



Urgent Heritage Alert#2

Date: October 3, 2024

The Catastrophic state of Gaza's cultural heritage under the deliberate Israeli bombings: Case of Souk Al-Zawiya

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Old City of Gaza, with its vibrant markets, was considered a vital commercial hub for the entire Gaza Strip, attracting visitors from abroad. Its historical importance comes from being located on an ancient trade route that served as the main gateway between Asia and Africa. Gaza City was an important trade rout stop, linking Egypt and India. Due to the difficult sailing conditions in the northern Red Sea, this overland route became a crucial path in ancient times. It began in southern Arabia, where goods from India, Hadramawt, and Yemen came together. Caravans then moved north, passing through Mecca, Medina, and Petra before splitting into two routes—one leading to Gaza on the Mediterranean and the other heading toward Tayma, Damascus, and Palmyra.

This strategic location placed Gaza at the center of trade between Asia and Europe, and between Yemen and the Levant during the winter and summer seasonal journeys. This strategic location facilitated both trade and cultural exchange, shaping the region's historical significance.

At the heart of this historic city lies Souk al-Zawiya, one of the most important markets in Gaza City, known for its historical and commercial value. Having flourished during the Mamluk era, the market is home to many shops, including those selling spices, vegetables, meat, clothing, fabrics, carpets, and household items. This variety has made Souk al-Zawiya a lively center of trade and daily life in Gaza, reflecting the city's rich cultural and economic history.

Architecturally, the Zawiya market, part of the Islamic urban fabric, intertwines with other notable landmarks like the Omari Mosque, Samra Hammam, and the Pasha Palace, reflecting the traditional Islamic architectural style. One historical tale recounts the route taken by the caliph on Fridays, beginning at Hammam al-Samra, passing through the market to check on the people's well-being, Friday prayers (Salat al-Jumu'ah) at al-Omari

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Grand mosque, and concluding at the Pasha's Palace— became the official museum of Gaza City.

The market is deeply connected to the ancient spice trade. Traders from India would often visit a specific area known as the "Indian Zawiya," which served as a resting place for these travelers. Although this corner was destroyed during WWI, a mosque, now called the Zawiya Mosque, was later built on the same site, preserving its historic name.

The market originally consisted of 65 buildings and 1,150 shops, stretching over 250 meters. Despite its historical significance, it faced ongoing challenges, including poor lighting and deteriorating infrastructure. While the Gaza Municipality had been preparing development plans to restore and preserve the market's historical character, the outbreak of the October 2023 war halted these efforts.

The aerial bombings in October 2023 caused catastrophic destruction to this and other significant sites. The market suffered extensive damage during an Israeli military incursion, leading to the complete destruction of many shops, facilities, and historical landmarks; severely impacting the cultural heritage of the area. Other key markets, including the Qaisariyya Souk, Sheikh Radwan Market, and the Stalls Market in Shuja'iyya, also experienced destruction during Israeli military operations.

Despite its significant cultural and historical value, the market has suffered extensive damage, prompting urgent calls for preservation efforts. The ongoing war continues to threaten its integrity and future restoration. Local organizations and international bodies like ICOMOS Palestine are actively advocating for its protection and restoration, seeking to raise awareness of its importance and integrate it into broader heritage conservation initiatives.

In the following pages, we present pictures of the market before the war, along with other images showing the damage it sustained due to the fierce war.



Figure1: A view of the market near the mosque square.

Source: Architectural Department, Islamic University-Gaza 2019.



Figure2: View 2 of the market near the mosque square.

Source: Architectural Department, Islamic University-Gaza 2019.

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Figure3: Mosque of the "Zawiyat al-Hunood".
Source: Muneer Elbaz, 2019.



Figure4: A side view of people gathering in the market for shopping before Eid al-Fitr.
Source: Municipality of Gaza, March 2023.

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Figure5: A view of destruction in the market near the mosque square.
Source: Municipality of Gaza, November 2023.



Figure6: View 2 of the market near the mosque square.
Source: Municipality of Gaza, November 2023

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Figure7: View 3 of the market near the mosque square.
Source: Municipality of Gaza Municipality of Gaza, November 2023.

After presenting these images, the next page will feature an assessment that was conducted remotely, based on information from Gaza locals and its institutions, especially the Gaza Municipality.

Assessment and Analysis of Al-Zawiya Souk:

Historical Value, Recent Restoration, and Current Status

1. Identity of the Site

1-1 Current name and original name: Souk al-Zawiya, commonly referred to as the "Fruit and Vegetable" Market in the Old City, serves as the main market for spices and vegetables. It is also known as the "Market of "Low-Income Employees" and the wholesale market. Locally, it is referred to as Al-Souk Al-Kabeer (The Great Market). The market's name likely comes from its position at a street intersection, or more likely, from its proximity to the Indian Zawiya located inside the souk.

1-2 Classification/ Type of place: A historic, vibrant traditional marketplace reflecting Gaza's rich cultural heritage and social history. It is a popular local (Bazaar) market frequented by both residents and visitors.

1-3 Location: Situated in the heart of Gaza's Old City, near Palestine Square between Omar al-Mukhtar and al-Wahda streets, Souk al-Zawiya covers approximately 250 meters and is surrounded by historical landmarks such as the Omari Mosque, Samra Hammam, and Pasha Palace (Figure8).

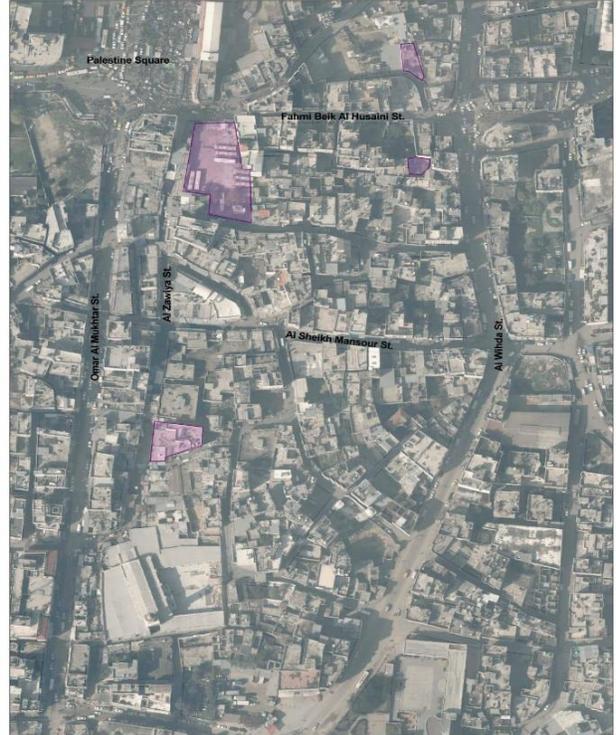


Figure8: Aerial View of Gaza's Old City Market.
Source: Municipality of Gaza, 2022

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1-4 Current Heritage Protection Status: The heritage protection status of Souk al-Zawiya is currently devastated due to the ongoing war. It has been included in the archaeological and historical survey of official records in Palestine, including those maintained by the UNESCO office in Ramallah.

Prompting urgent calls for preservation and restoration efforts. Local and international organizations, such as ICOMOS Palestine, are actively advocating for its protection, emphasizing its significant cultural and historical value. However, the ongoing war continues to threaten the market's integrity and future restoration, highlighting the critical need for immediate action to safeguard this vital historic and economic site.

2. Statement of Significance and History

2.1. Statement of Significance:

- Contribution to Urban Open-Space;
- Economic;
- Hand Craft;
- Emotional, Symbolic;
- Historic; Etc.

Despite the presence of multiple other markets, Souk al-Zawiya stood out as the primary market in the city, known for its wide range of goods. Initially focused on selling spices and leather goods, it gradually evolved into a marketplace offering a wide array of daily necessities. At its peak, Souk al-Zawiya featured shops selling spices, vegetables, fruits, poultry, fish, meat, and wholesale groceries. It was a key destination for Gazan residents throughout the year. Souk al-Zawiya served as a gathering place for all layers of Palestinian society, bustling with citizens, especially during holidays and special occasions such as the month of Ramadan and Islamic holidays.

Souk al-Zawiya was more than just a market; it was a vital commercial and cultural center in Gaza's history, recognized as a significant archaeological site in the Old City. Its architectural heritage linked it to Islamic urban development, with landmarks like the al-Omari Grand Mosque, Hammam al-Samra, and Qasr al-Basha nearby, enhancing the

region's socio-cultural fabric. Even though the market was very important for culture and history, it suffered a lot of damage during military actions, leading to urgent calls for preservation. The ongoing war still poses a risk to its structure and future restoration.

2.2. Historical Overview:

The market's name likely comes from its position at a street intersection, or more likely, from its proximity to the Indian Zawiya, a site frequented by Indian Muslims visiting the tomb of Sayyid Hashim ibn Abd Manaf at the Sayyid Hashim Mosque. The Indian Zawiya, which sits next to the market, features an inscription in Naskh script at its entrance.

Souk al- Zawiya served as a crucial commercial center in Gaza's Old City, particularly known for its spice trade. The souk featured a prominent Indian quarter, "Zawiyat al-Hunood," as described in Sheikh Othman Al-Tabaa's book "Ithaf Gaza". This area, established by affluent patrons, catered to travelers and pilgrims, supported by religious endowments and managed by a custodian responsible for meeting visitors' needs.

After a period of neglect, the quarter was rebuilt in the 13th century. An inscription at its entrance noted: *"The restoration of the Indian quarter was ordered by Abdullah Pasha, seeking the rewards of the Almighty Allah, in the month of Rajab, 1236 AH."* Although later associated with the Indian quarter in Jerusalem, the cessation of endowments led to a decline in travelers. The quarter eventually transformed into a mosque, which became a popular worship site due to its proximity to the bustling market, surrounded by shops that provided substantial income. A custodian would visit annually to collect revenues, leading to discussions about financial accountability. The mosque employed a servant and a "Muezzin" with modest salaries, there was no permanent "Imam," but knowledgeable religious scholars in Islam led the prayers. The Local people also arranged for a Quran reciter to perform daily readings before the afternoon prayer.

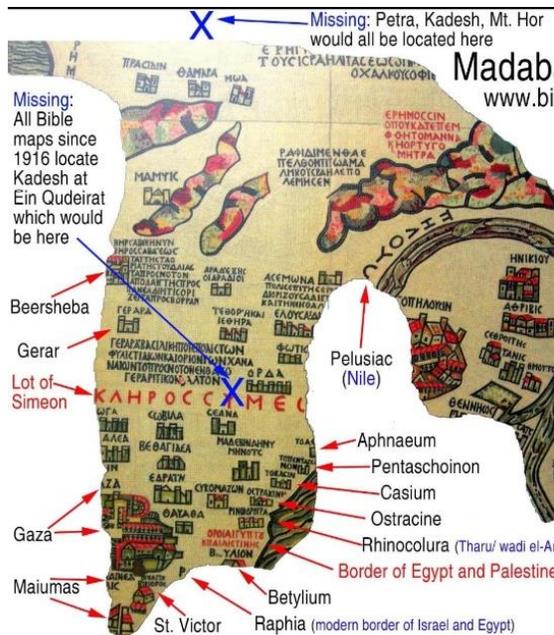
A significant historical figure associated with Gaza is Sayyid Hashim ibn Abd Manaf, the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), after whom Gaza is named "Gaza Hashim." He passed away in Gaza City during one of his summer travels and was buried there, which is why Gaza is called "Gaza Hashim." His name was Amr, then he was called Hashim because of his act of breaking bread to prepare a dish called thareed (or Fattah) for his people in Mecca during a year of famine. In Arabic, the word "Hashim" derives from the verb "hashm", meaning "to break something dry and brittle".

2.3. Date of project/ Date of construction/ Finishing of work

- There have been no archaeological excavations in Souk al-Zawiya. However, during sanitation extension works in the neighboring al-Qaisariyya Souk in 2021, images (Figure 9) documented the discovery of columns from buried layers. Researchers and academics suggest that these findings indicate the presence of a colonnaded street from earlier periods. This remains an estimate, as no formal excavations have been conducted. Figure 10 provides further visual evidence supporting these assumptions.



Figure9: Documentation of ancient columns discovered during excavations aimed at installing extensions for the adjacent market. Source: Muneer Elbaz 2021



Detail of Map Depicting the Northern Negev to the Mediterranean Sea and the City of Gaza, Madaba, Jordan

(Detail of map depicting the Northern Negev to the Mediterranean Sea and the City of Gaza, Madaba, Jordan (mosaic))

Byzantine School

Figure10: Part of the floor mosaic of St. George's Church in Madaba, Jordan

This mosaic dates back to the Roman period and illustrates Mediterranean cities, including Gaza. It showcases paved streets, churches, and the Roman amphitheater, highlighting Gaza's status as a prosperous city during that historical period.

- Throughout the Mamluk period, Souk al-Zawiya flourished as a center of trade and culture, integrating various architectural styles and commercial practices.
- Following the heavy destruction during World War I, parts of the market were rebuilt with modern materials (cement and brick), although it maintained its historical function. Over the centuries, the market has continued to serve as a vital commercial and cultural hub, adapting to various historical events and periods of reconstruction.

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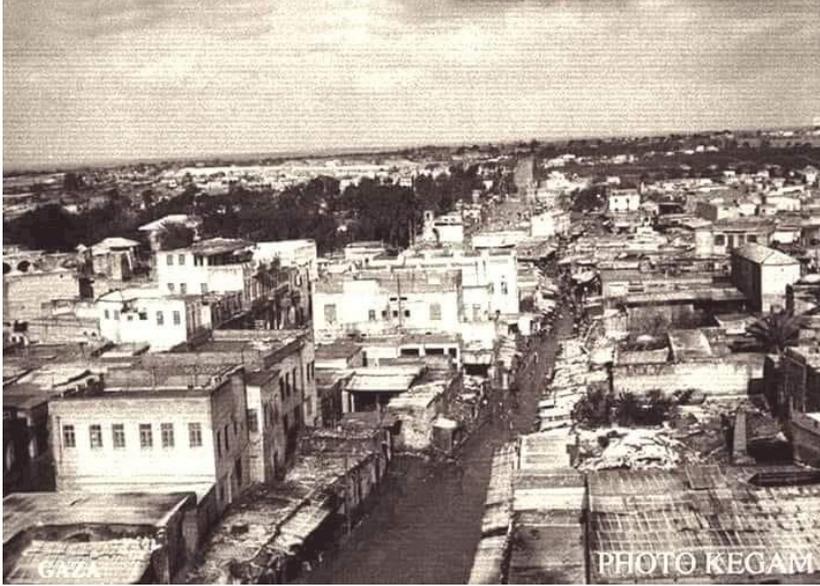


Figure 11: Souk al-Zawiya from the western gate of the Great Omari Mosque towards the west, Source: Kegham Archive.



Figure 12: Entrance to Souk al-Zawiya overlooking the Square from the west, Gaza 1957. Source: Palestine Remembered. [Link to image](#).

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2.4. Current Situation (Post-October 2023):

- **Status Before War (October 2023):** The market comprised 65 buildings and 1,150 shops, extending over 250 meters, with challenges including poor lighting and deteriorating infrastructure.

The Gaza municipality was working to develop Souk al-Zawiya and improve its appearance to match the historical significance of the place. Unfortunately, the war prevented these efforts from being realized. The designs and plans for the market, mentioned in the last item 8-5 of this report regarding Design and Rehabilitation Resources, demonstrated this commitment.

- In addition, before the war, several international visits were organized, including:



Figure13: Visit of the Première Urgence Internationale (PUI) Delegation on April 3, 2023



Figure14: Visit of the Bari Municipality Delegation from Italy on May 1, 2023

- **Damage Due to War (October 2023):** The market was subjected to airstrikes and artillery bombardment since October 2023, causing extensive destruction, with several buildings and shops completely demolished and others partially damaged, which has been documented by ICOMOS Palestine's first report published on November 30, 2023. The bombardment caused widespread destruction in the market, with several buildings completely destroyed and others partially damaged.
- The ongoing war makes it difficult to fully assess the extent of the damage, as continuous bombardments and intermittent strikes cause ongoing destruction. A comprehensive evaluation will only be possible once the war ends.

3. Description (History and Technology)

3.1. Physical Description: The market adjacent to the Great Omari Mosque was one of the busiest areas in the city, especially during the early 20th century. Following WWI, reconstruction utilized modern building materials; however, several historic shops near the Omari mosque preserved their traditional architectural styles, (Figure15 and Figure16).

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Figure15: A view 3 of the market near the mosque square. Source: Architectural Department, Islamic University-Gaza 2019

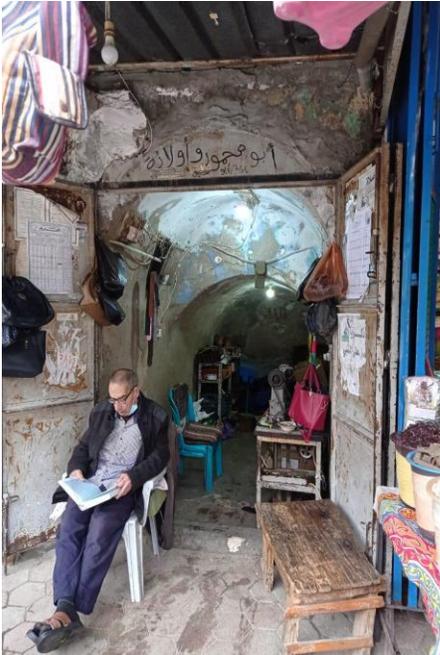


Figure16: One of the historical Shop in Souk al-Zawiya. Source: Muneer Elbaz 2019

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A prominent feature of the market was the Indian quarter, known as "Zawiyat al-Hunoud," which served as a hub for Indian merchants. After its devastation during the WWI, a mosque named "Masjid al-Zawiya", was constructed on the site, further enhancing the area's historical and cultural depth (Figure 3 on page 4).

3.2. Social and Cultural Values: Souk al-Zawiya was vital in the daily lives of Gaza's people and visiting traders, where it served as both a commercial center and a vibrant social hub. The market was the primary destination for those observing Ramadan, providing a lively atmosphere for shopping and community engagement during the holy month, holidays and religious celebrations (Figure17).

The market's rich variety of goods creates a lively atmosphere, reflecting Gaza's cultural heritage and contributing to the local economy. As a significant gathering place, Souk al-Zawiya not only showcases the unique traditions of the region but also plays a crucial role in preserving the social fabric of the community, making it an essential part of daily life in Gaza.





Figure 17: The images display the colorful decorations and goods that fill the market during this festive time. Source: Municipality of Gaza, March 2023

4. Threats

- **Primary Threats:** The ongoing war and airstrikes and bombardment (October 2023-present).
- **Additional Concerns:** Looting and vandalism in the aftermath of destruction; inadequate protection of remaining historical structures.

5- Recommended Actions

- 6.1 Disseminate an urgent Heritage Alert through ICOMOS and upload it to both national and international ICOMOS websites.
- 6.2 Call upon organizations such as UNESCO, ALECSO, ISESCO, the UN Security Council, and the Presidency of the European Union to take coordinated action.
- 6.3 Distribute the Heritage Alert to key organizations for support, including:
 - ICCROM: Provide technical expertise for preservation.
 - Cultural Emergency Response (CER): Offer immediate support for safeguarding heritage.
 - ALIPH Foundation: Advocate for and fund emergency interventions. Additionally, distribute the alert to:
 - International Council of Museums (ICOM)
 - Blue Shield International
 - International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)
 - Europa Nostra: To raise awareness and coordinate support within Europe.
 - International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
 - International Cultural Property Protection Committees

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- Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH): For regional support.
- World Archaeological Congress (WAC): To engage global experts in documenting and protecting Gaza's heritage.

Other actions recommended?

- International pressure to halt further destruction.
- Urgent fundraising for restoration efforts recovery

6. Desired Outcome

- Achieve a permanent ceasefire to ensure safety and stability for restoration efforts.
- Restore Souk al-Zawiya to its pre-October 2023 state, preserving its role as a cultural and commercial hub in Gaza.
- Rebuilding efforts should integrate traditional architectural styles and materials wherever possible, while modern infrastructure improvements should address previous weaknesses like poor lighting and structural integrity.

7- Recommended actions, after the end of war

- Demining,
- architectural and technical survey of damage,
- collection of precious debris,
- consolidation of endangered structures,
- provision of infrastructure, including the rehabilitation of water, wastewater, and electricity networks, as well as other related works,
- ensuring a participation of all shareholders, stakeholders and of the community in general,
- enhancement of all sorts of employment activities, building, crafts and commerce,
- overall architectural restoration including the mosque and its adjacent walls at least,
- a better more authentic redesign of the souk space, shopfronts and lighting,
- and a provision of funding, training, adequate building materials and equipment.



8. Source of Alert

8-1 Proposer(s) of Heritage Alert and Contact Details:

Focal Point:

- Shireen Allan, President, ICOMOS Palestine. Email: shireen.allan.2017@gmail.com

8-2 Partners and Contributors:

- Ayman Abu Shaban, General Director of Urban Services and GIS- Municipality of Gaza. Email: aymanabushaban@hotmail.com
- Muneer Elbaz, Project Manager, Qaysariyya Market Rehabilitation Project, University College of Applied Sciences. Email: melbaz@ucas.edu.ps
- Mohammad Shaqra, International Cooperation Lead - Municipality of Gaza. Email: mshaqra.mogaza@gmail.com
- Nour El-Batrawi, Architect in the Organizing and Urban Planning General Administration - Municipality of Gaza. Email: nour.batrawi77@gmail.com

8-3 Groups supporting Heritage Alert and/or nomination, with contact details

Organizations:

- Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation (CCHP). Email: info@cchp.ps
Manager: Isaam Juha. Email: issamjuha@gmail.com
Head of Rehabilitation Unit: Luma Qumsieh. Email: arch.luma.q@gmail.com
Advisor: Akram Al Ijla. Email: akramijla@yahoo.co.uk
- RIWAQ- Centre for Architectural Conservation
Director: Shatha Safi. Email: shatha@riwaq.org
- Hebron Rehabilitation Committee. Email: hebronhrc@gmail.com
- Taawon (Welfare Association)
Manager: Amal Abu Al-Hawa. Email: abuelhawaa@taawon.org

Official Committees:

- Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
- Municipality of Gaza

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- Hamdan Taha. Email: htaha99@yahoo.com
- Abdelatef Abuhasim. Email: a.abuhashem1965@gmail.com
- Samir Abdulac. Email: sabdulac@gmail.com

8-4 Letters of support for Heritage Alert action, newspaper articles, etc.

- On Nov. 25th 2023, **The Palestinian Ministry of Culture** published a statement condemning the destruction of the al-Zawiya Souk. ([Link here](#)).
- On July 18th, **Gaza Municipality** published a statement on condemning the destruction of the al-Zawiya Souk. ([Link here](#)).

8-5 Publications that describe the work/place, bibliography, etc.

Books and Publications

1. Al-Mubayyed, Salim Arafat. Gaza & Its Strip, A Study for Eternity of the Place and Residents' Civilization: From the Stone Age until World War I, The General Egyptian Book Authority, 1987.
2. Al-Mughni, Nihad. The Architectural Heritage of Gaza, Palestine: RIWAQ, 2007.
3. Al-Tabbaa, Othman Mustafa. Ithaf Al-A'izza fi Tarikh Ghazza: Volume 1 – The History of Gaza from Ancient Times to the Beginning of the Mamluk Era. 1st ed. Gaza: Al-Yazji Library, 1999.

Reports

ICOMOS Palestine

Reports of ICOMOS Palestine regarding the situation in Gaza and the West Bank.

1. Initial Report on the Cultural Heritage Devastations in Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Occupied Territories: Documentation and Gathering of Evidence During the Humanitarian Truce (24 Nov – 30 Nov, 2023), ([Link here](#)).
2. The Cultural Heritage Devastations in Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Occupied Territories (Documentation and Evidence Gathered: October 7th - December 16th, 2023), ([Link here](#)).

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3. Report #3: New evidences indicated the devastation in Palestine: Genocide, Urbicide and Ecocide (Documentation and evidence gathered: December 16th 2023 – January 31th, 2024), ([Link here](#)).
4. Urgent Heritage Alert#1: The Catastrophic state of Gaza's cultural heritage under the deliberate Israeli bombings: Case of Souk Al-Qaisariyya. Published on 27August2024, ([Link here](#)).

Online Resource

1. Google Arts & Culture: "Heritage and Culture of Gaza"
Link: [Gaza Heritage and Culture Story on Google Arts & Culture](#)
2. Google Arts & Culture: "The Story of GAZA Strip"
Link: [The Story of GAZA](#)

Design and Rehabilitation Resources

1. A project proposal that was prepared before October 2023: ([Link here](#))
2. Reconsideration of Al-Zawiya Historical Market Main Part of Gaza City Center before October2023: ([Link here](#))
3. Top view plan/Reconsideration of Al-Zawiya. Historical Market Main Part of Gaza City Center before October2023-: ([Link here](#))