



The Impact of the Devastating Earthquake in Syria on Harem Citadel - Northwest Syria



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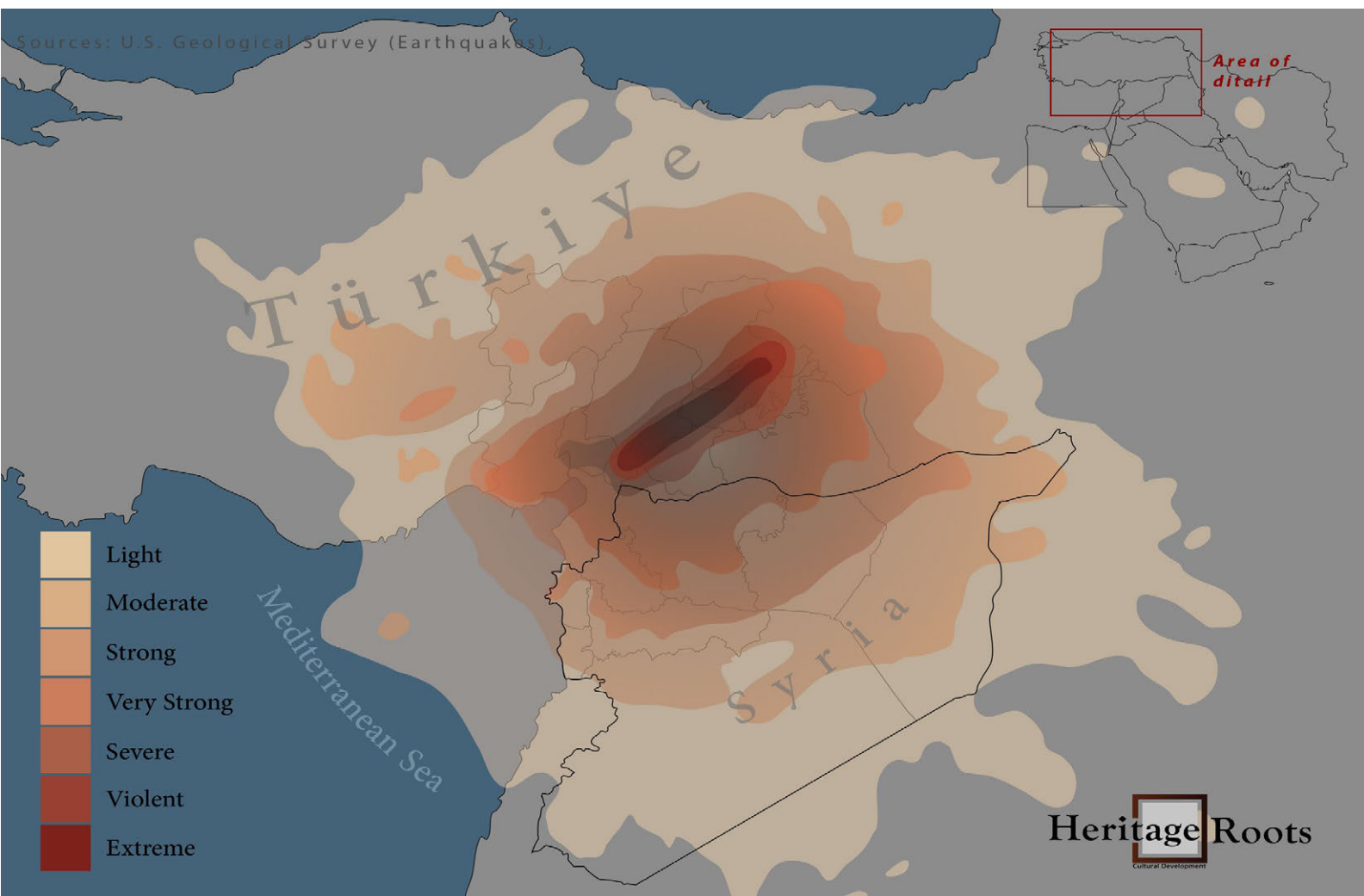
Abdul Rahman al-Yahia / Engineer



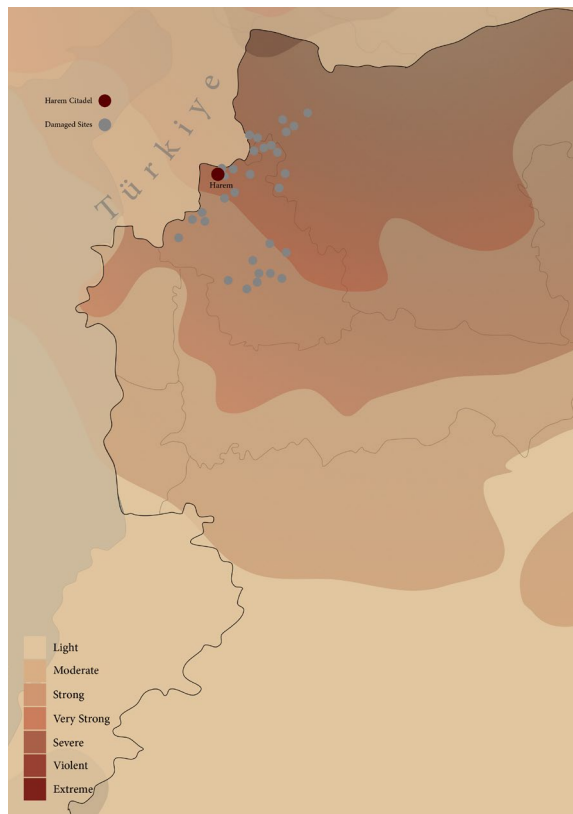
Preface

in previous preliminary reports, we monitored the damage caused in the archaeological sites in northwest Syria and this report is dedicated to Harem Citadel and the damage from 2011 till 2023

Throughout its history, Syria has been exposed to dozens of earthquakes, including the earthquake that struck the coastal cities in 1822 AD with a magnitude of 7.5 on the Richter scale, as well as several earthquakes that hit Antioch between the years 458 and 526, 528 and 859 AD. Each time an earthquake occurred, archaeological sites and historic buildings were damaged. However, the most severe of these earthquakes was the Turkey earthquake on February 6th, 2023 AD, which measured 7.8 on the Richter scale and caused extensive damage and numerous casualties. Archaeological sites were also affected by the earthquake.



The area affected by the earthquake in Turkey and Syria - ©[Heritage-Roots](https://Heritage-Roots.com)



*The area affected by the earthquake and Harem Citadel
Location in Syria - ©Heritage-Roots*

The Syrian Heritage Protection team, which specialized in documenting and evaluating the damage, conducted an initial inspection tour to monitor the damage to archaeological sites in the devastated area.

The Citadel of Harem is situated in the northwestern province of Idlib, Syria, in the Jabal Al-Aala region to the northeast of Antioch. Its strategic location acts as a link between Aleppo, the Mediterranean coast, and Antioch. The castle is built on the top of a cone-shaped archeological hill, overlooking the deep valley to the

west, the Asy River valley to the south, and the old town of Harem to the north. The summit of the hill stands approximately 190 meters above sea level and 40 meters above the surrounding plain.



Harem Citadel

"The Citadel was destroyed during the earthquake that occurred in the year 565 AH/1170 AD. In the year 569 AH/1173 AD, the Citadel was transferred to the rule of Saad al-Din as a deputy by order of king Salih Ismail bin Nur al-Din, the king of Aleppo. During this time, the Citadel was attacked by the Franks, which led to the collapse of some of its walls. Then, in the year 577 AH/1181 AD, Salih Ismail, the king of Aleppo, seized it. In the year 579 AH/1183 AD, the Ayyubid Sultan Salah al-Din took control of the Citadel. Later, the Citadel was affected by several earthquakes, the most important of which were the earthquakes of 1183 AH/1769 AD and 1237 AH/1822 AD. In the year 1248 AH/1832 AD, the Egyptian commander Ibrahim Pasha made it a refuge for his soldiers during his march toward the capital of the



Harem Citadel plan and its most important buildings- ©Heritage-Roots/the plane adopted from Arabic archaeological encyclopedia ref No 1

Ottoman state. At the beginning of the 14th century AH/20th century AD, Gertrude Bell visited it and took some photos of it. The Citadel was listed on the national archaeological sites list in 1959 AD, and some archaeological works were carried out in it in 1961 AD and continued until 2006 AD, the most important of which were the works of the Syrian-Italian mission between 1999-2002 AD, and the works of the national mission in 2006 AD.

The Citadel consists of an outer wall that follows the shape of the hilltop, which takes an oval shape except for the nearly straight northern side. The body of the hill is sloping at an angle of about 45 degrees and was covered with carved stones, of which only small scattered sections remain today. The body of the hill was separated from the rocky plateau on the east side by a ditch about 25 meters long and 8 meters wide."

The main entrance is located on the southwestern side and is accessed through a path that includes several newly built stairs. It consists of a double door, and the outer part is equipped with two L-shaped towers, the southern of which has been completely renovated, and the inner part marks the beginning of the long corridor that leads inside the castle. There is a secondary entrance located in the north-western corner of the first wall, which is much simpler, but it is closed. The outer wall is equipped with three square towers on the south-eastern side, with arrow slits, and the northern side is occupied by several rectangular adjacent rooms used as soldiers' quarters, extending from east to west, and are also equipped with arrow slits. At the eastern end of the hill, there is a huge square architectural facility, measuring 36 x 36 meters, representing the central Citadel or "Donjon". It includes two architectural sections forming the royal palace, the northern section of which is a residential palace with a bathroom and two side rooms, and a staircase leading to the roof. The southern section consists of several rectangular halls lined up next to each other, resembling warehouses or an industrial facility where about 350 arrows were found among the remains, and this building is now dilapidated and covered with rubble. A long corridor runs between the main entrance to the castle and the central Citadel, on the southern side of which a group of twelve shops is located. On the northern side, there are various functional facilities, including a mosque and a bathhouse. A water tank was found on the surface of the castle, which supplied the bathhouse and mosque with water. In the eastern side of the northern part of the castle, there is an entrance that

leads to a vault built of huge carved stones that leads to a spring at the bottom of the hill that supplied the old town with water.



Aerial view of the citadel

The current situation of Harem Citadel:

Harem Citadel suffered from two sorts of damage :

first one as a result of the war and the theft works, and the second due to damage subsequent to the 6 Feb earthquake in Turkey and Syria in 2023.

In the first sort, all the damages were caused by various factors, the main cause of the damage to Harem Citadel was as followings:

- Illegal excavation
- Damage resulting from climate changes
- Damage resulting from neglect and lack of emergency intervention.

The Citadel was subjected to military use by the Syrian regime forces when they entered the city of Harem, which violated Article 4 of the UNESCO Convention of 1954. The Citadel was subjected to random excavations by antiquities thieves with the aim of stealing artifacts and causing damage to

the site. Neglect of the site and the absence of a supervisory authority and a governmental agency responsible for antiquities plus damage to the site resulting from weather conditions.

Main Gate



Main gate from the city



inside the Citadel



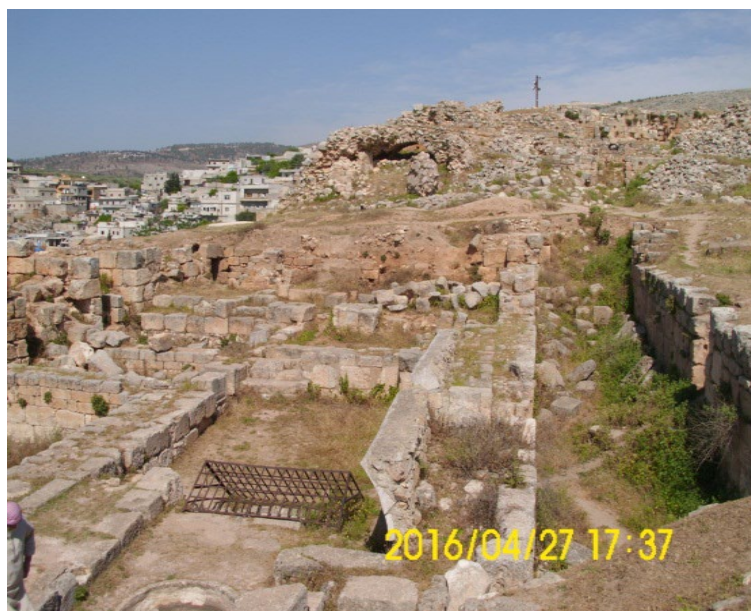


Illegal Excavation



neglecting damage

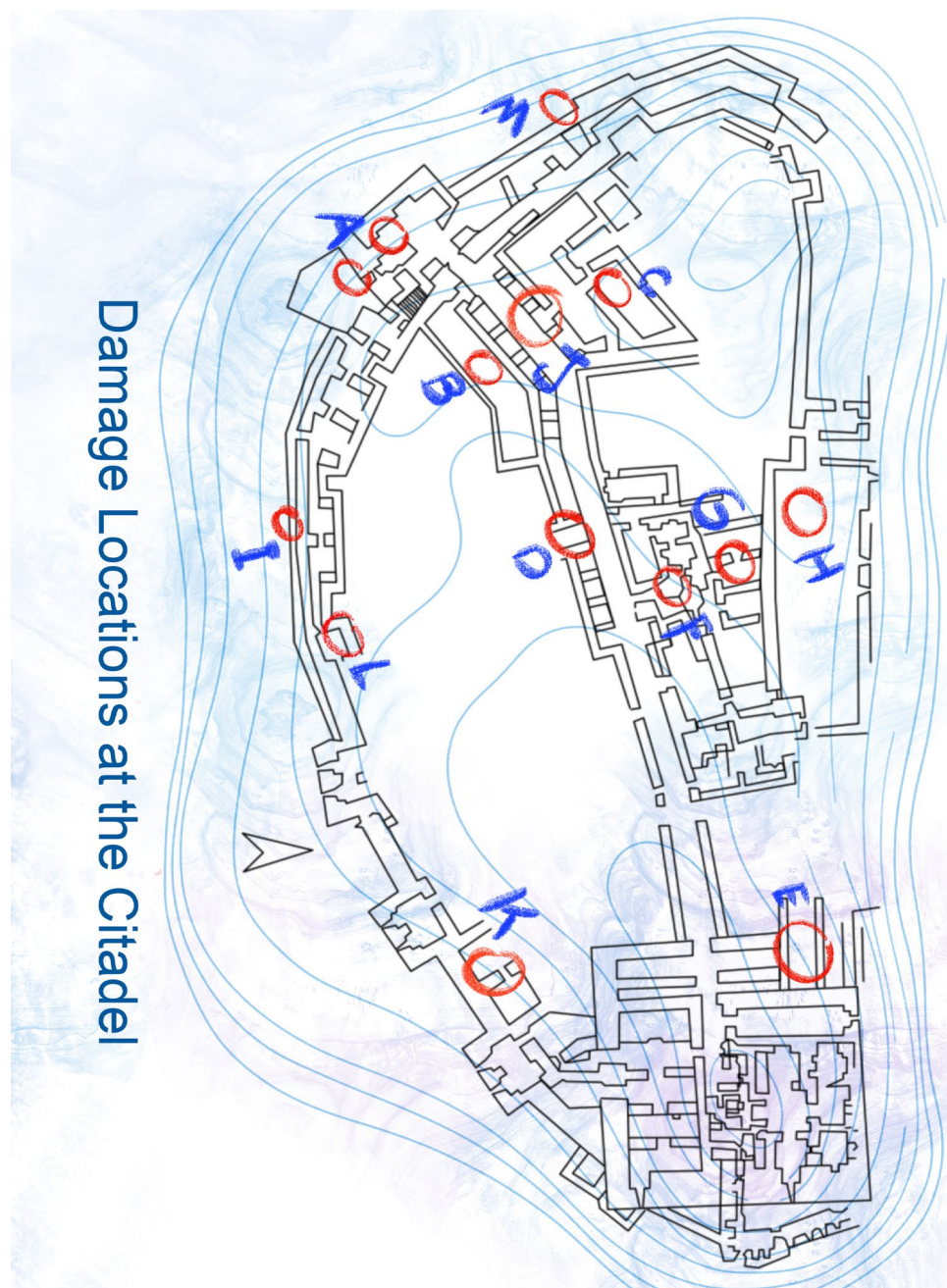




Damage as a result of the Earthquake

The team visited the citadel for the second time and starts documenting and recording all new damage to add them to our archive, in addition, the team starts to evaluate the damage to see if/how/where emergency interventions are required

There are collapsed parts in the front walls and roofs of the internal section, as well as some collapsed walls. The castle is in urgent need of intervention.



Damage at the main gate of the Citadel (*Damage A*)



Stones Collapse (*Damage B*)



The collapse of the facades of the storerooms (*Damage C*)







The collapse of the facades of the stores (*Damage D*)







The collapse of the ceiling of the soldier's area (*Damage E*)





Collapse inside the Bath area (*Damage F*).





Collapse inside the Bath area (*Damage G*).



The collapse in the ceilings inside the inner passages (*Damage I*).









The collapse in the ceilings inside the inner passages (*Damage H*).







The collapse in the ceilings inside the inner passages (*Damage J*).







The collapse of some roofs and internal walls (*Damage K*)







The collapse inside the first wall (*Damage L*).







The collapse of the slabs at the base of the limestone block on which the castle and the outer wall are situated (*Damage M*).





References:

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