



Palestine Association On Monuments And Sites
الجمعية الفلسطينية للمعالم و المواقع التاريخية

National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)

Urgent Heritage Alert #1

Date: 27/8/2024

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Old City of Gaza occupies one square kilometer within the 56-square-kilometer area encompassing Gaza City. Following extensive damage to its historical buildings during World War I, 259 structures have survived and are currently utilized as either private residences or public buildings. These buildings are concentrated within five primary urban clusters, additional historical structures are scattered among newly constructed buildings throughout the Gaza Old City area. The area surrounding the Great Omari Mosque is recognized as a significant historical urban fabric within the city. Much of this area suffered extensive destruction during World War I, and the remaining structures were subsequently restored. These include:

- The Great Omari Mosque itself and the adjacent al-Qaisariyya Souk.
- The historic shops of the al-Zawia Market located next to the Omari Mosque.
- The al-Samra historic Bath.
- Al-Pasha Palace museum.

During the ongoing Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip since October 7th 2023, there has been systematic destruction of the historical urban fabric in Gaza Old City, with the most severe damage occurring around the Great Omari Mosque. This area includes al- Qaisariyya Market adjacent to the Mosque, which has been targeted multiple times and suffered significant destruction following attacks on the Great Omari Mosque, al-Samra Bath, and al-Pasha Palace Museum.

This report raises concerns about the deliberate and repeated targeting of Gaza Old City's historical buildings, particularly underscoring the recent restoration efforts of al-Qaisariyya Souk, which was attacked mere months after its restoration. It also alerts to the intentional destruction of cultural heritage across the Gaza city, demanding urgent international attention and intervention to prevent further losses.

Al Qaisariyya Souk (Bazaar) is located in the heart of the Old City in Gaza. It has served as a vital commercial center for centuries, providing livelihoods for 120 families and offering opportunities for many artisans and artists, including jewelers, musicians and photographers. The market has fostered a distinctive

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cultural mix, with around 20 per cent of the shop-owners being Christian, contributing to the diversity of the city's community.

Al Qaisariyya was built in the 14th century AD as a complementary part of the southern portico of the Great Omari Mosque built by the Mamluk Sultan Muhammad ibn Qalawun Al-Malik an-Nasir Nasir ad-Din Muhammad ibn Qalawun (1285–1341) in 1329 AD. It was one of the last arcaded and longitudinally designed markets in the region. Passing through the Souk provides a sense of the importance of this unique architectural style, which begins on its eastern and western sides with two large gates. The eastern gate is distinguished by the Mamluk style, topped with rounded and pointed arches decorated with marble stones in the colours of sugar and terracotta. The gates lead to a narrow corridor about 60 metres long and 3.2 metres wide, with 44 small shops on either side. This alley is covered by a pointed vault with openings, which provide natural light and ventilation. At the centre of the alley is an octagonal dome, defining an important axis that runs perpendicular to the Souk's alley and the southern entrance to the Al-Omari Mosque.

The Souk's location in the heart of the city and its proximity to the Al-Omari Mosque and other markets, including Khan al-Zayt, evidences of its importance. It was previously used for goldsmiths and al-Attaris (spices), while before October 2023 it was mainly used as a jewelry Souk.

Despite this well-known historical importance, during the first three months of the war, al-Qaisariyya was hit by two massive strikes that led to the destruction of large parts of it, followed by a brutal strike in July, 2024. This marked the third major attack since October 2023. UNESCO's assessment as of June 2024 confirmed the damage to 50 cultural sites in Gaza, including Al-Qaisariyya Souk, stressing the need for urgent international intervention to preserve these irreplaceable cultural assets¹.

Similar to most cultural heritage sites in the Gaza Strip, the Souk was further deliberately targeted by aerial and artillery bombardments, resulting in great loss. Despite global condemnation of these attacks, **the Souk, including the eastern gate, a historic entrance to the Old City, was completely destroyed, many shops were severely damaged**, and the main cross dome, a critical architectural feature, was destroyed, leaving the remaining structures in dire need of intervention.

The destruction of the al-Qaisariyya Souk is a clear violation of numerous international conventions designed to protect cultural and historical sites. These deliberate and repeated acts are a flagrant violation of international laws, such as the 1954 Hague Convention and the 1972 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. These acts demand accountability for the violations and an immediate halt to further damage.

¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/gaza/assessment>

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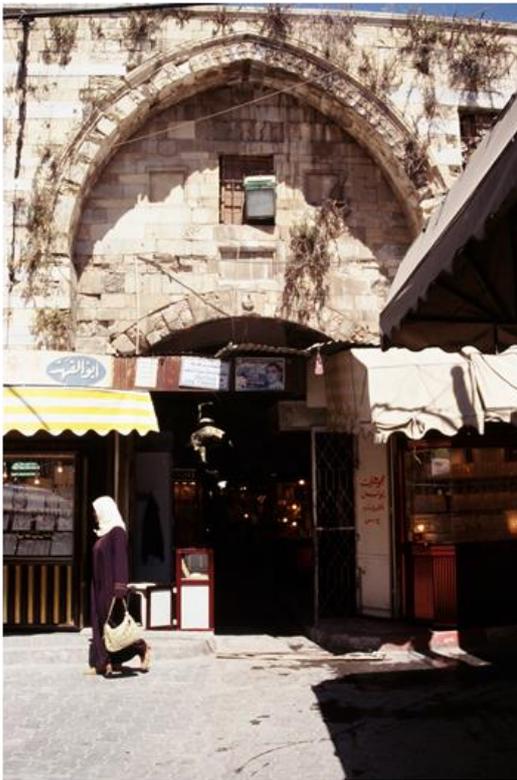
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Completed between 2020 and 2023, the al-Qaisariyya Souk Preservation Project, led by the Gaza Municipality, civil society organisations and academic institutions, aimed to restore the structural and stylistic integrity of the Souk, reflecting its unique architectural design. Subsequent attacks have undone most of this progress, leaving the Souk in a dangerous state that requires urgent intervention. Despite this situation, hope remains for future restoration and protection efforts, as this ancient heritage site is at risk of further deterioration, which could lead to the loss of an essential part of Gaza City's cultural and economic fabric. Immediate action must be taken to preserve al-Qaisariyya Souk for future generations and humanity, not only as a heritage icon, but also as a livelihood and a source of cultural diversity in the region. Protecting this Souk is an international obligation and a common responsibility to ensure that humanity's rich heritage is preserved and celebrated.



Mughni, N. (2007). The Eastern Gate. The Architectural Heritage of Gaza (page 117). Palestine: RIWAQ.



Al-Mughni, N. (2007). Inside the Souk. The Architectural Heritage of Gaza (page 119). Palestine: RIWAQ.

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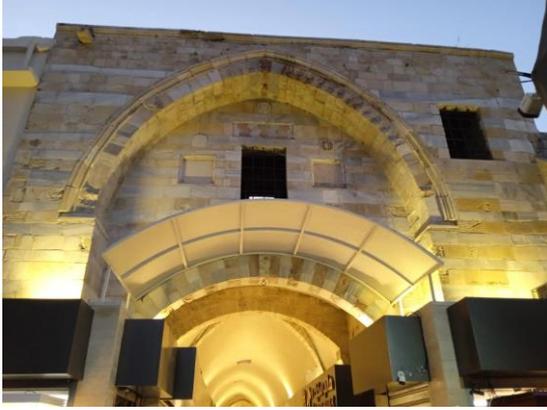


Photo by Ayman Abu Shaaban, Engineering Department, Gaza Municipality (2023). The Eastern Gate.



Photo by Ayman Abu Shaaban, Engineering Department, Gaza Municipality (2023). Octagonal Dome



Photo by Damage Assessment Committee (2024). The Eastern Gate.



Photo by Damage Assessment Committee (2024). Damage Documentation Photo Inside the Souk.



Photo by Damage Assessment Committee (2024). Damage Documentation Photo of the Octagonal Dome.



Photo by Damage Assessment Committee (2024). Damage Documentation Photo Inside the Souk.

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Assessment and Analysis of Al-Qaisariyya Souk: Historical Value, Recent Restoration, and Current Status

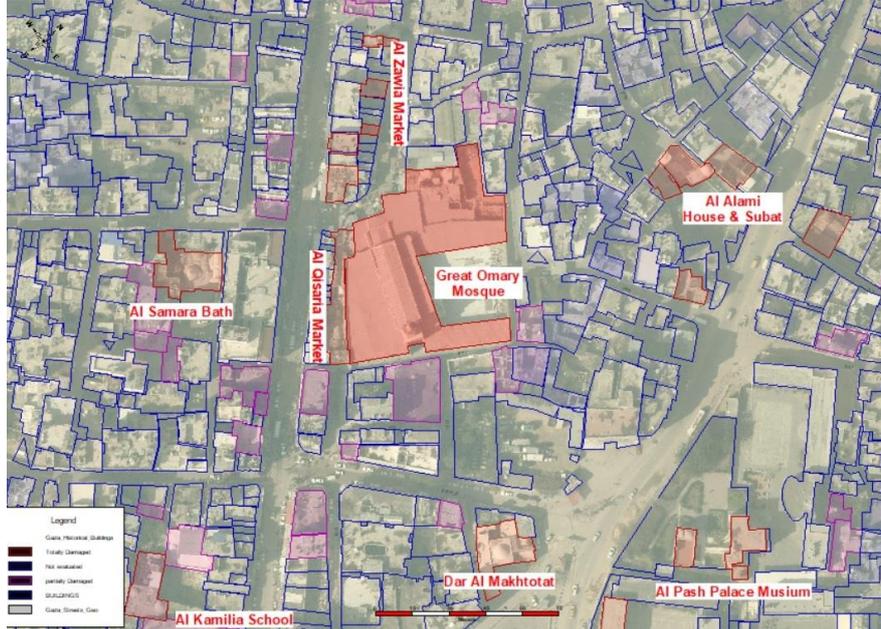
1-0 Identity of Place

1-1 Current name and original name.*

Al-Qaisariyya Souk (Bazaar) as well-known as the Gold Market

1-2 Location Town, Country, Street

Gaza Old City, Gaza City, Gaza Strip, Palestine



A GIS site plan prepared by Gaza Municipality Engineer Ayman Abu Shaban, 2022.

1-3 Classification/ Type of place

Archaeological Market (Bazaar)/ Urban Area

1-4 Current Heritage Protection Status

Currently the market needs full reconstruction for the eastern side of the market and restoration for the remaining parts of the market

2-0 Statement of Significance and History

2-1 Statement of Significance

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

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Al-Qaisariyya Souk, also known as the Gold Market, the last arcaded and longitudinally designed markets in the region. Passing through the Souk provides a sense of the importance of this unique architectural style on both national and regional levels.

Al-Qaisariyya is providing direct-jobs for 120 families in this very poor city as well providing tens of opportunities for crafts that are related to jewellers' handicrafts. Around 20% of shop-owners are Christians. It is also providing opportunities for creative industries such-as music, photography and film-making. As well as the internal tourism.

Al-Qaisariyya Souk, along with Al-Zawiya Souk, forms a vital commercial and cultural hub in Gaza City. These markets, located next to the Grand Omari Mosque, enhance the cultural and social significance of the area, attracting visitors from all walks of life and contributing to cultural and economic interaction in Gaza. Together, Al-Zawiya Souk and Al-Qaisariyya Souk are part of the city's historical heritage, representing an essential part of Gaza's urban fabric.



Documentation of market locations using GIS by ICOMOS Palestine, 2023

2-2 History of place

In the heart of the historic centre of the old city of Gaza, is al-Qaisariyya Souk. Because it is the last covered Souk in the Gaza Strip and was constructed during the Mamluk Era (before 1350 AD). It is registered as a protected monument in the lists of governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Historically, the east gate of al-Qaisariyya was the main gate to Gaza's old city. Al-Qaisariyya constitutes the east part of the historical commercial route. The west part of al-Qaisariyya was demolished in the beginning of the twentieth century before and during World-War-I. The doors of the east gate were removed in the mid twentieth century.

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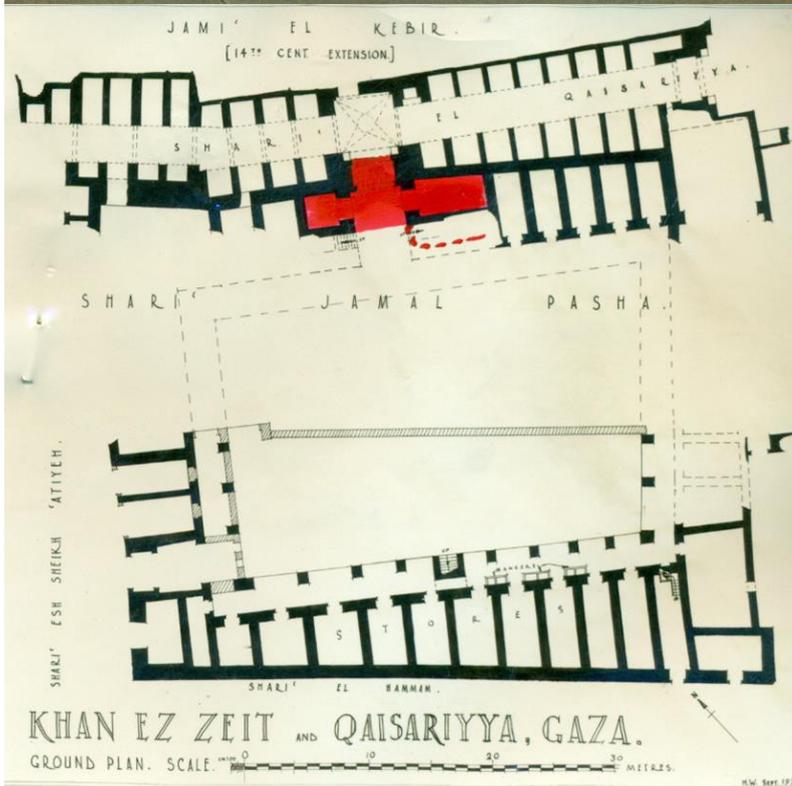
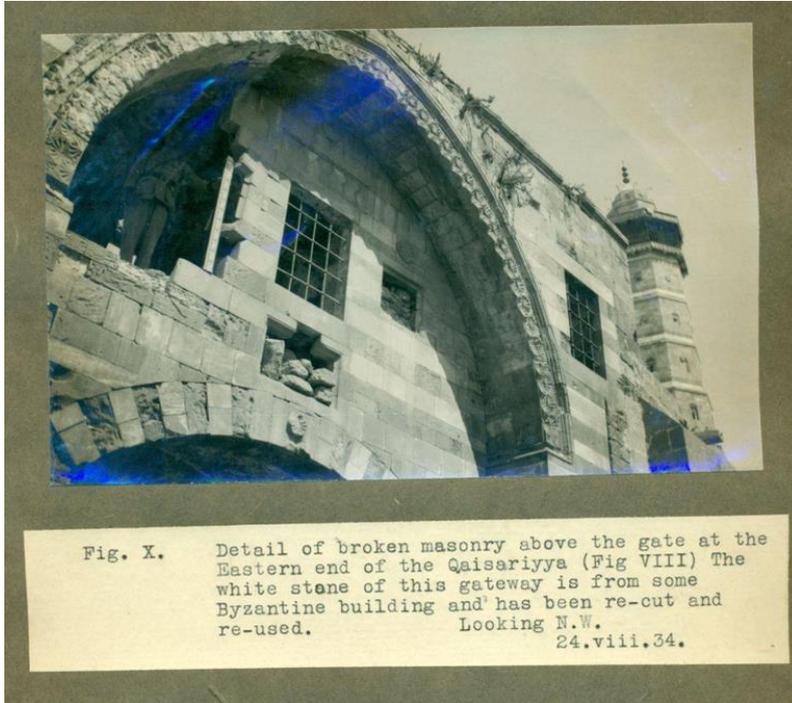
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Fig. VIII. Gateway at the East end of the Qaisariyya.
Looking W. 24.viii.34.



Fig. IX. Eastern part of the North side of the Khan showing
the inner N.W. corner of the lower arcade (Just
behind the head of the boy in the foreground.)
Looking N. 22.viii.34.



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2-3 Date of project/ Date of construction/ Finishing of work
Al-Qaisariyya was constructed in 1329 AD. The Souk, particularly the eastern gate, was restored during the British mandate and under the auspices of the Islamic supreme Council. Recently, the Souk went through a restoration. The project commenced in 2020 and was completed in August 2023.



Photos by Engineer Ayman Abu Shaban, Gaza Municipality. The market after the completion of restoration work from inside, 2023.

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2-4 Architect/Designers

Phase One: 2020-2021:

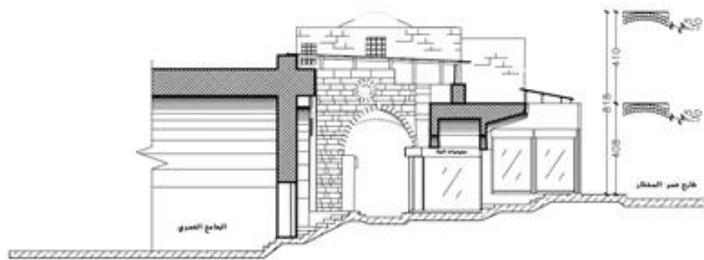
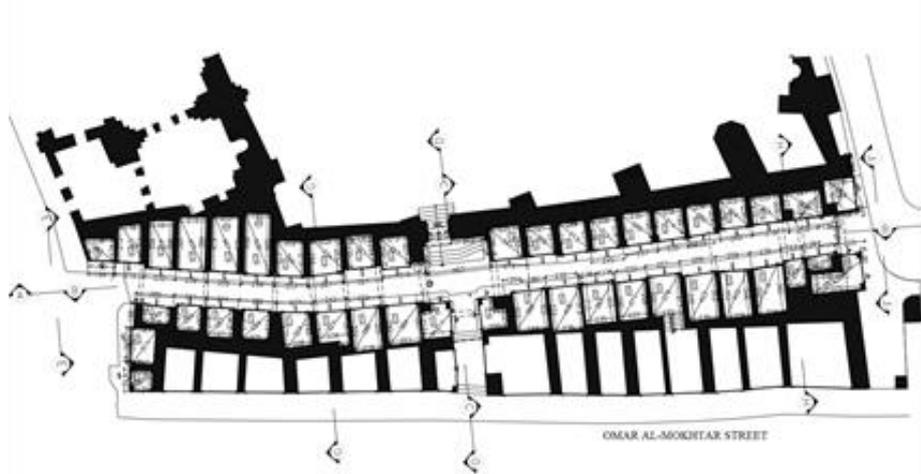
A- University College of Applied Sciences:

- Project Manager, cultural heritage expert: Arch. Muneer Elbaz
- Stormwater engineer (hydraulic-hydrologic expert): Dr. Tamer Eshtawi
- Building construction expert: Dr. Mahmoud Jahjouh
- Geo-Technical expert: Eng. Luay I. Qrenawi
- Site Manager: Eng. Hassan Salama
- Site engineer: Eng. Fawaz Baker

Phase Two: 2021-2023

A- University College of Applied Sciences:

- Project Manager, cultural heritage expert: Arch. Muneer Elbaz
- Site Manager: Eng. Hassan Salama
- Site engineer: Eng. Hazem Hillis



SECTION C-C LAYOUT 1/100

Rehabilitation Drawings. Gaza Municipality. The Project "The Conservation Project of al-Qaisariyya Bazaar Phase -II", 2022.

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B- RIWAQ Center for Architectural Conservation

- Architect: Michel S. Salameh
- Other members from RIWAQ

C- GIRIH for Design & Sustainable Solutions

- Architect: Rashid Yousif Al-Ruzzi
- Architect: Ghada Zeiada
- Other members from GIRIH

2-5 Original and current use of building/place

Original use of the building till 1960s: selling leather shoes and sandals

Current use of the building: gold market

2-6 Changes, additions

During the phase-two of the conservation project, several constructions work implemented such as:

- Typological reconstruction for the main cross vault of the Market according to the historical documents.
- By using lime stones material and metal-materials, a new entrance was built in the west side of the market .

2-7 Current condition and use

During the ongoing war on Gaza (after 7th October 2023): The Market was attached several times. The east-gate was completely destruction. Around six to eight shops were demolished. The north walls of the market were affected very badly. The main cross-vault had been destructed. The remaining parts for of the market is very bad condition and needs an urgent interventions.

2-8 Original design intent and use

Market for commercial use

3-0 Description (history and technology)

3-1 Physical description

Historically, the east gate of Al-Qaisariyya was the main gate of Gaza old city. As well as Al-Qaisariyya is the east part from the historical commercial route. The west part from Al-Qaisariyya was demolished in the beginning of the twentieth century before and during World-War-I. The doors of the east gate were removed in the mid of twentieth century.

The dimension of the ground-floor is 9m width and 60m length. The central passageway is 3.2 m width and the clear dimensions for the 44shops are varying according to its location but generally they are around 2m width and 2m length. A central-entrance hall is located at the mid of the market passageway. This hall plays a connection role between the market, Al-Omari Mosque and the remaining shops of Khan Ez-Zeit.

Before the last conservation project for Al-Qaisariyya (2020-2023), the site physical conditions were:

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The original stones, walls, vaults and finishes were in poor condition and need urgent interventions. The air-conditioning network was installed without respecting the historic value of the monument; it also imposed a major threat to individual lives. Unsuitable decoration works in-side the shops. The central cross vault and west entrance of Al-Qaisariyya were destroyed during the WWI. Roof needed a better isolation, maintenance and drain system. The un-controlled extensions and illegal encroachments were in many parts of the Market.

3-2 Construction system used

Sand stone walls, lime stone walls, several types of vaults and arches

3-3 Physical context/setting

In the historic complex of the old city of Gaza, is Al-Qaisariyya Souk. It is the last covered Souk in Gaza Strip and it was constructed during the Mameluke Era (before 1350AD). It is registered as a protected monument in the lists of governmental and non-governmental institutions.

3-4 Social and cultural context and value

Al-Qaisariyya as well-known as the Gold Market is providing direct-jobs for 120 families in this very poor city as well as it is providing tens of opportunities for crafts that is related to jewelers' handicrafts. Around 20% from shop-owners are Christians and they essential parts of the market 's community. It is also providing opportunities for a creative industries such-as music, photography and film-making. As well as the internal tourism.

3-5 Materials/fabric/form/function

Materials are: sand stone walls, lime stone walls, several types of vaults and arches.

Fabric: the market located in Historic-Islamic-Urban fabric.

Form: The market has a liner form. The dimension of the ground-floor is 9m width and 60m length

Function: Commercial

3-6 Aesthetic value

The market has very high aesthetic value in Gaza city because of:

- The beautiful Mamluk gate in the east side of the market. Unfortunately, this gate had been destructed during the ongoing war.
- A fantastic Islamic script on marble stones in the central hall of the market.
- The sky-light in the central of the cross-vault and ventilation openings along the passage's roof giving a wonderful and peaceful environment.

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4-0 Source of Alert

4-1 Proposer(s) of Heritage Alert and Contact Details:

Focal Point:

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

Partners and Contributors:

- Muneer Elbaz
Project Manager, Qaysariyya Market Rehabilitation Project, University College of Applied Sciences
Email: melbaz@ucas.edu.ps
- Ayman Abu Shaban
General Director of Urban Services and GIS- Municipality of Gaza
Email: aymanabushaban@hotmail.com

4-2 Groups supporting Heritage Alert and/or nomination, with contact details Organizations:

- RIWAQ- Centre for Architectural Conservation
Director: Shatha Safi. Email: shatha@riwaq.org
- Taawon (Welfare Association)
Manager: Amal Abu Al-Hawa. Email: abuelhawaa@taawon.org
- Hebron Rehabilitation Committee. Email: hebronhrc@gmail.com
- 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

Official Committees:

- Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
- Municipality of Gaza

Academics and Experts:

- Zaki Aslan. Email: aslan.zaki@gmail.com
- Ali Abdelhamid. Email: abhamid@najah.edu
- Hamdan Taha. Email: htaha99@yahoo.com

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4-3 Groups potentially against Heritage Alert action None

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

- On July 5th, **ICOMOS Palestine** published a statement condemning the destruction of the Al-Qaisariyya Souk in Gaza, ([Link here](#)).
- On July 8th, **The Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities MoTA** published a statement condemning the destruction of the Al-Qaisariyya Souk, ([Link here](#)).
- On July 18th, **Gaza Municipality** published a statement on X- (Twitter) condemning the destruction of the Al-Qaisariyya Souk, ([Link here](#)).



بيان صحفي صادر عن بلدية غزة

الاحتلال الإسرائيلي يلحق أضراراً كبيرة في سوق القيسارية الأثري

ألحق الاحتلال الإسرائيلي أضراراً كبيرة في سوق القيسارية الأثري المعروف بسوق الذهب في البلدة القديمة والمباني المجاورة له بعد قصف المنطقة ضمن سلسلة استهداف المباني الأثرية والتاريخية المتمتع الذي ترتكبه قوات الاحتلال منذ بداية العدوان وحرب الإبادة الجماعية.

وبينت البلدية أن الأضرار تركزت في الجزء الشرقي للسوق حيث تدمر المنخل وجزء من السوق والمباني المجاورة له.

ويقع السوق الأثري في حي الدرج في قلب البلدة القديمة بمدينة غزة، ويلاصق المسجد العمري الكبير من الجهة الجنوبية ويرجع تاريخه إلى العصر المملوكي (1260-1517 م) ويستخدم كسوق مركزي للذهب والحلي في مدينة غزة.

يذكر أن بلدية غزة كانت قد أجرت قبل العدوان أعمال ترميم للسوق بالتعاون مع وزارة السياحة والكلية الجامعية للعلوم التطبيقية تم خلالها إنشاء بنية تحتية للسوق إضافة لترميم الواجهات.

وكان الاحتلال الإسرائيلي قد تعمد خلال عدوانه على غزة استهداف المباني الأثرية والتاريخية في المدينة ومنها المسجد العمري الكبير، وكنيسة "بيرفيريوس"، وقصر الباشا، وحمام السمرة، ومقر بلدية غزة الأثري، وبيت السقا وبيت العسفين الأثريين.

وتدعو بلدية غزة منظمة الثقافة والعلوم الدولية اليونسكو لضرورة التحرك العاجل وإدانة جرائم الاحتلال بحق المباني الأثرية وحماية المباني والمراكز الثقافية في غزة وفلسطين.

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Palestine Association On Monuments And Sites
الجمعية الفلسطينية للمعالم و المواقع التاريخية

National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)

4-5 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.

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).
2. The Cultural Heritage Devastations in Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Occupied Territories (Documentation and Evidence Gathered: October 7th - December 16th, 2023).
3. Report #3: New evidences indicated the devastation in Palestine: Genocide, Urbicide and Ecocide (Documentation and evidence gathered: December 16th 2023 – January 31th, 2024).

Online Resource

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

Design and Rehabilitation Resources

1. Intervention Design Drawing: Link ([here](#))
2. Rehabilitation Drawings: Link ([here](#))
3. Al-Qaisariyya 3D before and after: Link ([here](#))
4. Al-Qaisariyya Bazaar: Link ([here](#))

4-6 Time constraints for advocacy (immediate action/delayed action)

- Immediate action required to prevent further loss.

5-0 Recommended action

- 5-1 Disseminate an urgent Heritage Alert through ICOMOS.
- 5-2 Calls to international organizations such as UNESCO, ALECSO, ISESCO, the UN Security Council, and the Presidency of the European Union.
- 5-3 Upload the Heritage Alert to the ICOMOS National and International websites.
- 5-4 Distribute the Heritage Alert to affiliated organizations such as the Global Heritage Fund, World Monuments Fund, and others. Key organizations include:

- I. International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM): **For technical expertise.**

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- II. Cultural Emergency Response (CER): For immediate support and rapid response in safeguarding Gaza's heritage.
- III. ALIPH Foundation: To advocate for and fund emergency interventions.

Additionally, please distribute the alert to:

- IV. International Council of Museums (ICOM)
- V. Blue Shield International
- VI. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)
- VII. Europa Nostra: to raise awareness and coordinate support within Europe.
- VIII. International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- IX. International Cultural Property Protection Committees
- X. Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH): for regional support.
- XI. World Archaeological Congress (WAC): to engage global experts in documenting and protecting Gaza's heritage.

5-5 Other actions recommended

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

6-0 Desired Outcomes

The primary need is to end the war to protect and preserve the heritage.

- 6-1 Halt all destructive activities caused by the war to preserve the heritage.
- 6-2 Prevent any actions that lead to permanent damage, by ending the war.
- 6-3 Focus on stopping the war to ensure existing legal protections are effective.

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