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Seljuk Inscriptions on the Citadel Walls of Sinop

The Seljuks conquered Sinop from the Byzantine Empire of Trebizond/Trabzon in November of 1214. Beginning the following spring, and lasting 5 months through the summer of 1215, Seljuk emirs had 15 inscriptions carved and inserted into the citadel walls of Sinop, which were repaired and rebuilt at the time. These inscriptions give a remarkable “snapshot” of the Seljuk elite, and its practices of building and architectural patronage in this relatively short period of time. They bear the names of 12 emirs, along with notables of 9 Seljuk provincial cities, 3 architects, and one scribe. Supervising the work were two emirs, one of slave origin, the other not.

Most of these inscriptions are of a standard type, giving the name and titles of the ruling sultan, Izzeddin Keykavus, the name of the emir who paid for the stretch of wall and/or tower that bears the inscription, and the date, all in Arabic. And yet, there is a variation in titlature, word order, and format that shows accomodation to the circumstances of time and place. In addition to the Arabic inscriptions, there is also a Persian poetic inscription, and a bilingual Arabic-Greek inscription, the only one known from Seljuk Anatolia.

These inscriptions were published in the 1920s and 1930s, but have never been reexamined. Their contents have been transcribed, but they have never been considered fully in the context of the Seljuk building program in Sinop, nor the structure of the Seljuk state and its patronage. This paper aims to contextualize this rich inscripational program, discussing placement, titlature, and building practices and techniques of the time.