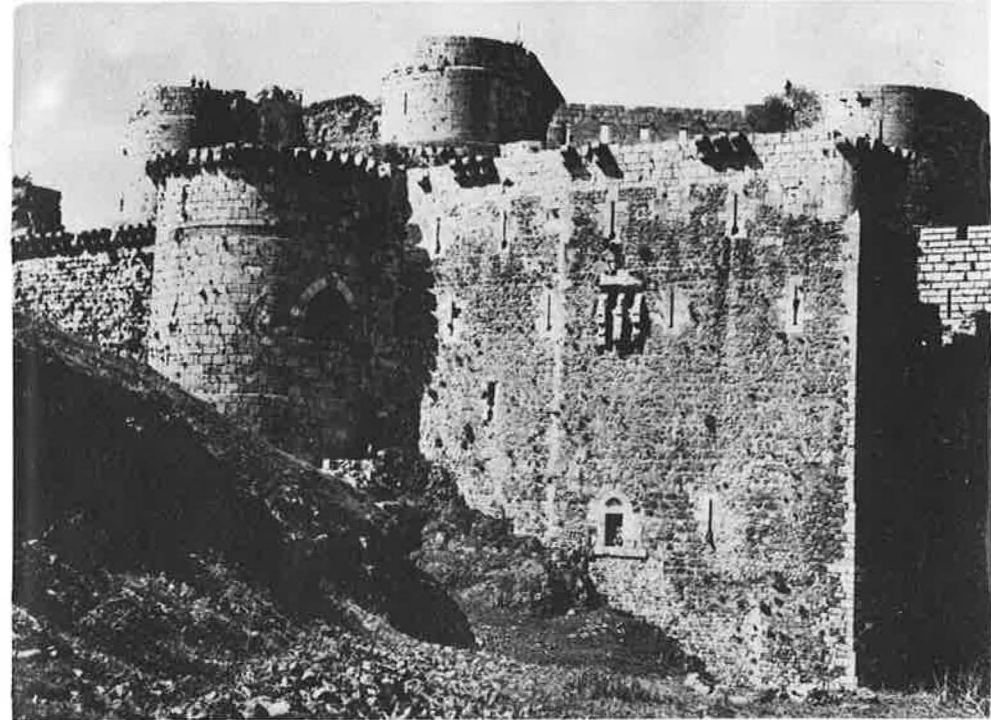


Fig. 4 Tower No 6.

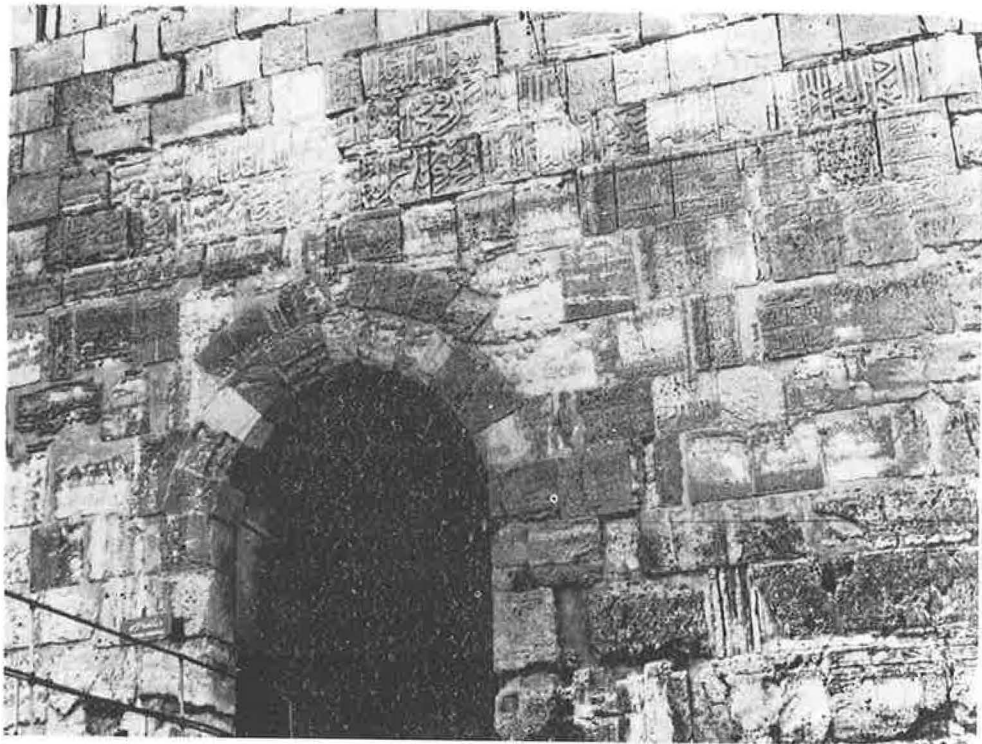


Fig. 5 Main Entrance.

I. -- A tour outside the Castle

It often happens that visitors go inside the fortress without going round it to see outer wall from the outside, through this outside tour is very interesting.

The visitor arrives before the Eastern Front of the First Wall, at a place marked on our plan as N° 1. This is the main entrance of the fortress.

Before going through this entrance, let us proceed Northwards and follow the arrows, leading down to the place marked N° 2. We stop for a moment to observe, between two great towers, one of the castle doors, which opens onto a rock-cut underground chamber leading to the inner ditch. There after we proceed on our way until we reach the Western Front (fig. 3) where we find that all is well preserved, having never been subjected to any attack. In fact, it overlooks a steep valley which is 300 metres deep. This front is both architecturally beautiful and of perfect homogeneity, its five round towers being built on the same plan.

At their highest level, both towers and their adjacent fortifications were pierced, for purposes of defence by long loopholes alternating with stone

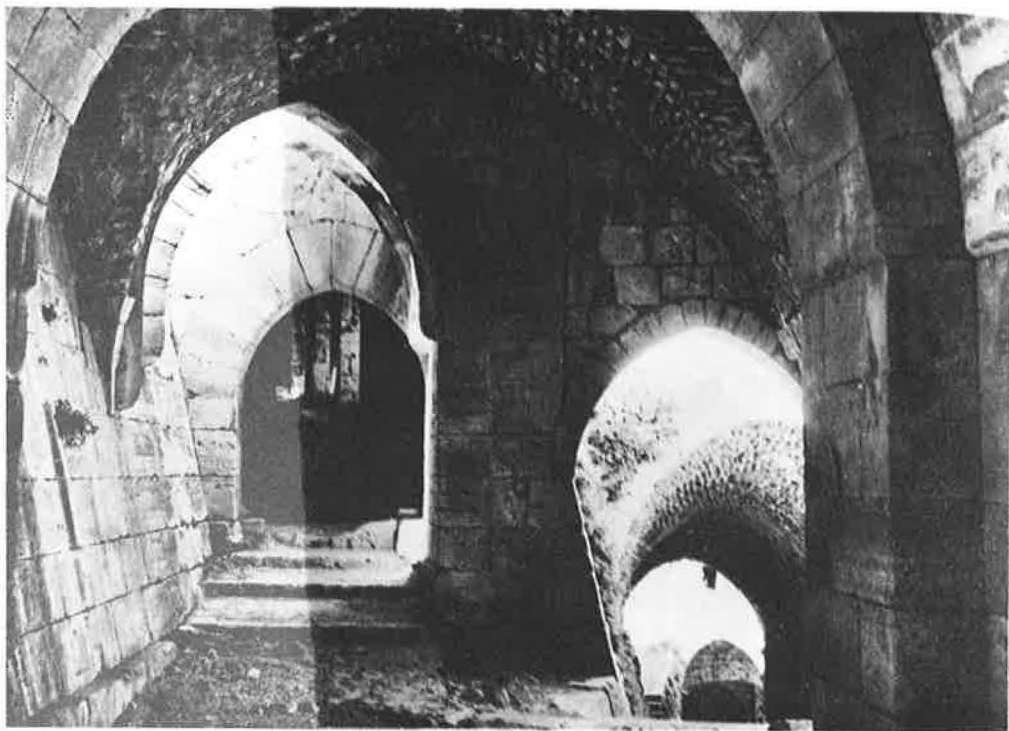


Fig. 6 Access Ramp, point marked 8 on plan



Fig. 7 Door of Tower No 9 Seen from inside.



Fig. 8 Tower N° 9 and the south-East corner tower
of the upper level

brattices. This upper floor is well preserved only at the point marked N° 3.

Next, at the Southern Front we see, first, Tower N° 4 situated at the South-West angle. This imposing round tower is based on a large curving bank. At its top, framed by two lions resembling those associated with the name of Sultan Baybars, we find the following inscription :

« Our master Sultan Baybars and his son al-Malek al-Said Nasser ad-Din, have ordered the restoration of this consecrated fortress on Tuesday 25th Sha'ban 669 H. 1271 A.D. ».

At a distance of three metres from this tower and on the outside of the curtain fortification, an aqueduct, resting on 4 arches, brings water from the neighbouring hill, to the moat which separates the two Southern walls. From the top of this hill, a visitor can take a photograph of the general view of the castle.

Proceeding on our way, we arrive under the salient N° 5 a tall, massive and square construction built to protect the neighbouring works which it dominates by reason of its size. Since there is no slope to separate it from the adjoining land, the

southern Front is rather vulnerable. An engraved inscription imputes the construction to the Sultan Qalaoun. There is a small door in its Eastern Wall, which opens into a subterranean passage leading to a big room (N° 11). From here we proceed until we reach Tower N° 6 (fig. 4). This has two floors, at the lower of which we can see two archers. To the East, at a distance of eight metres from the ground is a blocked postern with a slightly flattered arch under which we can see holes which probably served to hold the supports for a fly-bridge. Above the postern, an Arabic inscription relating to Baybars can be seen, framed by two lions and dated 1271 A.D. After Tower N° 6 there is in the rempart one of the secret doors of the castle, which leads to the inner moat through a subterranean passage.

It is befitting to recall that the Southern Front, as it stand today, was built by the Arabs. The rempart was completely demolished at this side, during the siege of the fortress by al-Zaher, who having discovered its vulnerability at this point, concentrated all his machines against it.

If we now follow the arrows, we will reach the foot of the Eastern Front and the main entrance of the castle marked N° 1. Here the first stage of our visit ends.

The Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums is proceeding to restore the outer wall, which is damaged and partly in ruins.

2. — A tour inside the « First Wall »

We begin our tour by entering the Castle through the main door at N° 1 (fig. N° 5).

A flight of few stairs leads to it. Under this flight of stairs, there are a mole and an arch both of which were probably built to support the stair. Below this door, are two Arabic inscriptions. The text of the first runs as follows :

« In the name of God, the restoration of this consecrated fortress was ordered during the reing of our master, King al-Malek al-Zaher the wise, the just, the vigilant who is aided by Allah, the victorious, the conqueror Rukn al-Dunya' wal Din Aboul-Fath Baybars, the partner of the Prince of the Faithful (The Caliph) on this day, Thuesday 25th of Sha'ban 669 H./ 8th April 1271 ».

The second inscription, by the Sultan Sha'ban on the 6th of December 1345, concerns the payment of Muslim troops. It is in a bad state of preservation.

After passing through this main door, we enter an irregularly shaped room with four broken arches.

We walk under the southern arch towards the entry ramp. This ramp leads inside the second

wall, the slope being shallow, it has low but wide steps. Various doors and outworks protect it. As we go along this incline, we first see, on the left, Salient N° 7, which has two superposed rooms. Through this incline we go inside the low-room and pass, first, a door leading to the guard-rooms and after this, the stables.

At point N° 8, the ramp is open to the sky. It bifurcates towards the North and continues ascending to the entrance of the inner fortress (fig. 6). This open place is dangerous to an aggressor, who would find himself wedged between the door of the incline and tower N° 9 and within reach of the towers that dominate the place.

On leaving the access incline and resuming the tour inside the first wall, we go into tower N° 9 (fig. 9 et 10). It is a work constructed in pentagonal form and built in a very great embossment (refer to fig. 7 and 8). The doorway of this tower is especially powerful, 5 metres thick. It has a port-cullis. A broken arch of embossment surmounts this door which opens on the way leading to the inner moat. There are two lions in profile over it, couching face to face. Their heads have disappeared. A very Frankish master-piece.

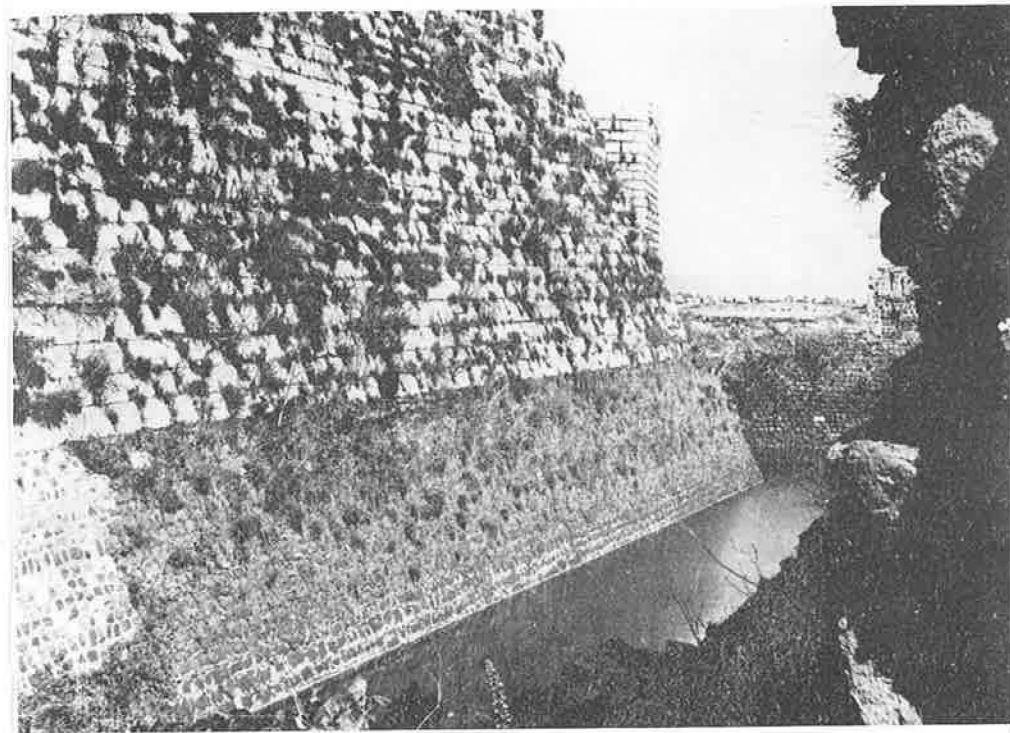


Fig. 9 The moat between the two southern defence wall.

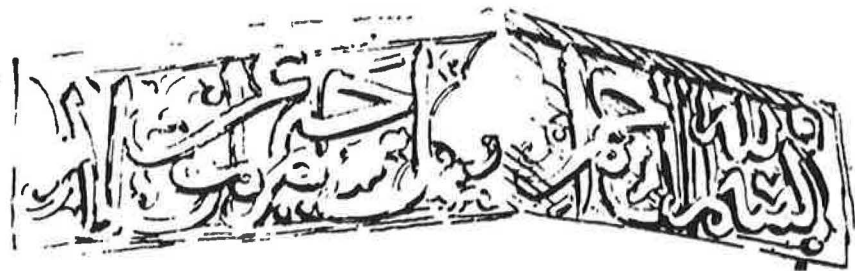
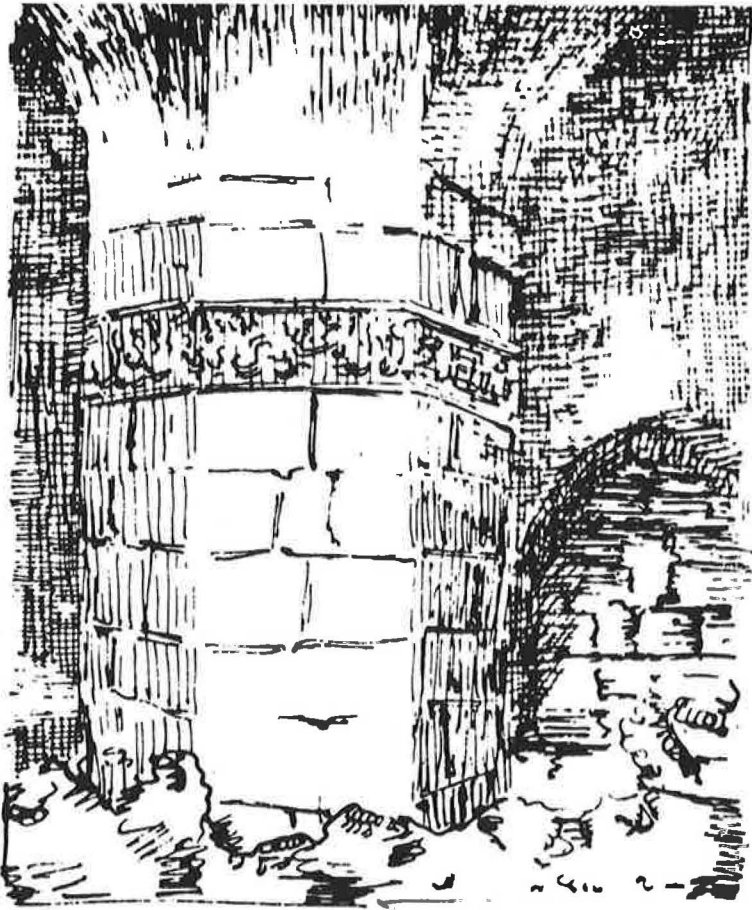


Fig. 10 Pillar of Tower No 2.



Fig. 12 Inner wall, Western front.

When we go out through this door and walk by the moat, which is usually full of water (fig. 9), we see a bath on the left (place N° 10), built in accordance with the usual practice followed in building Arabian bath. It is built at lower level in order to use water from the ditch.

We now continue our tour and enter Tower N° 6 in order to see its postern which we have mentioned before. We enter the long room N° 11 which is 60 m. \times 9 m. Its vaulted roof is not supported by pillars. In the middle, a secret underground passage leads to the outer door of Tower N° 5 previously indicated. After we proceed on our way along this huge building we reach a narrow corridor which leads to the left inside Tower N° 4. It has a round form and we see loopholes and a central pillar with an inscription in the name of al-Zaher (fig. 10). Here we return to the narrow corridor in order to go up to the terrace and visit the upper floor of Salient N° 5.

This floor is a big room which has, in the middle, a large pillar that is the square and eight groined vaults built on consoles resting on that pillar and on the pier of the big broken arches open on nine niches, three of which are on the East, three on the West

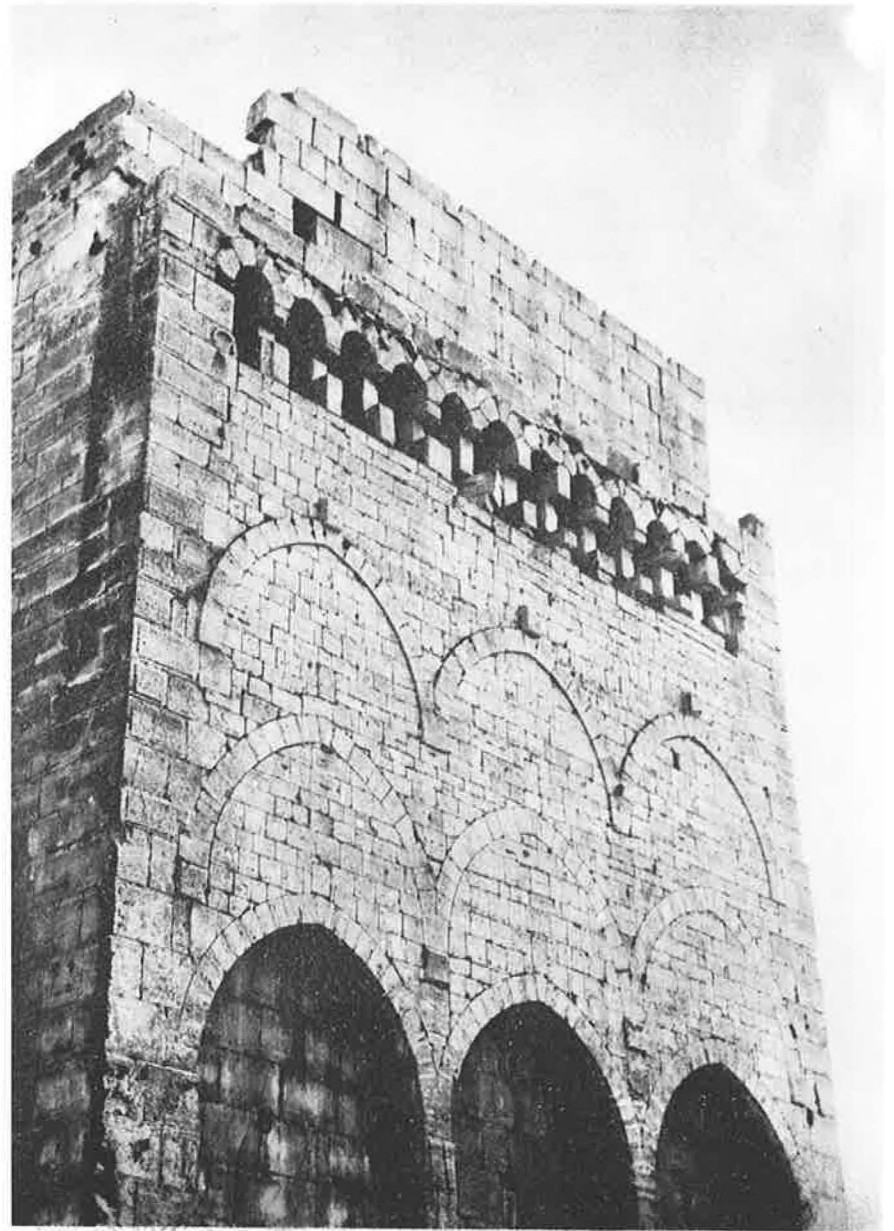


Fig. 13 N.-W. Facade of Tower N° 14.

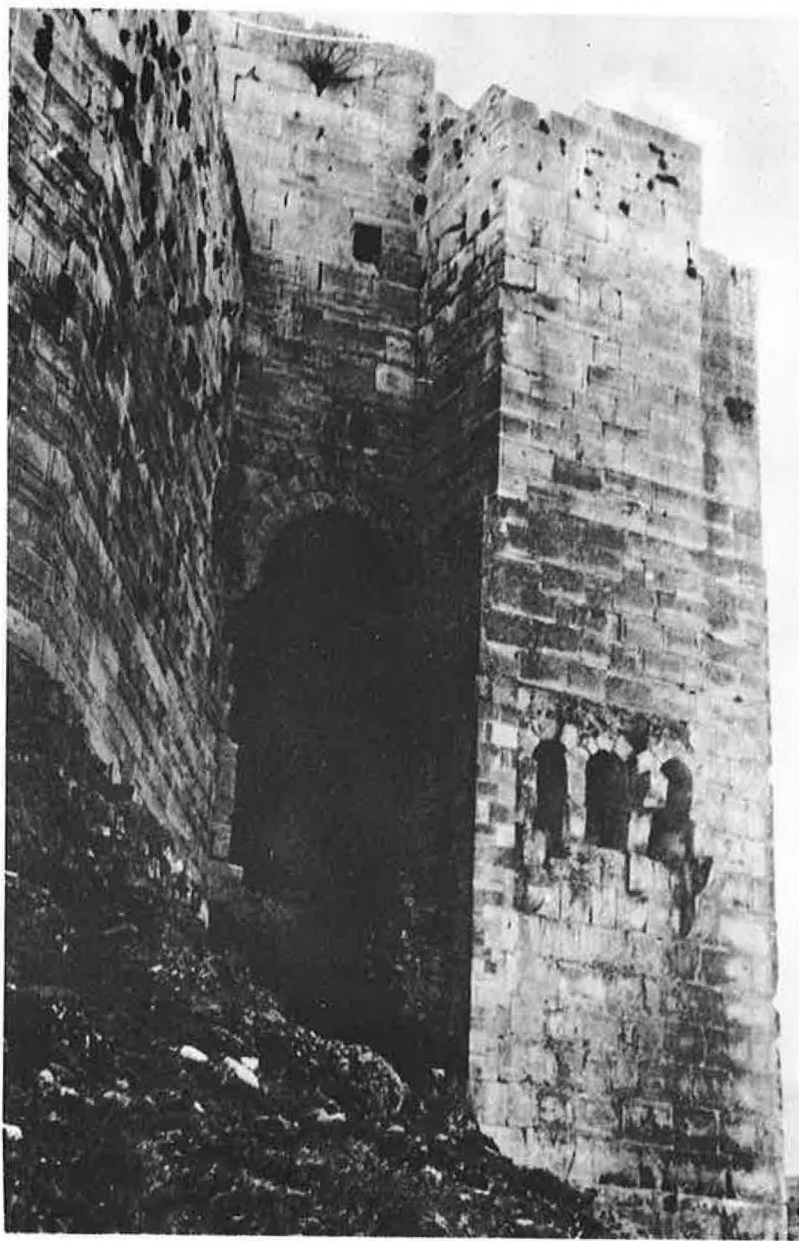


Fig. 14 Tower No 14, door open on the ditch.

and three on the South, all reaching as man archieres (fig. 11).

Thereafter we go down a staircase (marked No 12) and then inside into the western Front. This front, which has a length of nearly 150 m. presents a beautiful architectural appearance of a perfect homogeneity. The five round towers protecting it are all built on the same plan with identical proportions. Tower No 13 is the first we reach. It has a vaulted roof which stands on no pillars. It is provided with many ouvertures, every one of which has loopholes and a machicolation. As we continue our tour along the corridor of this Front, machicolations and loopholes follow one another regularly.

Once inside this corridor, we can go out from where we came in (through staircase No 4) and continue to follow the arrows going towards the North. We are then between the two walls of the western Front (fig. 12), on a platform. This First wall appears on the left with its fortifications and upper entrances that used to have moving stairs. The powerful towers of the second wall are on the right and are joined by means of a glacis made to safeguard against earthquakes and attacks.

Towards the end, between the two walls of the

Western Front, we arrive under Tower N° 14 which is called the « Tower of the Daughter of the King ». (We shall later talk about the interior of this tower). From the outside, it is in rectangular form. The work has a peculiarly impressive aspect. It presents a sloping wall with embossment.

In front of this wall, two angle-pillars and two medium pillars, dividing the slope in three parts, receive three broken arches. These arches support a wall separated from the lowest part by a space which constituted a big machicolation. Below the three arches, we can see, in the wall, two superposed ranks of three proparches supporting a big brattice of twelve machicolations. In the East, there is a door opening on the ditch.

At this point, we continue our walk first between the two walls of the Northern Front, and then between those of the Eastern Front, in order to reach Tower N° 15, where the second stage of our visit end.

3. -- A Tour inside the « second Wall » and its central construction.

We begin the third stage of our visit by entering Tower N° 15 through a small staircase. It should be recalled that this tower, borders upon the Access Ramp which we have previously mentionned and left behind us at point (N° 8). Once inside, we have the door of the « *Second Wall* » before us. We ascend a few steps, go through a well-fortified door and, following the arrows of the scheme, come upon the open yard (N° 16).

Yard N° 16 was originally very spacious, but became gradually reduced by various buildings successively added in it (fig. 15). The *yard* is delimited in the South by a large room (N° 20) whose vaults, resting on pillar, support an upper yard called the Esplanade. The Chapel is in the North, and a corridor built in front of the large room (N° 17) appears in the West.

The *Corridor*, similar to that of a cloister, must be the jewel of all the architecture of the « Krak of the Knights ». The facade, open on the yard, is provided with two doors and five double bays divided by thin columns corresponding to seven trusses. These two doors are opposite the two others



Fig. 15 Tower N° 16 and Façade of the Corridor.



Fig. 16 One of the windows of the corridor.

which open on the Large Room (N° 17). The ogives of these seven trusses, the doors and the bays with their columns, the pilasters and their capitals decorated with various leaves, form a very harmonious whole

The following Latin inscription is engraved on the northern pillar of the seventh truss :

« Si tibi gratia sen sapientia forma que detur, inquinat omnia sola superbia, si comitetur ».

« If grace, wisdom and beauty are given to you, pride all alone tarnishes all these qualities when added to them ».

Also there is a French inscription, which is rather mutilated, on the northern pillar. It concerns a certain *Jorgi*, who may be one of the lords of the Krak (fig. 17 and 16).

The long axis of the *large room* (N° 17), which is fronted by the corridor, is North-South wise. The room forms a rectangle of 27 m. long and 7,50 m. wide. It has three trusses supplied with vaults on an ogival transept. This large room is similar to those of the lords had in their castles. It was used for meetings and probably as a reception-room.

To the West of this large room is another, which is 120 m. long.



Fig. 17 The Corridor.

It is 10 m. high under the vault and 8 m. wide. It is covered with vaults whose penetration contains chains of freestones. These vaults are supported by big broken arches. In the Northern part of this room, twelve latrines can be seen. At the other end, there is towards the South a wide round oven made of bricks, which is 5 m. in diameter. A little far off, there is the wall of the fortress, which is 27 m. deep.

We now pass along to the Pillars-Room (N^o 20), which we have indicated in the South of the yard and which is adjacent to the room that is 120 m. in length and which we have just left. It is a large rectangular room, which has five ranks of heavy marked pillars, on which cylindrical vaults of rubble in unequal height are set. These vaults are provided with airing and lighting openings on the esplanade. In the corridor that links this room with that of 120 m. long, we can see the remains of a kitchen, which makes it possible for us to suppose that the pillars-room was used as refectory.

If we now follow the arrows indicated on the plan, we will come first to a *Warehouse* (N^o 21) (which is a vaulted room without pillars) and then to another *Warehouse* (N^o 22) where we find big oil-jars. There it no doubt that the provisions of the garrison were preserved here. We then pass to a third *Warehouse*

(N° 23) where we can see the remains of an oil-mill, near which are jars and a well. There is also an inlet leading to the corridors reaching many parts of the inner wall. These corridors are provided with loopholes.

After visiting the different warehouses, we must return to the *Yard* (N° 16), and from there, pass to the castle Chapel in the North of the yard.

The *Chapel* (N° 24) is 21, 50 m. long and 8,50 m. wide. It consists of a nave which has three bays of cylindrical vaults. It ends with a domical vault of apse open under a big arch of double curves.

The *chapel* was transformed into a mosque after the Moslem conquest and today the pulpit, or *minbar* of the mosque can still be seen. At the southern side of the *chapel*, there is a west door opening on the yard through two big broken arches. During the recent works executed by the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, a beautiful coloured frescoe representing « The Presentation of Jesus to the Temple » (fig. 18) was found outside the western wall of the *Chapel*. This frescoe is now kept at the Museum of Tartous.

On leaving the *Chapel*, we proceed to the second

part of the yard indicated on the plan as N° 25, where we see a big staircase leading to the upper floor of the fortress.

This staircase, obstructing the main door, is probably a late addition. It seems that this staircase and that of yard N° 16 were added by the Frank when the upper floor of the fortress was built. The original staircase, which should be of snail-like shape and small dimensions, was situated in the N.-W. angle of yard (N° 16) near the porch of the chapel.

When we ascend the staircase of yard N° 25, we then begin our visit to the upper floor of the fortress. (We draw the attention of the reader to the fact that the plan added to the present guide doesn't concern itself with this part of the fortress so there is no question of indicating its different monuments by numbers).

We first come to the upper floor of Tower N° 14 *The Tower of the King's Daughter*, the interior of which we have already described. This tower as we have mentioned before, has 12 ouvertures. We are planning to transform the upper room into a resthouse for visitors to the Krak.

If we continue our walk on the roof, which is 120 m. long (N° 18 and 19), we will arrive before a

big round tower that stands almost in the middle of the western front. The interior of the room is rectangular, while three archieres open under the niches in a broken cylindrical vault.

In the S.-W. angle of the *Second Wall* stands the celebrated tower, which had probably served to protect the apartment of the Lord and Ruler of this place. The room of the first floor is at the level of the esplanade. A fine staircase leads to the second floor where there is that which is called the Master's lodgings. It is a circular room receiving light through a rectangular window, at the North-West and through a very big window with a broken arch at the South-West.

The decoration of this room is of curious style.

Its vault is a cupola forming a perfect semicircle, under which is bent an ogival casement falling on 4 capitals supported by the little columns. The spiral staircase of this tower leads to the terrace where from we can have an admirable view of all the fortress and the surrounding landscape.

The second of the three big towers of the southern front of the inner wall is near the middle of this front. It has three superposed rooms. That of the ground floor, which is at the level of the esplanade,

opens on the pillar's room (N° 20), which we have visited on the upper floor of the fortress. The high room receives light at the North through two beautiful, double and rectangular windows divided by a big mullion. It is to be recalled that there is a semicircular « *Coat* » which doubles the second floor of the fortress and constitutes the passage before this floor.

The third big tower of the southern front stands at the S.-E. angle of the front. It also has three superposed rooms of the same level as those of the previous tower.

After visiting the three towers of this southern Front, we go down the stairs which lead to yard N° 16. The arrows conduct us to the door of the inner wall, through which, after gradually descending along the slope of the Access Ramp, we return to the outer door of the Castle.

the Convent of st. George

At a distance of 4 km. before arrival at the Krak, there is a bifurcation. The road on the right takes us to the Convent of St. George which is situated at a distance of 3 km. from this bifurcation.

This Convent is rather well-known as the *Convent of St. George al-Humaira* which latter term is taken from a neighbouring field bearing this name up to the present day.

We do not know the exact date of the foundation of this Convent. It may have been erected during the IVth or the Vth Century A.D., as several monasteries of Syria were built during this period. In accordance with a tradition, it consists of a grotto, the place of which is today opposite the door of the Chapel on the ground floor. This grotto was afterwards neglected and obstructed and, perhaps, substituted by a building of many rooms. The building has a small door near which there was a dormer-window. We can still see this dormer-window and the door (which is 0, 93 m. × 0, 64 m.) in the southern part of the Convent.



Fig. 18 Frescoe found on the outer wail of the chapel.

It is related that the monks who lived in the Convent used to stretch out food to the natives through the dormer-window. It seems, likewise, that through it, some monk used to teach the passer by the tenets of religion. The Convent has a similar door in the western wall provided with a cross in a circle.

The Convent of St. George has been the object of successive restorations through the ages. The major part of the buildings we see today are recent. Yet, only an archaeological study of all these buildings can determine which of them belong to more ancient periods. This study has yet to be undertaken.

Today the Convent has two Chapels, one on the ground floor, the other on the first floor.

The first chapel, which has 4 vaults, is the older one. The iconostasis which probably dates from the XIIIth Century, is of well-carved ebony wood, representing holy pictures.

The chapel on the first floor is spacious and beautiful. It dates from 1837 and has a very fine iconostasis.

The Convent has another 52 rooms (chambers, lodgings, stables and vaults). It now belongs to an

Orthodox religious community, and is the object of several Pilgrimages.

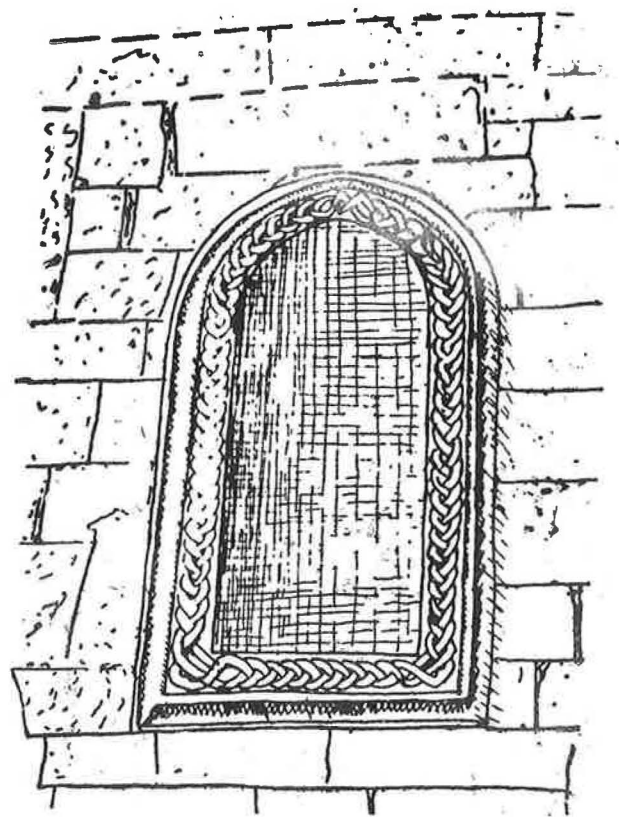
Near the Convent, one can see an ancient caravanserai and a spring called « *al-Fawar* », (the effervescent), which is celebrated in a well-known legend. In fact, tradition has it that this spring overflows and its water subsides when the fields, which belong to the Convent, are irrigated.



Fig. 19 Convent of St. George



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