

MY PLACE NABLUS
PALESTINE



All materials used in this Brochure have been contributed by the participants of the project My Place Nablus

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The admission of Palestine as an official state member of UNESCO has marked the recognition of the importance of its historical and artistic heritage. This can be a reason to invite international authorities and organizations to focus on the issue of enhancement of the Palestinian historical heritage and in particular on Nablus old city as one of the most beautiful and important sites of this land as well as one of the most destroyed and abandoned today. The importance of Nablus it lays in the mix of different culture and civilizations that contributed to the building of its roads, palaces and mosques and made it a unique example of Architecture, Art and Archaeological heritage. It's position as cross point for important trade route made also it's cultural tradition a valuable example of multicultural expression of tolerance and coexistence in the Middle East. We can still find today number of vestige of its past but under a heavy layer of destruction and abandon, due to the on going conflict and the disinterest of the international community. Although this difficulties there are few local association and institution and some international NGO who, conscious of this urgent needing are working for creating a restoration plan for the old city. The best wish is the inclusion of its inhabitants in a process aiming to help the local community to regain possession of this precious heritage. One of those institutions is the Nablus municipality who together with a group of scholars and Architects has recently published a plan for restoration of the old city aiming to attract investors who can fund project for rebuilding and adjust the old city. The following is a part of the conclusion of this study:

«Generally the most important value of the old city can be found in its configuration. These configuration may be comprehended and described best by the public space. Squares, streets and paths are, without doubt, the oldest and most lasting elements of a city. Made narrower or wider, overbuilt or disclosed here and there they have lasted through the centuries. The pattern of the Roman city can still be read in some parts despite the impetuous social and political changes through the ages. This assembly of streets and paths must be preserved in its whole structure, or even restored if necessary. The core of the city with its furrows and grooves is the essential building monument [...]»

The project MY PLACE is inspired by this needing of study and research about the past of the city to encourage local population to valorize their cultural heritage. The target groups of this action are the youth of the city who see the valorization of their heritage as one the best investment for their future. The project is a starting point of a wider strategy aiming to support their initiatives in media production to highlight their cultural heritage and to encrease its visibility in their society. The spread of the new media among younger generations along with the freedom of information are among the fundamental pillars of democracy processes in contemporary world. The knowledge of the historical past and the enhancement of cultural heritage are important elements to develop multiculturalism and cultural openness together with the construction of a national identity.



a bizantine column inside the Hambali Mosque



Nablus History and heritage

The current centre of the city of Nablus it follows the urban structure of Flavia Neapolis, the ancient Roman city founded in 72 AD in the valley between the two mountain of Iqbal and Gerezim. Part of this city's structure is still visible in the two main decumani crossing the historic market and intersected by narrow dense thistles that are repeated in succession along the two streets.

Traces of structures and infrastructure of the Roman period are still visible within the city and along the perimeter around it, as a partially preserved Theatre, the roman Ninphaeum, an aqueduct and an Amphitheatre. During the course of centuries and the subsequent domination the city has experienced moments of intense economic development and other neighbourhoods where built next to the original city. Most of the roman monuments were reused, for example the bigger temples and basilicas they become first churches and then mosques in a very interesting fusion of techniques and architectural styles that we find in few other Middle Eastern cities. The four springs near Nablus, governed first by the Roman, aqueducts and cisterns, had helped to make the city even more lush and rich. There are 18 fountains in the historic old city some of which date back to the XVII century. Most of these fountains are still working and in many cases they became beautiful examples of Islamic art.

The general appearance of the city in its present form is due to the seventeenth century, with the consolidation of the Ottoman power thanks to the support of some local Arab families. Its architectural and decorative style in spite of numerous additions and reconstructions of later centuries and especially in the nineteenth century, is still dominated by historical buildings, in which several techniques and decorations schemes of previous centuries are reused in an eclectic way harmonizing the structure in the urban context.



From top to bottom :
A typical decoration from ottoman
period
Al-Shifa Bath
Tuqqan Soap Factory

The old city of Nablus most visible monuments nowadays belongs to the Ottoman period and they were built on the crusader and Mamluk city. Among these buildings are the **Turkish baths (Hammam)**. The town is very famous for its *Hammam*, out of the thirty-eight Turkish bath of historic Palestine where in Nablus but only two of them are now still functioning in the traditional way. In the XVII - XVIII Centuries Nablus was an important Ottoman city, the local governors were powerful and important families who left us some examples of their huge **palaces**. Private houses with walls like fortress surrounding one or more court yard as typical of Arab homes.

The importance of Nablus as a privileged and strategic trade center increased intensely over the centuries, the presence of four **caravanserais**, sites dedicated to the merchants and the storage of their goods, is a testimony of this important role. From the four hinges positioned khans in the historic center were leaving the typical products of the city of Nablus for being resale in three different continents. The production of cotton carpets, made from cotton, growing once in the vast fertile area on the outskirts of Nablus, has certainly played a major role and the cotton textile industry was interested in all markets in the Middle East coming up in Europe. Another important industry linked to the massive olive oil production is the soap manufacture, a thriving industry, developed mainly during the nineteenth century, whose cultural and economic value cannot be ignored. Within the urban structures others important architectural buildings in fact are the olive oil **soap factories**. Of the 32 factories once active in the urban context, unfortunately only two are still working, because of the difficulties of transport and trade in goods for production and the limitations imposed by the occupation. Some of these historic structures were totally destroyed, others have suffered serious structural damage others have been converted into shops, offices, or used as spaces for social activities.



*Typical olive oil soap tower dry sistem in
Tuqqan soap facoty.*

During the twentieth century modern new buildings were made inside the old city, not always respecting the continuity of architecture and urban shape, sometimes breaking altitude or using inappropriate materials and techniques. The Municipality of Nablus has been engaged in a large rehabilitation program, works are been Carried out in haste with the aim of responding to the immediate humanitarian needs of the population but with little consideration for the heritage values of the historic urban fabric. Modern technologies and materials seem to have been used extensively and recent unauthorized additions constructed. The current state of conservation of the rich architectural heritage inside the Old City is precarious but not permanently compromise. The abandonment of the old town by the resident population is unfortunately reason to decline for the entire urban context, several buildings have unfortunately closed and destined to decline, the cultural value of many sites of historical and artistic interest is not always recognized by the people, thus increasing the risk of destruction and vandalism. According to the reports by UNESCO “Missions to Bethlehem, Nablus and Hebron (May 2004),” the cultural heritage of the Old City of Nablus has suffered Extensive losses, due to April 2002 military operations: hundreds of buildings were affected, while sixty-four were severely damaged, seventeen of which has been considered of particular heritage significance thanks to an inventory prepared by the Graz University in 1997-2002. Four buildings were completely ruined, and their sites turned into heaps of rubble or cleared away, creating open and dusty scars in the historic urban area. Another military operation from 15 December 2003 to 6 January 2004 brought further top damage at Qaryun neighborhood resulting in the complete destruction of three residential houses, while another thirty-five buildings were rendered inhabitable and Abdel-Hadi Palace was hit by mortars and also affected by Explosions.

“The old city of Nablus can be considered a cultural treasure not only because it is a typical example of medieval eastern cities of the Islamic world, but also because is a living place continuously developing and moving from one civilization to another. This city is not only rich by the intangible heritage of the people’s traditions, cultural life, habits and behaviors, it is also very important for its architectural values with a number of buildings well representing the architectural local Palestinian style” said us the Architect Naseer Arafat. Despite political instability, neglect, and the Israeli occupation, the city of Nablus city is a living, place, the city markets crowded by citizens and merchants, with their colorful fragrant goods, with their hospitality and kindness encourage the small number of foreign visitors to enjoy the typical flavors of the Palestinian tradition, like the famous local Knafa, a sweet cheese.



a buisy street of the old city market



a knafa sweet shop



In 2002,
Israeli forces planted explosives
which completely destroyed two
Soap Factories in this area

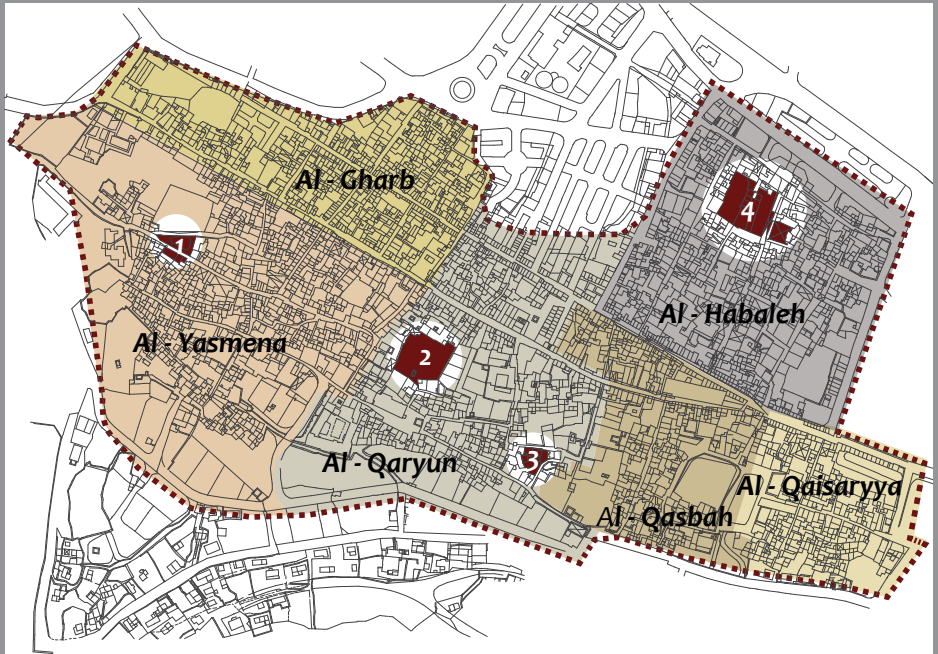


The work of documentation and the case studies :

The following case studies are the result of a two weeks workshop in Nablus old city carried out by a mixed team of young Italian researchers and an-Najah University students. After a number of inspections to the old city and a preparatory work, the team choose to focus on the selected cases for document them. Those once were flourishing palaces of the old city of Nablus that testifies until today the richness of its past and the wellness of the family who use to live there. Unfortunately nowadays this palaces are empty and ruined places. The study proposed is technical survey that aim to show how those spaces can be restored and reused to serve the local community and to shape the old city in a different way. The study is an example of how new generation of local and foreign students would like this space, together with many others in the old city of Nablus, to be. The collected material for this documentation work are just a part of what it could be done to enhance the old city, so their effort is an invitation to do more.

***From top to bottom :
Photogrammetric survey in Hashim house
A student making hand sketches in Hashim house
Photo documentation in Al Nemer Palace***

OLD CITY - CASE STUDIES



CASE STUDIES



1. Al - Yasmena Square



2. Tuqan Palace



1. Hashim House



4. Al - Nimer Palace, 5. Al-Habaleh Square

Al - Yasmena Square



Al - YASMENA SQUARE

Its Located in the west of the old town on the edge of Jasmin district. Is Square triangular shaped resulted from the confluence of three roads. A building In the middle of it has been established in 1996 for social and cultural activities.

The Square is dominated by buildings with one two Levels some of which severy damage during the israeli invasion.

The Al Yasmena Square is dominated by residential use and low commercial activity.



View of the square from south side



View of the square from West side



East-West Elevation

Tuqan Palace



TUQAN PALACE

Tuqan Palace is located in the core of the old city of Nablus in the Al-Qaryun Square and bounded on the north by Al-Nasr Street and Al-Beyk mosque and from the south by Abd al-Hadi Palace

Tuqan Palace is a historical palace located in the old city of Nablus that reflect the political and economic realities of the inhabitants of these houses. This palace is owned by the Tuqan family one of prestigious families of the city a feudal family present in the city since in the late 18 century AC whose ancestor was the mayor of Nablus, Ebrahim basha Tuqan.

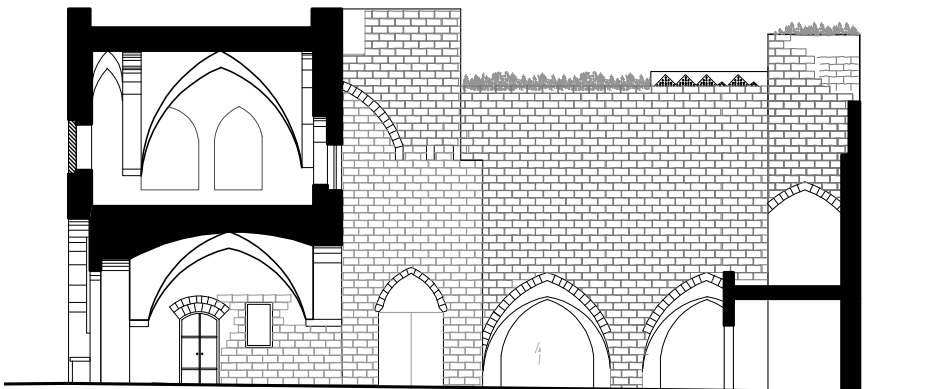
The palace includes five courtyards, each courtyard with rooms distributed around it and each courtyard is for different home guests, as for guards, for the foreign guests and for the family itself .



Ruined domed room on the upper floor



View of the main courtyard



North Elevation

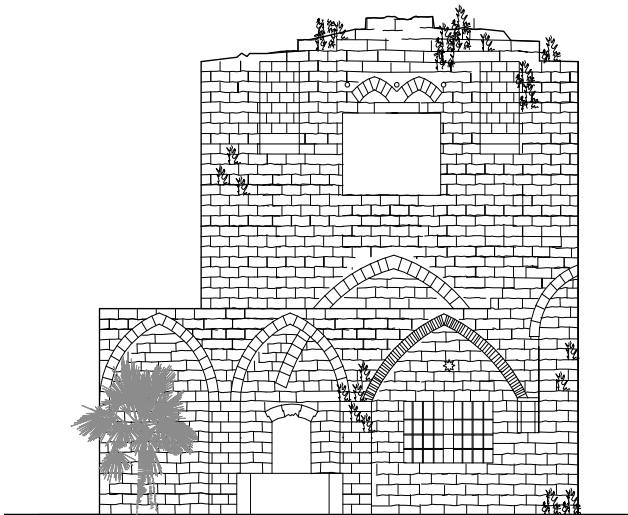
The palace has two entrances to courtyards. Its bigger garden is the most extended of the all old city, it has two entrances from al Qaryun square. The palace was designed as a castle with a high wall to protect the family from the enemies.

The palace consists of three floor plans, the first level contains the main courtyard and the main entrance rooms are distributed around the courtyard guards' rooms and horses stables for summer and winter season. Through the courtyard is possible to reach the second level (first floor) by stairs to get to the guest space, a little courtyard for butler and workers, and finally the area of the ruling family.

For each side there is its own entrance.



Ruins and degrade on the second floor



East Elevation

Unfortunately, the palace tuqan suffered severe damage during the long period of war, due to bombing raids in April 2002, this led to the collapse of the structures of the upper wing and destruction of much of the entire building and surrounding houses, only part of the building is still used as a nursery, a large part of the structure is lying in state of total decay and neglect.

Hashim House



HASHIM HOUSE

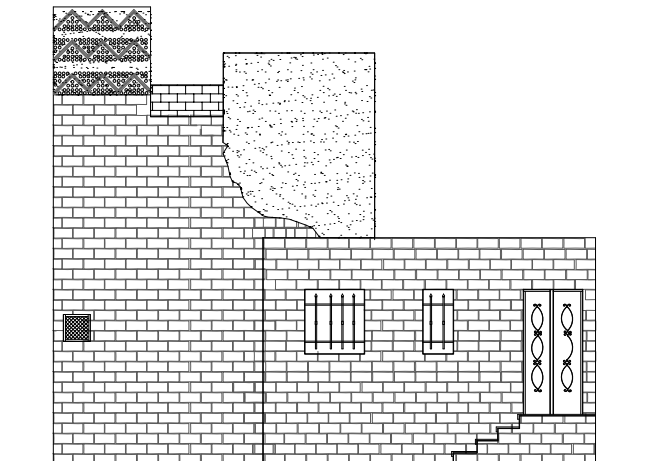
This house can be considered one example of courtyard houses belonged to middle class family of the old city.

It's situated in the Al-Qaryun neighbourhood and is called Hashim house after the name of the family who built it, one of the oldest families of the city.

Hashim house was built between in the second half of XVIII century and has historical importance as an expression of the old architectural style in Palestine and for being built upon the site of the ancient roman Ninfeum the ruin of which is possible to see through the windows of the room on the left side of the entrance.



*From top to the bottom:
Ruins on the upper floor.
Damage room in the
second floor.*



*Hashim house
groundfloor courtyard
survey, west side*

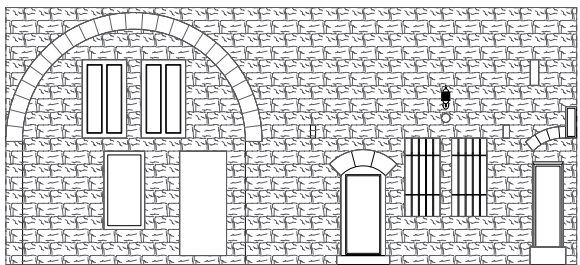
The court yard in the second floor has the particular high wall made by terracotta (pottery) tubes arranged in a pyramid shape joined by mortar, this separation system widely used in Nablus allowed maintaining the privacy of the upper courtyard inhabitants and at the same time provided the circulation of fresh air in the environment.

The built count three levels and in each floor there is a court yard with four or five rooms around it. From the third floor there is a good overlooking to the old city. In the whole building it's possible to see many beautiful details and decorations on the top of the windows and doors, of particular beauty is a big Rosa (circular windows) in the wall of the room on the top of the building.

Hashim house has been exposed to destruction and damaging many times in 2002 during occupation, this house had missed many of its rooms, especially on the top floor by the lack of maintenance. In 2007 it was partially restored and dedicated to public education service for a short period, but for the most of it is still ruined.



***Hashim house ground floor courtyard
photogrammetric survey, east side
below: the roman Ninphaeum***



***Hashim house
ground floor courtyard
survey , south side***

Al- Nimer Palace



AL - NIMER PALACE

Al-Nimer Palace located in the eastern part of the old city of Nablus in Al-Habaleh square was built in the Ottoman period starting from the 17th century. The city passed under Ottoman rule with the commander Abdullah Pasha Al-Nimer who built this palace.

The first floor in Al-Nimer palace was dedicated to horse stables, here there is a nice fountain and a little pool.

Several rooms of the ground floor were used for the storage of goods and another room is now used as meeting room.

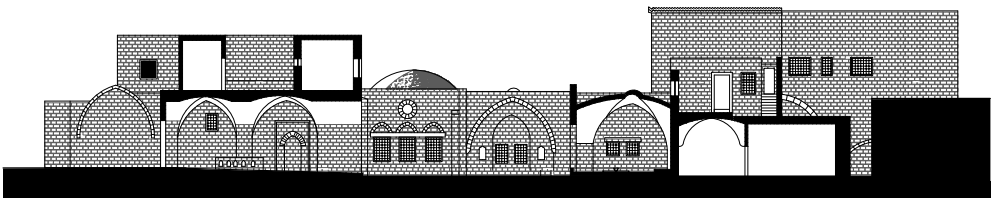
A narrow stair in the main court yard leads to the second floor which was used as residence for the family, from the left and the right two little typical courtyards are surrounded by the family's rooms.



View of the courtyard on the upper floor



Detail of the fountain in the main courtyard



East Elevation

In 1927 an earthquake hit the city and destroyed parts of the palace, al-Nimer family members renew ruined parts using materials such as limestone blocks and cement plaster.

Recently the palace remains home to some of al-Nimer family descendents while the stable turned in to carpentry workshop.

The backyard fence of the palace was destroyed during the israeli invasion of the city in 2002, in the bombing of a nearby house, the fence is still ruined creating degrade in the area.



Restoration work in Al Habaleh Square



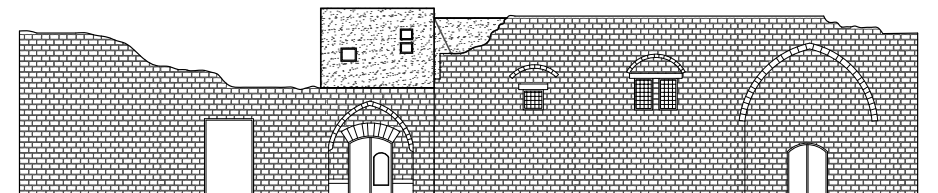
View of the east side street related to Al Nemer Palace

AL-HABALEH SQUARE

Al-Habaleh Square is located in the northeast side of the old town, surrounded by historical buildings and old narrowed alleys.

The eastern side was closed because its bad conditions and is directly linked to al-Nemer Palace.

Al-Ta'aun Organization has recently worked on the restoration of this Square with good results. This last case is an example of how a part of the old city has been restored and reused, serving the local community as a common space



South Elevation

The project :

This project started from the encounter of two organizations: The Yafa Cultural Center the Promoter and its partner Amis-NET an Italian NGO.

The Yafa Cultural Center has a long experience in working with young vulnerable people, while its partner Amis-Net has a good experience in working with media production. The involvement of young European media experts, as trainers and partners, has been seen as a way to bridge experiences, best practices, networking and knowledge sharing on specific topics as well as to promote active citizenship among young people and strengthen their sense of solidarity.

This booklet is one of the results of this project. It is an example of historical and architectural documentation made by young students and photographers on some chosen subjects who result in five case studies. This is not a wide documentation and is not complete, but is just an example of how some young people have worked together for enhancing the local historical and cultural heritage. This work documents not only some historical sites but also the willingness of the younger generation to give a meaning to the heritage of their country and wish for a better place where to live. The project lasted for a month and ended in a workshop that constitutes its core. The experience done and the results are just an invitation to do more.



