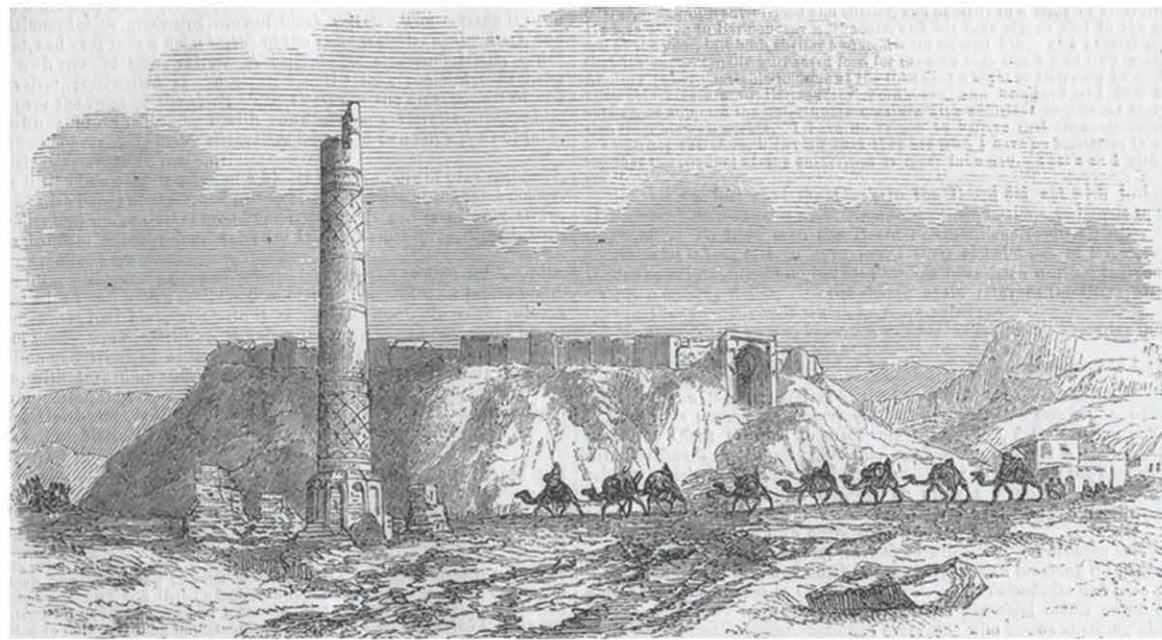


ERBIL CITADEL

6,000 Years of History



• The archaeological mound of Erbil Citadel, which is 32 metres high at its highest point, is the result of the natural accumulation of the remains of successive civilisations over a history of at least 6,000 years. The earliest evidence of occupation is in the **Ubaid** period, the first period in history when many people started to live in towns. Throughout history the high mound was a notable landmark on the ancient “Royal Road” or for travellers crossing the Zagros from the east.



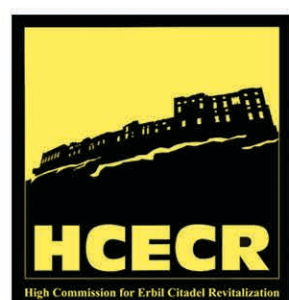
Sumerian clay tablet of Shulgi, king of Ur, mentioning Erbil.

• The first mention of Erbil is in two clay tablets from Ebla in Syria, which mention a messenger travelling here c. 2300 BC. About 100 years later, another records the capture of the governor in the mountains nearby and c. 2100 BC there are many **Sumerian** texts recording Erbil’s incorporation into the third empire of Ur.

• Erbil soon became independent again and by 1716 BC was probably the religious capital of the **kingdom of Qabra**, which in that year became part of the first **Assyrian empire** of Shamshi-Adad I.



Stele recording the victory over the king of Erbil by Shamshi-Adad I, who created the first Assyrian empire.



Alabaster relief from the royal palace at Nineveh depicting Erbil in 657 BC. It shows the lower city, the Citadel on its mound, above which towers the Temple of Ishtar.

• For nearly 1,000 years ending in 612 BC, Erbil was one of the main cities in the Assyrian empire, famous for the **Temple of Ishtar** in the Citadel. The temple housed a scribal school, an astronomical observatory and priestesses who foretold the future. It may have gone out of use when the Assyrian empire was destroyed by a coalition of Babylonians and **Medes**, the possible ancestors of the Kurds, who gained possession of Erbil at that time.

• Darius I unified the administration of the succeeding **Achaeamenid empire** in 521 BC and executed a local leader in Erbil who claimed descent from Median royalty.

• Darius III chose Erbil as his base in 331 BC before he faced defeat by Alexander the Great at the nearby **Battle of Gaugamela** (or Arbela). After the battle, Alexander found Darius’ treasure and royal clothes abandoned in the Citadel. Following Alexander’s premature death, his brother became Governor of Erbil in 321 BC.



Mosaic from Pompeii depicting Alexander’s victory at the Battle of Gaugamela.

• The Greek-speaking **Seleucid empire** was conquered by the Parthians, who allowed Erbil autonomous status as the capital of the **kingdom of Adiabene** (Hedyab), which was prominent in the 1st century BC and 1st century AD, became a centre of Judaism and was later the seat of a Christian archbishop. Adiabene often became a battleground between the Roman/Byzantine and **Parthian/Sassanian empires**, particularly in the key periods of conflict - AD 116 – 118, 195, 216 (when the royal tombs at Erbil were destroyed), 354 and 627.

• The **Ommayyads** developed Mosul as the provincial capital and Erbil temporarily lost its importance, but this returned when Zengi captured the Citadel in 1126 or 1128. In 1190 Sultan **Muzaffer Ed-Din Kokburi** became ruler of Erbil as the capital of an emirate which occupied much of northern Iraq and the city became a noted centre of culture and learning during the late **Abbasid** period.

• Not long after the death of Muzaffer Ed-Din in 1232, the **Mongols** devastated the lower city, although they failed to capture the Citadel, finally acquiring it by negotiation following the siege of 1258/9.



Coin of Muzaffer Ed-Din minted in Erbil.



Siege of the Citadel by the Mongols 1258-9.

• After this Erbil became an important staging post on the route between **Mongol** domains in Iraq and Persia and Central Asia

and China, later becoming successively part of the Black Sheep and White Sheep domains. Between 1508 and 1535 it formed part of the Safavid empire, when its transfer to **Ottoman** rule was accomplished without violence.

• In 1743 the Citadel was besieged for 60 days by Nader Shah, the ruler of Persia, during which the city walls were severely damaged. In 1745 the Ottoman Sultan Mourad I ordered that the defences should be surveyed and repaired, but it seems that only the **Grand Gate** was reconstructed and the remainder of the defensive circuit was replaced by the present perimeter of houses. Even without city walls, the Citadel was difficult to capture and in 1835 the garrison of the prince of Soran was besieged in the Citadel by Ottoman troops.

• In 1918 a **British administration** took control of Erbil. After Iraqi **Independence** in 1932, the establishment of peace and security encouraged the wealthier inhabitants to abandon the Citadel in favour of new houses in the lower town and the Citadel started to fall into decay.

• A new wave of inhabitants came to live in the Citadel from 1986 onwards in the form of refugees fleeing the destruction of their villages by the previous Iraqi regime. In 2006 the KRG decided that they had to be relocated so that the Citadel could be restored and revitalised. The **High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalisation (HCECR)** was formed in 2007 as a dedicated body to care for the site and from 2008 onwards extensive studies were carried out in partnership with UNESCO. Practical conservation and rehabilitation work started in 2010 and now the Citadel is coming back to life.

Golden Ages of Erbil

- Neo-Assyrian period c. 1000 - 612 BC
- capital of the kingdom of Adiabene 1st century BC - 1st century AD
- reign of Musaffer Ed-Din Kokburi 1190 - 1232 AD
- capital of the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq since 2005

Illustrations: p.1: engraving of the Citadel based on a drawing of 1841-3; p. 2: Sumerian clay tablet from Aleppo Museum, Shamshi-Adad’s stele from the Louvre; p. 3: alabaster relief of Erbil from the Louvre; p. 4: “Alexander Mosaic” from the National Archaeological Museum in Naples; p. 5: manuscript illustration from the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalization (HCECR)

