

The Historical Review as a Reference for the Islamic Heritage Restoration (Case Study: As-Sayyid Hashim Mosque)

Ziad M. M. Shehada¹

Abstract

The historical study of a built heritage is an essential element in supporting the process of conserving such tangible heritage. The restoration process of a heritage goes further than preserving or repairing the building, as it includes restoring the building to its original form by applying the mechanisms and methodologies that are effective in maintaining the building in such form. This research aims to highlight the importance of the history in guiding the restoration process of the heritage projects. This research has selected the As-Sayyid Hashim Mosque in Gaza City as a case study due to the significance of the grave of the grandfather of the Prophet Muhammad located inside the mosque. The researcher followed the field reconnaissance to understand the depth of the historical study that guided the restoration process, and whether the outcome of the restoration process was compatible with the original form. The researcher found a direct relation between history and value; when the restoration process of a building relies on historical studies, the value of the building gradually increases to significant amounts.

Keywords: Historical Review, Heritage, Restoration, As-Sayyid Hashim Mosque, Value

1. Introduction

History is a branch of social science that studies the past. Historians study documents related to past events and produce new research documents based on their studies. Architects and consultants, including those working in the field of building conservation, are not usually interested in history (Wells, 2018). Their work focuses on the knowledge and experience of their own field, which, unfortunately, may not always be effective, given the wide-ranging nature of restoration works varied by time and place. The main aim of the conservation process is to restore a built heritage to its original form by using the same materials as much as possible (Brebba & Binda, 2011). If new materials or parts were added, this change should be mentioned or documented so as not to distort or change the historical facts which may confuse future visitors or researchers.

A restoration process is defined as a therapeutic and philosophical approach in architectural preservation. It differs from conservation as it allows the removal of some historical materials to specifically create a portrayal of a specific time period, which may not necessarily be the original or most recent time periods of the life of the building (Orbaşlı, 2017). The restoration projects of current times follow various methods to preserve a built heritage; some methods would change the forms and shapes, including the interior design, by using different materials. The key consideration in this issue is the historical documentation to determine the original shape and materials (Bitelli, Rinaudo, Gonzalez-Aguilera, & Grussenmeyer, 2020). As such, a historical review would provide some helpful perspectives in understanding the restoration process required besides learning how the built heritage has evolved through time. There are four key determinants of a restoration work, namely: history; legislation; administration; and special issues (Hoffman, 2006). This research goes further than a mere study of nostalgic historical as it aims to strengthen the role of historical review to support restoration works.

2. Case study (As-Sayyid Hashim Mosque)

This mosque is located in the Daraj district, near the north-western edge of the ancient Gaza hill, near Ashkelon Gate. The access to the main entrance can be reached through three main roads which includes the Al-Wahda Street from the south, Jaffa Street from the east, and a recently constructed road around the cemetery of Al-Awzaee from the north-western side. The As-Sayyid Hashim Mosque is considered as the central nucleus of the entire region (Irving, 2012).

¹ Faculty of Built Environment, University of Malaya, Malaysia. Email address: Archzms@gmail.com

The unique feature of the area is that it retains the traditional character of the urban fabric of some neighborhoods while also retaining many of the neighboring ancient monuments that need protection and restoration, as well as other ancient mosques such as the Sheikh Khaled Mosque and the Sheikh Zakaria Mosque (Filiu, 2014). As-Sayyid Hashim Mosque is specifically located in an area that is characterized by narrow crooked and cul de sac alleys. Some historical maps, such as Gat, has depicted that the area is also the place of the discovery of many ancient buildings and monuments (Donner, 1992).

2.1 Historical Value

The As-Sayyid Hashim Mosque is one of many historic mosques located in the Gaza City. The historical significance of the mosque lies in the tomb of the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad, Hashim bin Abd Manaf. The mosque was named As-Sayyid Hashim after him (Sharon, 2008). Hashim passed away in Gaza during one of his commercial caravans, called the caravan of winter and summer, as Gaza was, at that time, a market for trade in the Arabian Peninsula prior to the Islamic era. He was also the founder of these caravans, which the Holy Qur'an mentions in Surat Quraysh, verse 2 (Irving, 2012):

لِإِيلَافِ قُرَيْشٍ ﴿١﴾ إِيلَافِهِمْ رِحْلَةَ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ ﴿٢﴾ فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ ﴿٣﴾ الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ ﴿٤﴾

For the accustomed security of the Quraysh (1) Their accustomed security [in] the caravan of winter and summer (2) Let them worship the Lord of this House (3) Who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger and made them safe, [saving them] from fear (4)

The body of Hashim was buried at the north-western corner of the mosque. Following the Islamic era, the people there started to bury the dead in that area too, as it was considered a blessing to be placed near to the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad (Büssow, 2011). There used to be a custom of seeking the blessing of the tomb. So, every needy, sterile or sick person used to resort to the tomb, thinking that the blessing would be granted, and supplication be accepted. This custom, however, is no longer practiced (Butt, 1995). According to Imam Ali bin Bakr Al-Harawi (died in 1214 AD), Hashim was buried after his death in a cave in Gaza. In 1689 AD, Sheikh Al-Nabulsi and Sheikh Asaad Al-Luqmi Al-Damyati visited the tomb and rebuilt it with a majestic dome above it and a large prayer house was built with an octagonal neck and rectangular windows (Tabbā' & Hāshim, 1999). Inside the space, a niche (direction of prayers) and pulpit were also built, topped with a minaret, which was removed and rebuilt in 1904 AD (Petrie, 2013).

Credit was given to Haji Ahmad Muhyiddin Al-Husayni, the Mufti of Hanafi school in the Gaza strip, for putting in great efforts to obtain practical and moral support to establish the mosque. In 1850, he wrote to Sultan Abdul Majid Khan seeking assistance in completing the mosque in which the Ottoman Sultan immediately ordered to spend one hundred and fifty thousand from the Emiri treasury for this purpose (Ali, Thiam, & Talib, 2016). The building of the mosque was also supported by some other notables and rich people in Gaza. Some scholars believe that the Mamluks were the first to establish the mosque, and Sultan Abdul Majeed Khan only renovated it in 1850 AD. However, there is no evidence to prove that the mosque was built in the Mamluk era besides the fact that some elements of the building followed the Mamluk style (Frontiers & al-Thaqāfah, 2013; Peacock, 2017). Despite the historical significance of the tomb, the building of the mosque did not occur until centuries later due to the reluctance of to building a mosque over a non-Muslim man.

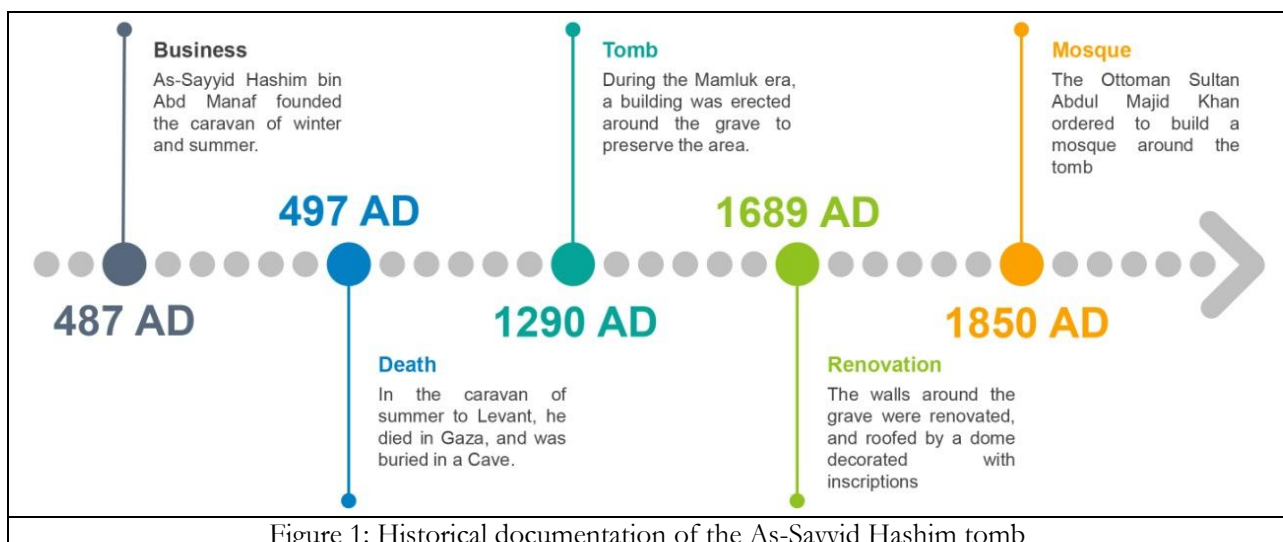


Figure 1: Historical documentation of the As-Sayyid Hashim tomb

During World War I (1914-1917), the mosque was severely destructed and damaged. Nonetheless, the mosque was gradually rebuilt until it returned to the way it was before (Shriteh, 2014). In 1967, As-Sayyid Hashim Mosque was closed by the Israeli army for its role and activity in resisting the occupation (Brenner & Ranstorp, 2016). It was almost demolished by the Israeli army in 2014 before the Kingdom of Jordan intervened to prevent the matter, as the Jordanian royal family had links to Bani Hashim (i.e. family of Hashim) (Finkelstein, 2018).

2.2 Mosque Architecture

The mosque is distinguished by a featured and independent architecture. It consists of a number of elements that combined with each other in an integrated and homogeneous architectural composition, thus performs two main functions: the functional elements of the mosque; and the traditional character of the mosque, which is considered one of the most important historical and archaeological buildings in the city (Arefian & Moeini, 2019). The total area of the mosque is 2400 square meter, with a prayer house built in a small part of it. The remaining area is a marble central opened courtyard surrounded by rooms used as an Islamic school and a library containing hundreds of books and manuscripts that was burned down during the World War I (Brebba & Boquera, 2016).

The main prayer hall of the mosque is a semi-square roofed hall with cross vaults and a niche heading towards the qibla, and a pulpit renovated in 1850 AD by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Majeed. After the construction of the prayer hall, three external arcades for prayers, from the north, south and west, were built (Yacobi & Nasasra, 2019). These arcades have been carried by nineteen marble columns and roofed by sixteen small domes and two large domes. Along the corridors, marble columns are extended with the Corinthian style, and the columns' crowns are decorated with carved ornaments of the acanthus and artichoke leaves. The walls of the mosque are characterized by thickening, the thickness of one wall is 90 cm, in order to be able to carry the stone domes (Al-Mobayyed, 1995).

The south facade of the mosque has the main entrance crowned with a pointed arch. A marble slab was recently added above the entrance with the name of the mosque and a few geometric motifs inscribed on the slab. The stones from which the mosque was built were collected from the remains of two mosques: Jawli and Mordestan (Filiu, 2014). Next to the entrance, from the right side, are the entrance to the washroom and the previous ablution room.

3. Methodology for obtaining historical information

The objective of the restoration work was to preserve the mosque as much as possible and return it to its original Ottoman form. The researcher tracked the method used in the restoration project and found it based on three categories:

- Interpretation

There were many documents, inscriptions, and manuscripts in the library of the mosque which illustrated the history of the mosque and the tomb inside it. The illustration and explanation assisted the experts and restorers to understand the previous status of the mosque before the changes happened in the recent past.

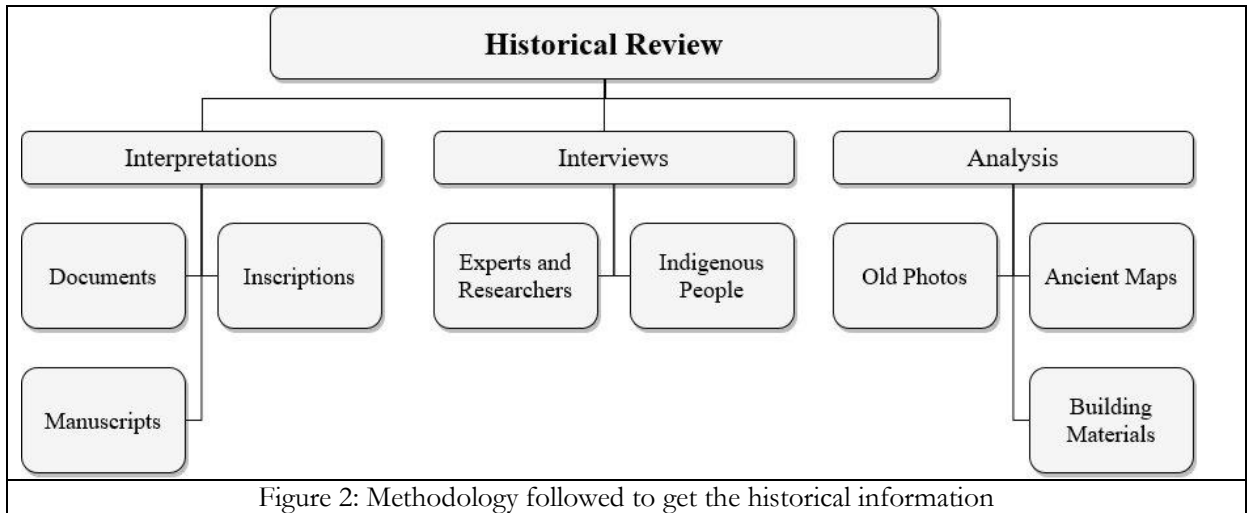
- Interview

Obtaining information from experts and researchers was very important, particularly from those who read the history of the mosque and are able to detect any change that happened to the mosque. The restorer also interviewed the indigenous people who stayed in the district for a long time, as those people would have remembered the details of the mosque and witnessed the developments from past decades.

- Analysis

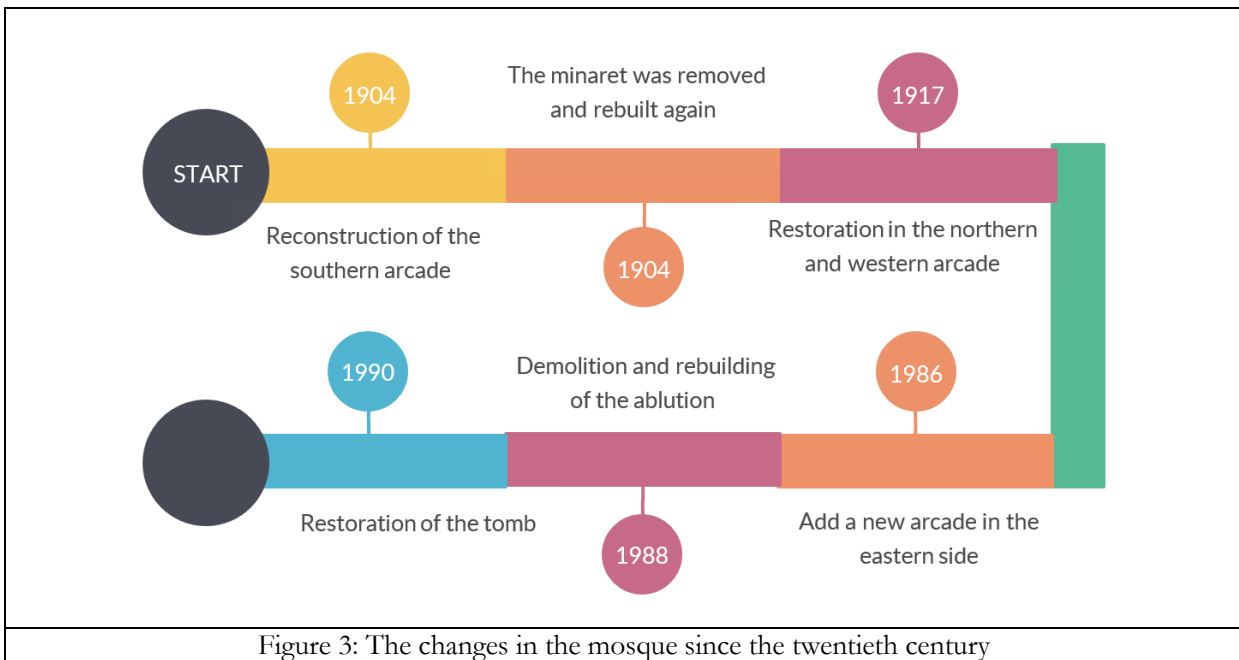
The analysis of old photos, maps, and materials were able to detect the original form of the mosque and the materials used. The current available photos and maps refer to World War I and documented many details of the mosque while the analysis of the materials was done in the laboratory.

The restorers matched the information obtained from the above three methods and drew an image of the original shape of the mosque based on the historical review.



4. Interventions based on the historical review:

Based on the methodology listed above, many architectural changes and additions were observed. The following chart shows the key changes that had happened in recent history, starting from the beginning of the 20th century:



In 2007, a comprehensive restoration was implemented, the general principles followed in carrying out the restoration process were:

- Any restoration work should be changeable or removable, so that it will not impede any future intervention.
- The restoration does not preclude the possibility of obtaining information and evidence about any part of the mosque in the future.
- The original materials in the mosque have to be preserved and maintained as much as possible.
- The work is required to be homogeneous in terms of color, texture, shape and scale. If there is a need to add new parts or materials, it must be visible and obvious to avoid overwhelming the original materials.
- The restoration activities should be performed by trained, skillful, and experienced workers in the restoration field.
- Substantial attention should be paid to the quality of the materials used in order to ensure the greatest possible sustainability and safety.
- Full documentation all elements, works, and stages before, during and after restoration, is required.

The intervention in the mosque included all elements whether internal or external, however, the researcher focused the research on the elements that related to historical study and were obvious for the people so they can identify clearly before and after restoration especially the elderly who witnessed the changes along time. The problems encountered and solutions adopted in the research are listed below:

4.1 Demolition of the Eastern Arcade

There are four arcades in the mosque. All of them are original from the Ottoman era except for the eastern arcade which was built recently in 1986 (Al-Mobayyed, 1995). The arcade consists of concrete pillars and topped by concrete crowns, while the roof of the arcade was made of reinforced concrete which is considered an infringement to the archaeological character of the mosque. Limestone, sandstone, white and red marble were used in the interior facade of the arcade. The following table explains in more detailed the problem and how it was solved:

Problems and damages	Description of damage	Methods of Treatment
The reinforced concrete used to build the arcade is incompatible with the shape and nature of the mosque.	A reinforced concrete arcade was built in a way that contradicted the nature and characteristics of the original building material (i.e. sandstone and limestone).	Removed the concrete structure and applying materials and methods that do not harm the original building.
	There were damages in the arcade materials, and corrosion and wear in the rebar.	Treated the surfaces of intersections of the arcade in the old building and restored it with the same original finishing materials.
	The arcade covers the main eastern facade of the mosque and contradicts with the design of mosques with inner courtyard.	Combined the space of the arcade within the courtyard of the mosque.

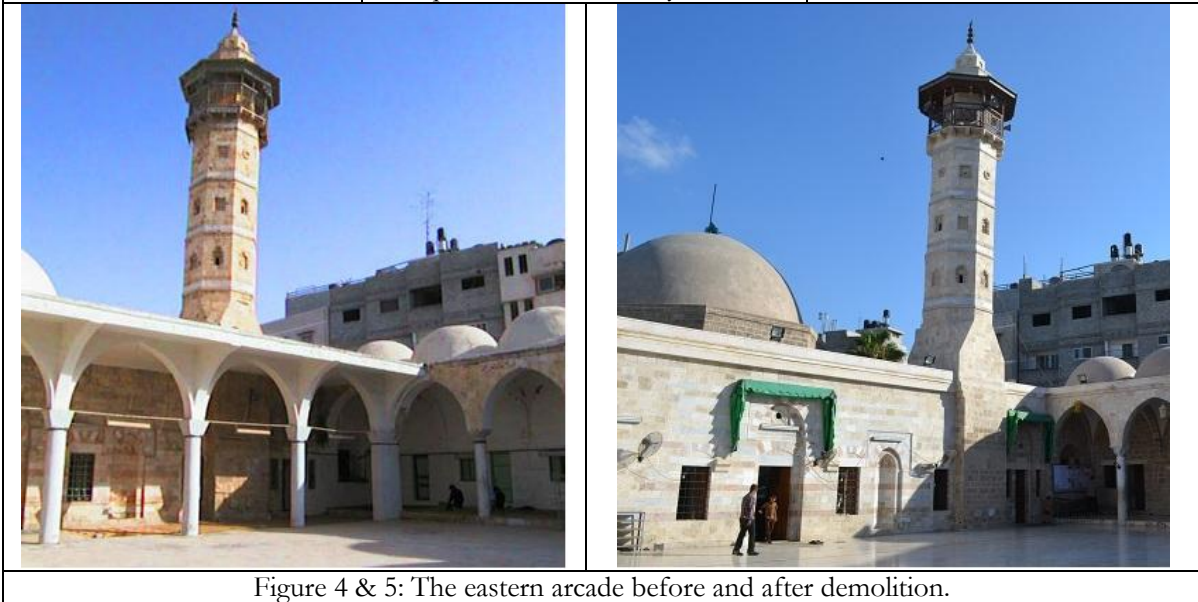


Figure 4 & 5: The eastern arcade before and after demolition.

4.2 Removal of the internal ceramic tiles

Usually, the mosque-goers would lean their backs on the wall while waiting for prayer times or reciting the Quran. This habit has led to the emergence of a problem in the walls from the bottom side (1.5 meters high). The caretakers of the mosque resorted to covering the walls with tiles bought from markets without any consideration of the historical or archaeological aspects. As a result, the general appearance has become psychologically displeasing for the mosque-goers in turn reduced the spiritual sense of the mosque as a place of worship.

Problems and damages	Description of damage	Methods of Treatment
Ceramic tiles on the internal walls of the prayer hall.	Ceramic tiles were installed on the surfaces of the interior walls, approximately 1 meter high, in various shapes and colours that are incompatible with the materials of the original walls. The ceramic also caused retention of moisture within the walls.	Manually removed all the ceramic tiles from the internal surfaces to preserve the walls.
		Cleaned the surfaces from dirt, mortar residue and minerals using small blunt equipment followed by using a brush.
		Washed the voids with distilled water.
		Applied a calcareous plastering which consisted of 4 sand, 1 lime, half white cement, 1 crushed pottery for 5 mm in the first layer and 1 mm in the second layer.
		Used thick wood to protect the bottom part of the walls for the mosque-goers to lean against the wall.

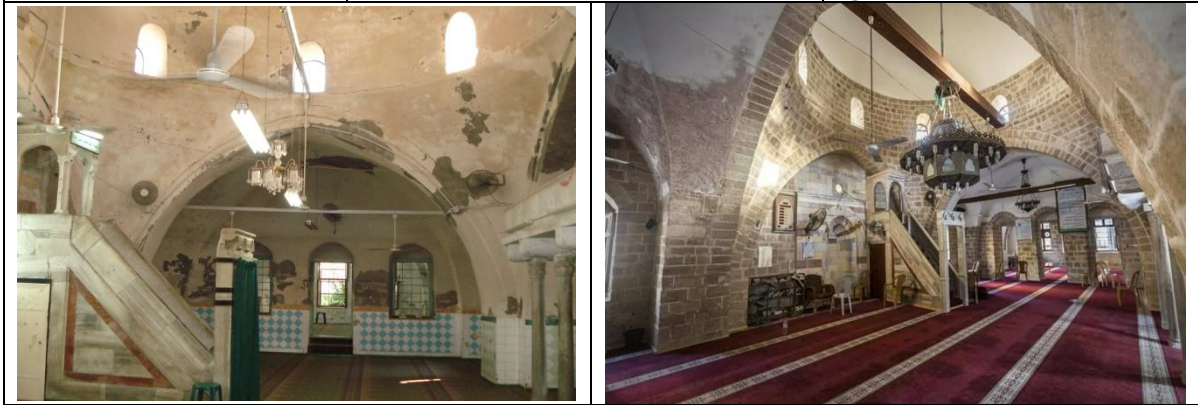


Figure 6 & 7: The treatment of the internal walls before and after restoration.

4.3 Removing reinforced concrete covering the domes

Inside the mosque, there are sixteen small domes and two large domes that covers the three arcades, in addition to the main dome. All these domes were restored in the 1970s, using reinforced concrete to fill the gaps and holes, adjust the distortions, fix the problems, and final coverage (Butt, 1995).

Problems and damages	Description of damage	Methods of Treatment
The main and arcade domes were covered with reinforced concrete.	The main arcade domes surrounding the courtyard were clad with 8-10 cm of reinforced concrete at random, which distorted the shape and rotation of the domes and also deformed the appearance and texture of the external structural materials.	Maintained the concrete layer while treating the damages as follows: 1- Levelled the surfaces of the domes by a special mould that ensures the regularity of the shape of the domes at all sides by adding calcareous mortar until reaching a regular surface level. 2. Softened the final layer of domes. 3. Isolated the cracks with suitable insulation materials and applied the isolation materials at several layers. 4. Painted the domes in creamy colour hues with a texture that matches the general character of the mosque.

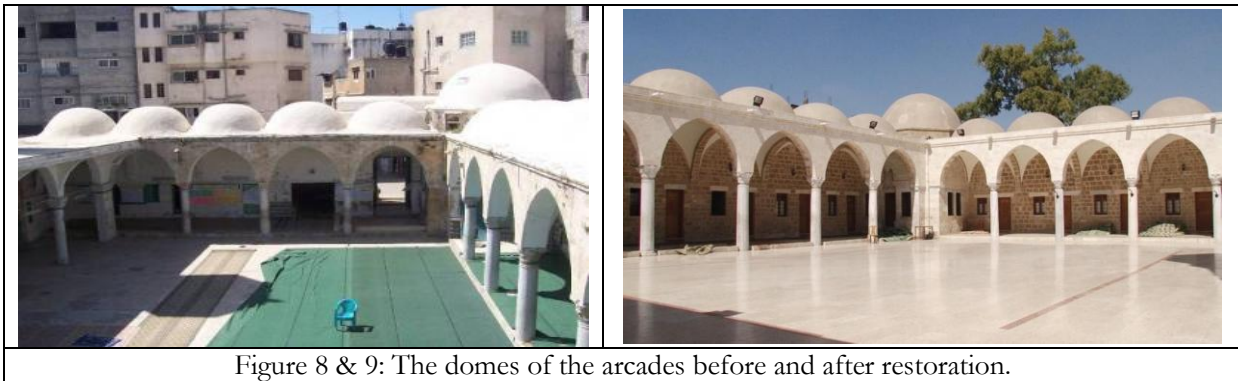


Figure 8 & 9: The domes of the arcades before and after restoration.

4.4 Treatment of the Minaret

The style of minarets was widely used in the Mamluk era. However, the minaret of this mosque does not appear to have been built in the same era. It was built in 1850 with an Ottoman style and eventually removed due to the broken warp in 1905 (Filiu, 2014). Notwithstanding, the minaret was built again according to the Mamluk style in 1910 (Petrie, 2013). The minaret was erected over the prayer hall, next to the courtyard. It consists of a square base topped by a single octagonal shape with a balcony for the muezzin (a man who calls Muslims to prayer from a Mosque) above it with an octagonal body topping it. Above that then were a group of copper balls, topped by a smaller octagonal mass, followed by a stone cone in the form of a pyramid with a square base. Finally, above that rested the three metal balls before the crescent-shaped metal piece. At the eastern side of the minaret, there is a door that connects to the roof of the mosque. The minaret has a balcony that used metal and wood in its structure. The balcony was decorated by a group of floral motifs. The balcony ceiling was made from wood covered with metal sheets and the body of the minaret was crowned with a row of geometric and botanical decorations. The minaret also has various arched holes distributed along the facades to give an aesthetic appearance.

Problems and damages	Description of damage	Methods of Treatment
Inclination and lack of verticality of the minaret's body.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- The survey reviews showed that the inclination of the minaret changes with height, as the inclination of the first block, from the roof to a height of 4.5 m, was little (i.e. not exceeding 0.2%). 2- The inclination of the second block, 2.15 meters high from the end of the first block, was 0.8%. 3- The inclination of the third block (i.e. from the end of the second block to the end of the minaret) was 3.2%. 4- This inclination may be due to a defect in the original construction or a result of lateral forces from an earthquake. 	<p>The results of the structural study showed that the inclination of the minaret was not dangerous and remained safe. The minaret was able to withstand the forces caused by the inclination in addition to the lateral forces caused by earthquakes or winds. Therefore, there is no immediate need to rectify the inclination of the minaret.</p> <p>The interviews that the consultant conducted with the elderly in the area indicated that the inclination in the minaret had existed since it was first constructed. The information was consistent with the nature of the irregular tilt along the height of the minaret and varied in the three masses of the minaret.</p>

Despite having an accurate description of the minaret, the photos are indispensable to document the changes.

In the original shape, the copper balls and crescent were not present above the minaret.



Figure 10: The mosque in 1898

The copper balls and crescent were added in 1920.

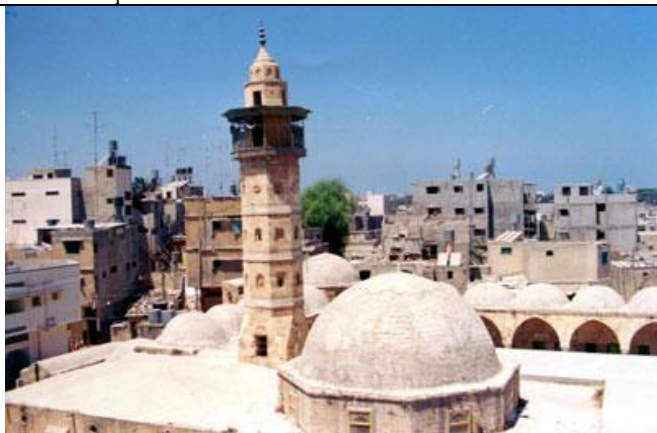


Figure 11: The mosque in 1980

After the comprehensive restoration, the copper balls and crescent still existed.




Figure 12: The mosque in 2010

4.5 Treatment of the tomb

The tomb is located at the north-western corner of the mosque. It is a 25 m² room with the grave closer to the eastern side of the room. The tomb was recently covered with marble and has arches of gypsum on the corners. The tomb is topped by a high dome on an octagonal neck that has windows distributed radially around the neck. At the entrance of the tomb, there are marble columns on both sides topped by marble crowns and ending with a marble composite arch that includes a set of poetic texts engraved on a stone below it, as shown in the pictures. The prayers in the mosque were not limited to Sunni-Muslims. A decade and a half ago, the "Bohra" (a subgroup within the Ismaili Shia) had organized visits to the mosque and performed their private religious rituals as they considered As-Sayyid Hashim mosque one of the five sacred places in the world because of the tomb of Hashim bin Abd Manaf, the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad (Campo, 2009). The sect restored the tomb by themselves at their own expense. They spent about thirty thousand dollars for this purpose (Sharon, 2008).

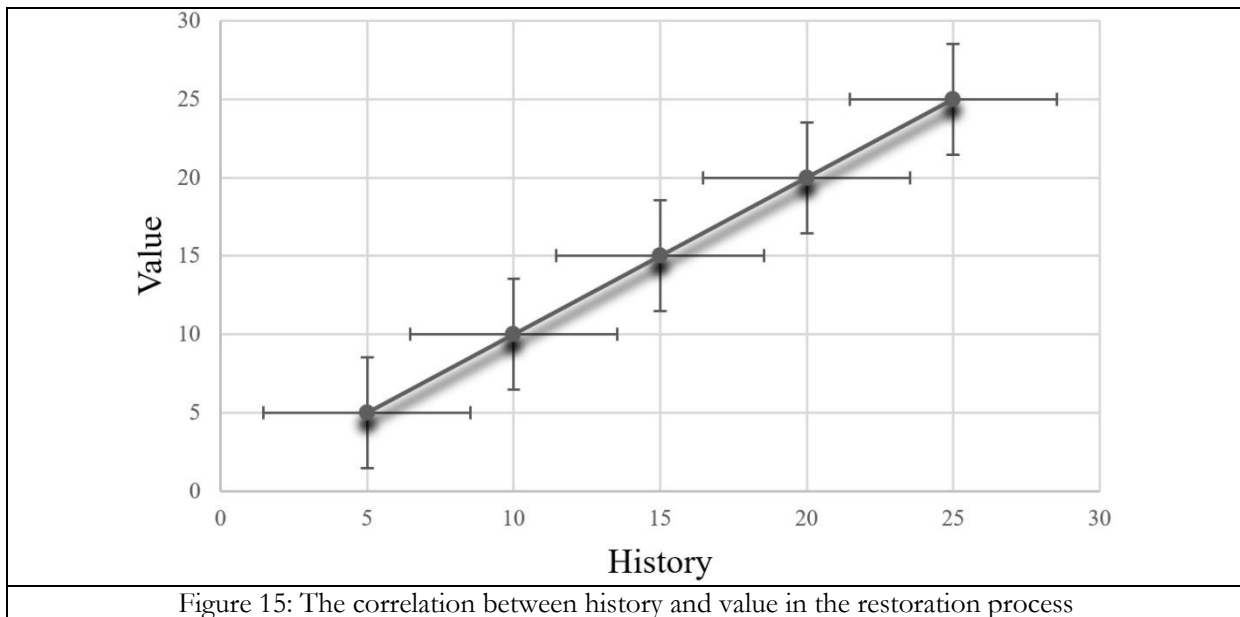
After the completion of the restoration, the Sultan of Bohra, Mohammed Burhanuddin, attended the opening ceremony in Gaza (Daftary, 2010). In 2000, the second Palestinian uprising (Al-Aqsa Intifada) broke out, thenceforth the members of the Indian sect stopped coming to Gaza due to the turbulent situations (Filiu, 2014).

Problems and damages	Description of damage	Methods of Treatment
<p>The moisture was trapped in the sandstones, causing erosion to occur.</p>	<p>1- The inner walls of the tomb were covered with thick marble slabs, which trapped moisture inside the walls and caused the stones to erode. 2- The problem started since the religious Bohra group carried out the restoration work which ended up damaging the tomb instead.</p>	<p>1- The marble slabs were carefully and precisely removed to be used and re-installed. 2- The lining of walls was removed. 3- The walls were dried in two ways: (1) making small holes in the walls and injecting them with special substances that absorb water and then get rid of it; (2) dried using standard oscillating fans.</p>
		
<p>Figure 13: The grave inside the tomb</p>	<p>Figure 14: The entrance of the tomb</p>	

5. Results

The research has clearly demonstrated that the restoration process relied heavily on the historical studies to determine the original form and materials used, therefore indicates the importance of history and documentation to preserve a built heritage of a nation and its authenticity. The comparisons between the newly restored mosque and its historical images revealed two key findings. First, a mismatch of the new shape of the minaret with the old image that dates back to 1898, as there were no copper balls and crescent above the minaret. They must have been added after the restoration process that took place after the end of World War I. The copper balls and crescent should be removed to preserve the original shape of the minaret similar to the eastern arcade which was removed for the same reason. Second, the full restoration process of the mosque included all parts except for the tomb of As-Sayyid Hashim, the grandfather of the Prophet Muhammad. It was partially restored instead because the tomb was already renovated five years before the restoration in 2009 and it was still in good condition. it is worth mentioning that that the tomb was renovated by a religious group that did not specialized in architectural heritage. As a result of the modern materials used, the tomb lost its archaeological and spiritual value.

Workers in the field of architectural heritage should take into account that whenever a built heritage is tracked historically, the restoration process will succeed in enhancing the value as the aim of the restoration is to return the built heritage to its original form. This positive correlation can be depicted through a graph showing the direct correlation between the importance of relying on the historical documentation in the restoration process and the value of the built heritage.



6. Conclusion

The mosque is a significant built heritage due to the presence of the grave of the grandfather of Prophet Muhammed. The mosque was built way back in the Ottoman era as the inscriptions and writings on several stone slabs demonstrated. It was exposed to new and modern additions that were not part of the original heritage, including the use of reinforced concrete that affected the value and construction of the archaeological monument. The restoration process relied on the historical review based on three methodologies including interpretation, interviews, and analysis. This historical study resulted in fundamental changes to restore the mosque to its original form using traditional methods. The changes included external features, such as demolishing the eastern arcade, as well as internal features, such as the removal of the ceramic tiles in the interior walls. After the project was completed, it was deemed to be one of the best restoration projects. This supports the notion that historical study should lead an architectural restoration practice that is led by comprehensive historical study will result an enhanced identity of the building as well as preserves the authenticity and integrity of the built heritage.

References

- Al-Mobayyed, S. (1995). *Islamic Heritage Buildings in Gaza and its strip*: Egyptian General Book Authority.
- Ali, A., Thiam, I. D., & Talib, Y. A. (2016). *The Different aspects of Islamic culture: Islam in the World today; Retrospective of the evolution of Islam and the Muslim world*: Unesco Publishing.
- Arefian, F. F., & Moeini, S. H. I. (2019). *Urban Heritage Along the Silk Roads: A Contemporary Reading of Urban Transformation of Historic Cities in the Middle East and Beyond*: Springer International Publishing.
- Bitelli, G., Rinaudo, F., Gonzalez-Aguilera, D., & Grussenmeyer, P. (2020). *Data Acquisition and Processing in Cultural Heritage*: MDPI AG.
- Brebbia, C. A., & Binda, L. (2011). *Structural Studies, Repairs and Maintenance of Heritage Architecture XII*: WIT Press.
- Brebbia, C. A., & Boquera, A. M. (2016). *Islamic Heritage Architecture*: WIT Press.
- Brenner, B., & Ranstorp, M. (2016). *Gaza Under Hamas: From Islamic Democracy to Islamist Governance*: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Büssow, J. (2011). *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem 1872-1908*: Brill.
- Butt, G. (1995). *Life at the crossroads: a history of Gaza*: Rimal Publications.
- Campo, J. E. (2009). *Encyclopedia of Islam*: Facts On File.
- Daftary, F. (2010). *A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community*: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Donner, H. (1992). *The Mosaic Map of Madaba: An Introductory Guide*: Kok Pharos Publishing House.
- Filiu, J. P. (2014). *Gaza: A History*: Oxford University Press.
- Finkelstein, N. (2018). *Gaza: An Inquest into Its Martyrdom*: University of California Press.
- Frontiers, M. W. N., & al-Thaqāfah, P. N. A. W. (2013). *Pilgrimage, Sciences and Sufism: Islamic Art in the West Bank and Gaza*: Museum With No Frontiers.
- Hoffman, B. T. (2006). *Art and Cultural Heritage: Law, Policy and Practice*: Cambridge University Press.
- Irving, S. (2012). *Palestine*: Bradt Travel Guides.

- Orbaşlı, A. (2017). Conservation theory in the twenty-first century: slow evolution or a paradigm shift? *Journal of Architectural Conservation*, 23(3), 157-170. doi:10.1080/13556207.2017.1368187
- Peacock, A. C. S. (2017). *Islamisation: Comparative Perspectives from History*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Petrie, W. M. F. (2013). *Ancient Gaza: Volume 1*: Cambridge University Press.
- Sharon, M. (2008). *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae, Volume Four: -G*: Brill.
- Shriteh, F. (2014). *Gaza*: Xlibris.
- Ṭabbā', U. M., & Hāshim, A. L. Z. A. (1999). *Ithāf al-a'izzab fī tārikh Ghazḡab*: Maktabat al-Yāziji.
- Wells, J. C. (2018). Challenging the assumption about a direct relationship between historic preservation and architecture in the United States. *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, 7(4), 455-464. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foar.2018.10.001
- Yacobi, H., & Nasasra, M. (2019). *Routledge Handbook on Middle East Cities*: Taylor & Francis.