

YOUTH READS HISTORY OVER OLD STONES

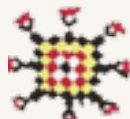
Palestinian Heritage Education

campaign and workshops

Nisf Jubayl - Sabastiya - Bayt Umrin - Ijnisinya

**Carla Benelli
Osama Hamdan**

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Mosaic Centre - Jericho
Committee for the Promotion of Tourism in the
Governorate of Jericho



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Youth reads history over old stones

Osama Hamdan - Carla Benelli

Photographs:

Osama Hamdan

Carla Benelli

Raed Khalil

Michele Piccirillo

Luca Tommasini

Rasmi Shaer

Batul Sukkar

Majd Khalil

Mona Ghaleb

Plates and drawings:

Osama Hamdan

Nur Khdairy

Juda Maali

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Mosaics in Nisf Jubayl: A beautiful picture of a beautiful country

By Dr. Sami Musallam

Chairman of the Commission for the Promotion of Tourism in Palestine

Within the framework of the project called “Youth reads history over old stones,” the Mosaic Centre of the Committee for the Promotion of Tourism in the Governorate of Jericho and Al Aghwar (the Jordan River Rift Valley) undertook the rehabilitation of the Youth Centre in the village of Nisf Jubayl, a beautiful and serene village that lies, amidst the north eastern slopes of the hills of the Governorate of Nablus. This project would not have been possible without the generous financial support from the European Union. On this occasion, I would like to thank the European Union for financing such important projects for the development of the youth sector and tourism. I would like to thank, as well, the Mosaic Centre for the efforts it is undertaking in this village and for the efforts it has been exerting in order to safeguard and revive Palestinian folkloric tradition. Finally, I would like to thank the Nisf Jubayl Youth Centre for liking for new ways to provide better services for the youth and children of the village and for providing a place for them in this centre that has been rehabilitated as a meeting place from which they can organize their various social, cultural and sport activities.

The aim of the project “Youth reads history over old stones” is to enable the Palestinian youth, male and female, and Palestinian children to discover the art of mosaics. Mosaics are not only an art. It is also a science based on knowledge and practice, learning and training. Within the framework of education, the Mosaic Centre organized a number of workshops for the youth of Nisf Jubayl in which they gained artistic capabilities and a scientific culture of how to deal with mosaics.

These workshops included: -

- a workshop on making mosaics,
- a workshop on painting and colors,
- A workshop on Palestinian folkloric tradition like the dabka dance, theater as well as sport exercises.

Surely, such activities build bridges on love, friendship and social solidarity not only among the participants in these workshops but also among those participants, the organizers and the donors. Such courses and projects open the bridges of understanding and friendship among peoples. It also helps Palestinian youth and children to design programs and find mechanisms to get out of the state of siege, repression, stress and tension caused and imposed by the ongoing Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory and the erection of barriers and checkpoints on this land. Definitely, the end result of this project was the realization of the rehabilitation of the youth centre in the best interest of the people of Nisf Jubayl, including its youth and children.

Finally, my thanks go to all who contributed in realizing this developmental project which will surely, contribute to strengthening tourism in that area and draws a beautiful picture of our Holy and beautiful Land, including the village of Nisf Jubayl.



Why a project in cultural education

More than half of the Palestinian population consists in children and youth, living in a difficult political and economical situation. Since 2000, in the rural areas of the country the traditional income of the families collapsed. Workers are no more earning their salary in Israel and the agricultural work in the land is no more economically viable. The presence of Jewish colonies all over the territory causes difficulties in the movement of goods and people. The vulnerability of the economic and social patterns has a negative impact especially on the younger generations.

There is a need to protect the young people from marginalization and neglect by ensuring their social inclusion and involvement in civic and cultural programs, and by addressing their educational and employment needs.

The area of the four villages is rich in history and local population, especially youths, need to find new hopes and opportunities for the future. The understanding of the value of their cultural heritage will help not only to preserve it but also to find a benefit for their social, economical, cultural and educational growth.

In the rural areas, in the cultural sector, there are at least two sorts of problems to face:

a) On one side there is an urgent need to improve the quality of life in the low-income, rural communities of the region. Actions in the cultural heritage protection can serve youths and their families culturally and economically.

b) On the other site one of the most important resource of the region, its cultural heritage, is underestimated and at risk of disappearance, especially at village level, besides its importance for the whole humanity. The most important thing that it is possible to do in this situation to protect this heritage is to increase the level of knowl-



The workshop in mosaic production



The preserved room of the Youth Centre

edge on cultural heritage as such, improving the understanding of the values of heritage and of its importance among local population as a whole, and young people in particular.

Both a driving force and goal for development, culture is a key factor impacting on every stage of the development process of a community. Nevertheless, the economic and political challenges of the region have limited the intervention in the cultural sector, especially by central and local governments, which rarely consider culture a priority. Besides, people's participation is fundamental for the success of actions carried out in the field of culture and our Association is well aware and acts consequently involving local communities in every stages of the action.

This action gave opportunities of understanding the complexity and multiplicity of cultures and humanity to young people. It encouraged and helped them to take matters into their own hands, to realize that they are the ones who can ensure that the infinite diversity of cultures will be better understood and better assimilated.

Summary of the action

The action took in consideration the importance of the cultural heritage in Palestine and its present condition of degrade and abandon, and organized awareness activities dedicated to local population, in particular youth and children, to protect and enhance it. The action exploited the positive potentials of culture in propelling educational and economical growth for the benefit of local youth.

A series of training and awareness activities concerning cultural heritage protection were organized for children and youths, such as workshops in drawing and mosaic production. A group of young workers were trained in the use of old and new architectural compatibles techniques to recover a small building in the old core of the village of Nisf Jubayl to be used as meeting point for the training and awareness activities.

The action involved young people and children of the villages of Nisf Jubayl, Sabastiya, Ijnisinya and Bayt Umrin in Nablus Governorate. Children and youth, both female and male, participated in the training courses and art workshops and in the educational visits.

The entire local population and local authorities of the four villages, as municipalities' councils and officers, teachers, etc., benefited from the awareness activities. Periodical visits to the conservation yard were organized for local population and students.

Objectives

The objectives of the action were:

- a. To increase the level of knowledge on cultural heritage of the Nablus governorate, collecting data and surveying the territory;
- b. To train local youth and children in the preservation of cultural resources, giving them an opportunity of improving their cultural knowledge of the region;
- c. To train local youth in traditional and compatible techniques of architectural conservation;
- d. To spread awareness among local population about the history of local cultural heritage and the importance of its conservation and enhancement;
- e. To safe from abandon and neglect part of the old core of the village of Nisf Jubayl, conducting rehabilitation activities over an old building.



The workshop in drawing

Activities

The action carried out the following activities in cooperation with the Youth centre of Nisf Jubayl and the Cultural Centre of the Municipality of Sabastiya:

- a. Data collection and survey about the cultural resources of the territory;
- b. Organization of educational trips to visit cultural and archaeological sites in the region;
- c. Organization of workshops for children in drawing and mosaic production;
- d. Organization of a training course for youth concerning the conservation of architectural properties;

Open air activity



e. Organization of awareness activities, such as lectures and power point presentations about the history of local cultural heritage and the importance of its conservation and enhancement;

f. Rehabilitation of a small building in the village of Nisf Juyayl to be used as meeting point where to organize the awareness activities and excursions for local population.

This is a little step in a long-term social project, which takes into account capacities and constraints that characterize Palestine, where the improvement of cultural, economic, social and political rights of local population, especially children and youths, are strongly limited. All the activities were carried out in strict coordination with local youth associations and municipality councils.



Educational trip

Management of the action

The conservation and rehabilitation activity has been carried out, under the responsibility of the project director, an architect expert in architectural conservation, by the following youth of Nisf Yubail: Maher Kader, Kader Shawqi, Naif Barakat, Assan Kiwan, Ahmad Samir, Mahmoud Awais, Mahmoud Khalil, Iad Khalil, Yusef al Haj, Yusef Barakat, Mohammad Qasem, Shadi Barakat, Nidal Barakat, Assam Barakat. The electricity system has been installed by Jalal Hassun and the mechanical system by Nabil Ibrahim. Numerous volunteers participated to the activity: Ahmad Khalil, Mohammad Khalil, Ahmad Khader, Anas Mahmoud, Obada Al Faqi, Walid Al Faqi, Rami Awais, Saed Khader, Yaser Barakat, Fala' Khader, Amr Khader, Anid Barakat, Ammar Barakat, Issam Barakat, Baha Sami, Salah Khader, Anin Barakat, Aisha Barakat, Moad Majd, Mohi Abd el Khader, Ahmad Iad, Mohammad Barakat, Jalal Khalil, Munis Barakat, Atiye Hasun, Riad Khader, Adel Barakat. Also some students of the elementary schools and youth of the Club in Bayt Umrin participated as volunteers. All the activities were organized and managed by a working team composed by a project director, Arch. Osama Hamdan, two experts in mosaics, Mosab Audeh and Nidal Khatib, one restorer, Rasmi Shaer, an art historian, Carla Benelli, an expert in drawing, Mona Ghaleb and a responsible for the excursions, Raed Khalil. Batul Sukkar followed the activity as local coordinator for the area of Sabastiya and Majdi Khalil as local coordinator for the area of Nisf Jubayl.



Open air activity

The Mosaic Centre – Jericho, Committee for the Promotion of Tourism in the Governorate of Jericho, is working in the field of cultural heritage safeguard since 2000 and is organizing training and awareness activities for local population, especially youth and children, since 2003. It have organized projects in cooperation with the Palestinian, Syrian and Jordanian Departments of Antiquities, with the Al Quds, Lebanese, Naples and Florence Universities, with local and international NGOs, and have been funded by Italian Cooperation and by the European Commission, Office for West Bank and Gaza Strip.





The area of the four villages

The project has been developed in the centre of the West Bank, in a small territory northwest of Nablus. The area includes four neighbouring villages: Sabastiya, the largest, Bayt Umrin, Ijnisinya, and Nisf Jubayl.

The region is rich in cultural heritage and beauty. The context is characterized by *wadi* (river beds) and hills, olive tree groves and orchards and human beings have succeeded since recent times in living in harmony and respect with the environment. The area of the villages is indeed famous for its agricultural and food products.

The distinctive features of the region require special attention for its safeguard and enhancement. In this chapter we provide some information about each village, trying to overcome the severe scarcity of documentation that affects the area.



Map of the area



Satellite view of the area from Google Earth



Nisf Jubayl

Location

Nisf Jubayl is located 17 km. northwest of the city of Nablus. The village has been built near three springs, which stream along the slope of the mountain. It is surrounded by the villages of Asirah ash Shamaliyah, Ijnisinya, Burka, Bayt Umrin and Sabastiya.

The name

The sun shines upon the village for a short time during the day because, covered by the mountain, rises late in the morning and goes down early in the afternoon. According to this description the name of the village comes from a Greek word for sun that, joined with the Arabic word *Nisf*, takes the sense of “half sun”.

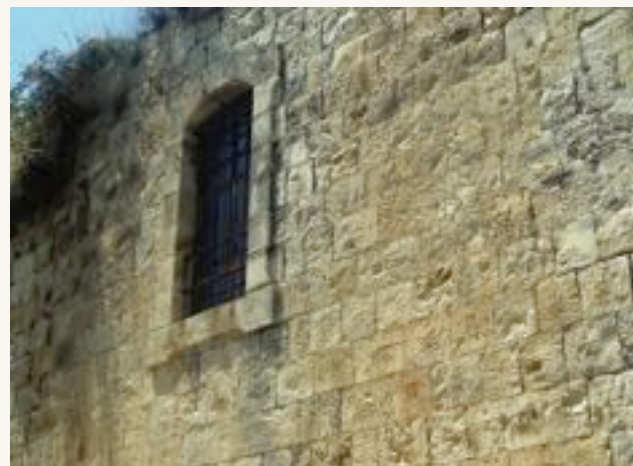
Population

Nisf Jubayl was inhabited in the past by Christians and Muslims. Muslims came from surrounding villages, such as Bayt Umrin and Burka. Some Christians originated from the ancient clan of Ghassanids, and others came from Jordan.

In 1922 lived in Nisf Jubayl 162 people. The 210 inhabitants of 1932 were half Christians and half Muslims and lived in 56 houses. In 1945 the citizens of Nisf Jubayl were 260 and in 1961 they dropped to 228 because the Christians, who had more economic possibilities to leave the village, started to emigrate to other villages inside or outside Palestine, reaching other Christian communities, in Beit Jala, Beit Sahur and Zababde. In the same year Muslims were 178. At the moment the village has 400 inhabitants. Census returns after the *Nakba* of 1948 show the emigration towards Jordan and the Arab States of the Gulf.



Satellite view of the area from Google Earth



Architectural detail

The phenomenon of emigration has characterized also the period of Israeli occupation and explains why the population is quite stable along recent years.

Springs

The village is supplied by the waters of three springs that reach the quantity of 100 cubic metres daily. The waters are collected in a reservoir and canalized to the houses of the village through an aqueduct. The springs are 'Ain Sharqia, which pumps out almost 50 cubic metres each day, Nabaet el Wad, which pumps out 30 cubic metres and Ain al Khader that pumps out 20 cubic metres. The waters of the springs are collected in underground channels and galleries since ancient times. The springs reached their present shapes after many works and improvements carried out during their history. Some of their channels are visible and are 30 m. long, 40 cm. large and from 40 up to 150 cm. high.



Ain al Khader spring

Education

In 1903 there were in the village two foreigner schools, an English one established in 1862 attended by twenty students and a French one with ten male students and seven girls. After the *Nakba* the Minister of Education built a school, which in 1967 was attended by 18 students. At the moment only the governmental school is still in operation.

The history of the village

There are no systematic studies or researches over the village and its archaeological sites. In our field visits we noticed numerous caves used in the past as dwellings. Some of them have been transformed in the years into rooms, digging wardrobes into the rock and building walls. Around the village there are ancient wells, and Roman and Byzantine tombs. Inside the village there are many traditional buildings, among which a very nice house, now abandoned, with

an impressive two-storey façade. Special attention deserves *Maqam* (Shrine) al Khader. The building is ancient and unlike the majority of the *Maqam* there is no tombs inside. Christians and Muslims venerate here *Saidna al Khader* (the Green One, identified by Christians with St. George or less frequently with St. Elijah), who is said, passed by here and used the spring. Here he rested and prayed. The *Maqam* was built thanks to him. In the past the shrine was used as mosque, before the building of the present Al Omari mosque.

Al Khader is believed to have curative powers, mainly of inflections caused by the envious, jealous evil eye and the *Maqam* was used in the past for many traditional ceremonies, as the ones that were common in every shrines in Palestine. Its walls were painted with *henna* and the interior was enlightened by oil lamps. Vow making was among the practices devoted to the Saint.

The *Maqam* comprises two rooms: the older one (3 x 3 m.) is covered by a dome about 4 m. above the floor level. There is a *mirhab* (niche for the direction of the prayer) in the southern wall and some niches in the lateral walls to insert lamps and other stuff. The room is in good condition but in recent times has suffered from incompatible works of restoration carried out thanks to private donors but without professional supervision. It is currently used as women centre.

The second room (4 x 2.5 m.) belongs to a different historical phase. A part of its roof has collapsed in the past.

The *Maqam* is entered through a door in the northern façade. The door is quite low and people should move downward to get in. The spring of Ain al Khader is located in the western part of the *Maqam*.

The Al Omari Mosque

The present village mosque comprises a rectangular hall, 15 x 4 m. large, covered by two half-barrel vault to the right and the left and by a dome in the middle. An arched *mihrab* is located in the middle



A traditional house



Maqam Al Khader



Al Omari Mosque

of the south wall. To the west there is the *minbar* (pulpit) made up by three steps. Two niches, one in the south and one in the north wall serve as wardrobes. The interior is enlightened by two large windows in the east wall and by a third one, relatively small, over the entrance, in the north wall. The entrance is 160 cm. high. Outside the rectangular hall there is a shaded open courtyard, enclosed by a wall built by old stones.

Churches

In the village there are three churches, all abandoned and unused. The older one is located in the middle of the village. It has been sold in the past and changed into a house. It comprises a 6 m. high square room (8 x 8 m.). Some lateral rooms have been discovered under the adjacent street. It is known that under the church there are other old rooms now used as cesspools by the surrounding houses. The church is currently hidden under a new cement building, which covers all its original elements.

A second church is located to the east part of the village. It was built in 1880. It includes a rectangular hall (8 x 6 m.) and has a small arched bell tower that holds a copper bell, surmounted by a stone cross. A stone wall surrounds the courtyard of the church, in the middle of which a crypt was used to bury Christian personalities of the village.

A stone plaque commemorates the construction of the church. The church has been recently abandoned and is no more in use. It needs urgent conservation works but nobody is taking care of it since its abandonment.



The Church in the east

Archaeological sites around the village

The village is surrounded by *khirbat* (ruins) and archaeological sites that currently are victims of illegal excavations and looting. Some of them are suffering from severe damages caused by heavy machineries used to discover ancient remains that are sold in the illicit market. An important part of the history of the territory is at risk of disappearance.

Among the sites there are: Khirbat Zura, Khirbat Mijrabin, Khirbat Srij, Khirbat Shureim.



The village in 1936



Bayt Umrin

Location

Bayt Umrin is located 18 km northwest of the city of Nablus, on the slope of a hill. It is surrounded by the villages of Jaba', Yasid, Asirah ash Shamaliyah, Nifs Jubayl and Burqa.

The name

Umrin is a Syriac word meaning “Sheikhs or Princes”. In Arabic *Bayt* means “house”, so the name of the village means “The house of Sheikhs or Princes”.

Population

2149 inhabitants live today in the village, in 452 houses. They were 527 in 1922 and 631 in 1931, living in 157 houses. Among them there were 13 Christians coming from Ijnisinya. In 1945 there were 860 inhabitants and in 1961 the villagers reached the number of 1048.

According to local oral accounts, the inhabitants of Bayt Umrin originated from the village of Burqa or from Kafr Qaddum or belonged to the tribe of Bani Hassan in Jordan.

Education

A school built by the Ottomans was established in the village before 1903 and in the same period it is recorded another school, built by a Christian foreign mission.



A decorated door



Architectural detail

History of the village

There are no systematic studies or researches about the history of the village and its cultural and historical sites. In our field visits we noticed various ancient buildings, mostly dated back to the Ottoman period, that follow the usual traditional construction technique of rubble walls supporting stone vaults.

In the surrounding areas of the village there are the following archaeological sites: Khirbat Mijrabin, Khirbat Sarmita, and Khirbat Fuleiya.



The village





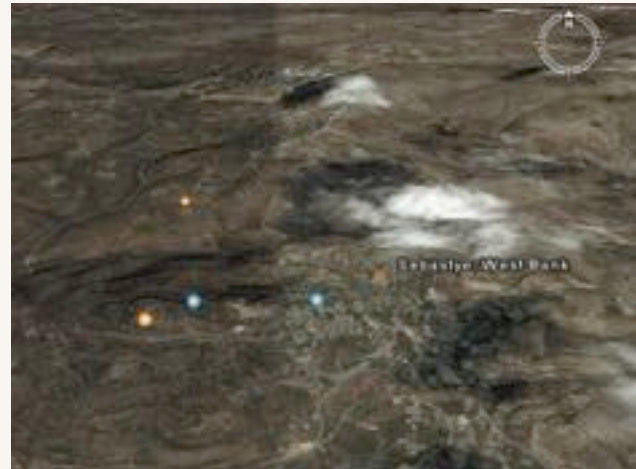
Sabastiya

The origin of the name of the modern-day Sabastiya is the Herodian city of Sebaste, founded in 25 BC by Herod the Great on the site of ancient Samaria. The city was the centre of an extensive wine and oil production area since Iron Age.

According to the Bible, King Omri (885-874) bought the hill from Shemer, moved his capital there, calling it Samaria, and built a citadel on the acropolis. The city expanded establishing commercial and social relations with the Phoenicians when Omri's son, King Ahab (874-853) married the Phoenician Princess Jezebel. The earliest remains of palaces and enclosure walls, which date back to Iron Age, were built in typical Phoenician building technique.

In the course of the eighth century, the Assyrian Empire took control of the entire region and Samaria was taken by King Sargon II in 722 BC. The city was rebuilt and repopulated, the local society was transformed. There are few remains from Assyrian and the succeeding Babylonian period and it was only in the Persian period, in the mid 5th century, that the city re-emerged in importance. After the conquest of the region by Alexander the Great, Samaria became a Hellenistic town in 332 BC and thousands of Macedonian soldiers were settled there following a revolt by the Samaritans. Three 13 m. diameter round towers dating to that period have been excavated and a later, massive, fortification wall with square towers. These fortifications were breached during the destruction of the city by the Maccabean King, John Hyrcanus, in 108 BC. After the conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BC by Pompey, the city was annexed to the Roman province of Syria and rebuilt in 57-55 BC by Gabinus, the Roman governor.

In 30 BC the emperor Augustus awarded the city to Herod the Great who renamed it in his honour Sebaste (*Augusta* in Greek). The city was rebuilt at the end of the 2nd century AD by the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus, when the city was established as a colony. The outstanding remains from the Roman period are: the *Augusteum*,



Satellite view of the area from Google Earth



The Roman Walls

consisting of a temple and a large forecourt built over the summit of the acropolis; a city gate and an east-west colonnaded street; a theater on the north-east slope of the acropolis; a temple to Kore on a terrace north of the acropolis, and a stadium to the north-east in the valley below. East of the acropolis lies the forum flanked on the west by a partially excavated basilica. Water for Roman Sebaste was provided by an underground aqueduct that led into the area of the forum from springs in the east. The city was encompassed by a city wall with imposing towers that linked the gateways in the west and north.

Following the early predication of Philip, Christianity spread all over the region of Samaria in the first centuries AD and the tradition developed soon that the body of John the Baptist, recovered by his disciples in Transjordan, had been buried in Sabastiya.

The Mosque



The Islamic army, commanded by ‘Amr ibn al’As, entered in Sabastiya in 634 AD. With the arrival of the Crusaders, in the 12th century AD, a magnificent Latin cathedral was built over the tomb of John the Baptist, presumably over Byzantine remains. In July 1187 Sabastiya submitted to Saladin’s nephew, Husam ed-Din Muhammad, who turn the cathedral into a mosque, also dedicated to Prophet Yahia, the Muslim name for John the Baptist. Another small basilica church, first founded in the 5th century, was excavated on the southern slope of the acropolis. According to a Medieval Greek tradition, it marked the spot where the head of Saint John the Baptist was hidden.

For centuries, the tomb of the Baptist has been visited by pilgrims and visitors, while slowly the ancient city was abandoned. Some of the monumental traces were however never completely covered, and at the beginning of the 20th century the ancient city started to be explored by archaeologists.

Two major archaeological expeditions excavated only partly the archaeological area of Sabastiya. The first was the Harvard Expedition from 1908 to 1910. The second expedition was known as the ‘Joint Expedition,’ a consortium of 5 institutions directed by J.W. Crowfoot between 1931 and 1935.

Crypt in the Church of the Discovery of the Head of St. John the Baptist





Ijnisinya

Location

It is a small village located 13 km. northwest of Nablus, only 2 km. far from Sabastiya. It is surrounded by the lands of Sabastiya, Nisf Jubayl, Asirah ash Shamaliya, Zawata and An Naqurah.

The name

The village takes its name from an Aramaic word that means “the same race, not stranger”. During our field visits in the village we had the opportunity to meet Mr. Abu Diab (the person in charge for the use of the village spring) who kindly dedicated his time to accompany us around the village.

He narrated us a local account, according to which the Roman Queen Elena was living in Sabastiya and used to come in the area of Ijnisinya, where there was a small lake surrounded by nice gardens and trees. The Queen forbade men to enter the area, to be free to bath with her bridesmaids. The area was therefore called *Jannet al Nisa'* (Eden of Women), from where comes the present name.

The Spring

In the village is located a water spring. It is not certain from where it originates, probably under the crossroad that links the village to Zawata to the south and Asirah ash Shamaliyah to the northeast. Channels have been built to bring the water to the middle of the village.

A well has been found in the northern part of the *wadi* that contains water only during times of heavy rain. The well is located between the spring and the mosque of the village. It was covered by earth until recently, when the water of the *wadi* uncovered it, discovering its external walls, built with huge, 1 m. thick stones.



Inside the village



The interior of the well

The cylindrical interior of the well is built with well-dressed stones. It is 6 m. deep. Inside the well, 1 m. above its bottom, in the eastern side, there is a tunnel from where the water flows inside. Another channel in the western part brings the water out of the well, towards the middle of the village, under the old mosque. In the past the water was getting out near the mosque, to be used by villagers. The Village Council has recently modified the conduit of the channel in the western part, under the mosque, establishing a network of metal pipes that collects the underground water into a cistern, to serve the houses of the village by water pumps. The water of the spring is the only water resource of the village.

Population

The census returns of 1997 showed a presence in the village of 418 inhabitants. In 1922 they were 119, increased to 157 in 1931, to 220 in 1945 and to 239 in 1961.



The school inside the old mosque

History of the village

According to a local oral account, the village was established in 722 BC following the destruction of Samaria (present Sabastiya) by the Assyrians. Some of the inhabitants of Samaria in their escape route settled in the area of present Ijnisiya. The name of the village is linked to this event.

In the middle of the village there are several old buildings that are in severe conditions of conservation. They are at risk to collapse and total destruction due to their abandonment and neglect. In the village there is an ancient mosque, called Al Omari, at present used as classroom by the village school. The building is old and connected with the water spring.



A decorated stone

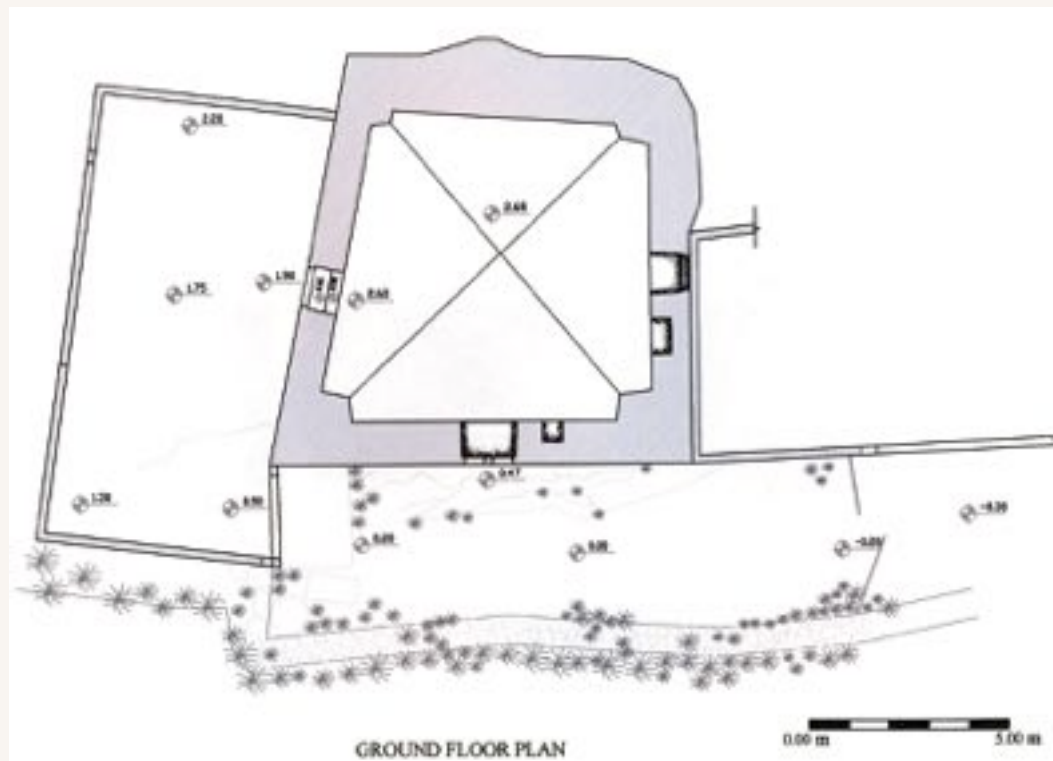


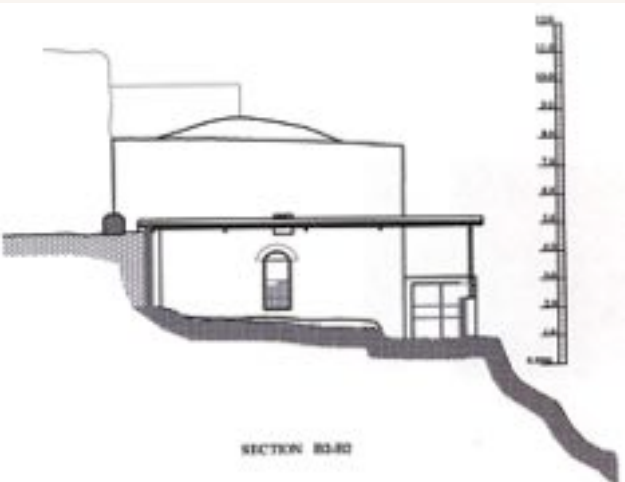
An old entrance



Conservation and preservation activity of the building in Nisf Jubayl

The conservation of a small building in Nisf Jubayl, including the training and awareness of a group of young people of the village in traditional architecture conservation, was one of the most important activities of the project. For this purpose we chose, in cooperation with the Village Council and a group of young people of the village and with the technical support of the Mosaic Centre of Jericho, a traditional building dated back to the end of 19th - beginning of 20th century. The house belongs to Mr. Mahmoud Awais, who signed an agreement with the Village Council entrusting for free the building to the local community for fifteen years in return for the conservation activity.





The house is located to the east end of the village and overlooks Wadi Ain Sharqiya. It includes a 55 square m. large room, 5.5 m. high, and an open space in front of the entrance to the room.

The foundations of the room are built directly on the rock that declines from south to north. The rock is still visible inside the room, at the bottom of the southern wall. The room is covered by a cross vault, which rests on four pilasters at the four corners. A double window opens in the northern wall and in the eastern wall there is the entrance door with a small opening over it. The door that once opened in the western wall has been recently walled up because the room on the other side belongs to a different owner.

The external facades are made by stones. In the northwest corner a stairs, built inside the thickness of the corner fill, leads on the roof.

The conservation works

Conservation and rehabilitation works have been carried out in the building through the development of a training course attended by young people of the village of Nisf Jubayl. The training course focused on how to use materials compatible to the principle of conservation. The methodology of the work was based on the conservation of the elements, materials and techniques of the original building; on the arrest of degradation and on a harmonic integration of elements for the new function.

During a period of four months we carried out the following conservation works:

Cleaning works

We removed from the site dump and earth, lowering the internal level of the room to reach the level of the external space and to be compatible with the new function.



Cleaning works

Plaster works

We removed all the degraded parts of the original plaster, especially from the internal walls, which were in severe conditions. Part of the ceiling plaster was also removed but most of the original plaster was preserved, consolidated and restored by a new plaster based on lime as the original one.

Part of the various plaster layers of the walls, especially in the east-north corner, was also preserved and consolidated. During the works it became clear that the room had been plastered several times in the past, and the ceiling had been plastered at least twice. The original plaster material included earth and straw, mixed with lime. We plastered the newly built service unit with cement plaster.

Setting of joints among stones (kohle)

The joints among stones in the external facades were in severe conditions and could not be completely preserved. Joints were cleaned and a new kohle was restored. The lime used for the purpose was compatible with the original colour and material. After the removal of the plaster over the internal walls, we discovered that also the kohle in the internal walls, made up by irregular stones, should be restored.

Reconstruction

The intervention was carried out to rehabilitate the area and create secure conditions in view of its future functions. We built a small construction to facilitate the use of the site as Youth Centre. The new construction was built in the southern part of the open space. It includes a sanitary unit in the east and a small kitchen in the west, divided by a corridor.

A 3 x 3 m. large and 4 m. deep cesspit was built by reinforced concrete blocks under the open space. The cesspit was insulated to reduce the effect of environmental pollution.



Plaster works



Plaster works

Special efforts were needed to build the supporting walls (*sanasel*) along the path that brings to the building. An elderly specialist carried out the work transferring his knowledge to the younger generation.

Setting of new pavements

We did not find any traces of floor in the room, and we paved it with ceramic tiles. The sanitary unit and kitchen were also paved and their walls were tiled. The open space and the path were paved with stone slabs. The Village Council has given their support and many young people of the village offered their help for free to complete the work, especially along the extended external path.

Insulation works

We carried out works to waterproof the room after the cleaning. A lime layer was put over the roof and the areas beyond the southern part, the cesspit and the roof of the service unit were also insulated.



Reconstruction

Electric system

A new electric system was installed for the new functions of the building. The system includes lighting, electricity and telephone.

Mechanical system and rainwater drainage

The sanitary unit and the kitchen were equipped with water plant and waste water drainage. Special attention was dedicated to the rainwater drainage coming from the roof to move away the humidity and avoid future damages.

Rehabilitation of the building

Thanks to the project we could furnish the building to organize in the site a Youth centre for the village. The room was equipped with tables, chairs, shelves and cupboards for files and books and with a computer with printer and scanner.

The experience has been carried out as a training course for young people of the village, who learned how to preserve and enhance old buildings and took the opportunity to work, in an area of severe unemployment.

The project developed also awareness activities, linking the villagers with their cultural heritage. The most important result of the project was in fact the awakening of the knowledge of local community concerning the value of their architectural heritage, their willing to work together and volunteering for a common benefit.



Setting of joints among stones



Heritage Education Workshop

To capture the interest of the children of the four villages concerning their cultural heritage, a series of heritage education workshops have been organized. The workshops were based on the results of previous experiences of heritage education for children and youth, organized by our working team in the Governorate of Jenin and Nablus, and observed the following rules:

- each workshop lasted two weeks and had a time schedule of four hours a day for five days a week (after school). Children were divided in groups of fifteen, of similar ages. Eight workshops were organized, four in drawings and four in mosaic production;
- they were based on cross-curricular approaches, linked with the school programmes and offered an opportunity for educational success in out of school environments; it was a way to tackle other fields of knowledge;
- they integrated active educational methods and employed a widest variety of modes of communication and expression;
- they were a form of intercultural education allowing a better knowledge of the cultural heritage and its multi- and cross-cultural aspects and raising awareness of the need of its protection;
- they encouraged a desire for knowledge, aroused curiosity and developed creativity, autonomy, critical sense and a range of diverse skills.





Workshops in mosaic

During the project, four workshops titled “Doing a Mosaic” were carried out in cooperation with the Youth Centre of Nisf Jubayl and with the Cultural Centre of the Municipality of Sabastiya.

The activity has been carried out with four groups of boys and girls of the four villages. Two of the workshops have been organized in the Youth Centre of Nisf Jubayl for the children of the same village and of the village of Bayt Umrin. Other two workshops have been carried out in the Cultural Centre of Sabastiya for the children of the same village and of the village of Ijnisinya. Children were supported and monitored by the mosaic experts of the Mosaic Centre – Committee for the Promotion of Tourism in Jericho Governorate.

The main objective of the workshops was to increase the children’s awareness towards cultural heritage, through the production of a piece of mosaic, developing their artistic and creative skills.

During the workshops, a lesson on the history of the territory and a lesson on the history of mosaic, dealing with the techniques and the materials used in mosaic production during the past and in present days, were held.

Students participated in all the phases of the production of pieces of mosaic with coloured tesserae cut by hand from local stones.

The workshop in mosaic production





Workshop in drawing

Four workshops dealing with drawing techniques, titled “Reading a Monument – Looking for the Signs of the Past Over Stones”, were also organized by the project in cooperation with the Youth Centre of Nisf Jubayl and with the Cultural Centre of the Municipality of Sabastiya.

The activity has been carried out with four groups of boys and girls of the four villages. Two of the workshops have been organized in the Youth Centre of Nisf Jubayl for the children of the same village and of the village of Bayt Umrin. Other two workshops have been carried out in the Cultural Centre of Sabastiya for the children of the same village and of the village of Ijnisinya.

During the four workshops, sixty children were followed and monitored by a trainer, expert in drawings, Ms. Mona Ghaleb.

The workshops carried out lessons in the classroom, about basic elements in drawing and open-air excursions. Before the excursions, a lesson on the history of the territory and on the characteristics of various architectural styles in different historical periods have been held.

During the open-air excursions, the trainer point out to children ancient decorations over stones and help them to draw their favourite monument.



The workshop in drawing



The workshop in drawing



Public presentations and meetings with local communities

We organized some open days to involve the local communities in the sharing of the responsibility in the preservation of their cultural heritage. The open days confronted issues about the importance of the cultural heritage. In a friendly atmosphere the communities discussed also problems that come from the present difficult situation of the destruction, looting and disappearance of the cultural heritage caused every day by the common practice of illegal excavations. The meetings were very important to give the opportunity to participate to pleasant common events and to help local communities to understand how to support the safeguard of cultural heritage for the benefit of all.

The entire community was invited to participate to the open day organized to award a certificate of participation to each child attending the workshops.



Lecture for children



Public event in Sabastiya



Educational trips

The first step to protect cultural heritage is to involve local community in its preservation. It is therefore fundamental for local community to learn the importance of its historical and cultural heritage and to protect and take benefit from it.

A beautiful environment characterizes the area of the four villages, and cultural and natural resources constitute an important opportunity of development fo local communities. But this environment is fragile and at risk of disappearance. Ancient remains are in very poor condition and neglected and will not survive much longer. Many researches and studies have been published over the major historical site of the territory, the ancient town of Samaria-Sebaste, , including the results of three archaeological excavations. However very little is known by local inhabitants, who have no access to these materials, mostly published in English or French and collected in foreigner institutions and library all over the world.

Trip to the Roman theatre in Sabastiya





Trips to the Yahia Mosque in the village of Sabastiya

Besides the importance of this major archaeological site, there are a long series of minor sites in the villages and in the surrounding area, which are almost ignored.

The project team organized various guided excursions to the historical and archaeological sites in the territory of the four villages to make local communities aware of the importance and safeguarding of their cultural heritage.

Each trip included 25/30 people or children and illustrated an item in the territory, such as archaeological remains, architectural properties, tombs, holy places, local traditions, ancient water installations, ancient productive installations etc.

Following the philosophy of dialogue among the conservation activities and the local community, special tours were organized to explore the rehabilitation yard in Nisf Jubayl.



During the visit to the yard, the objectives of the project, as well as techniques and methodologies of intervention, were illustrated and explained.

Local people were curious to explore the yard and appreciated its slow transformation from a garbage dump to an agreeable place where the community can meet and get pleasure from public events.



Trips to the archaeological site of Sebaste





Inauguration

At the end of the project, a feast has been organized to inaugurate the Youth Centre of Nisf Jubayl. The feast was attended by a great number of people, including H.E. Sami Musallam, Minister for the Promotion of Tourism; Mr. Mohammad Falah Qader, Head of the Village Council of Nisf Jubayl; Dr. Izzat Ayoub, on behalf of the European Commission Technical Assistance Office for the West Bank and Gaza Strip and Mr. Ibrahim al Hafi, on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

Delegations of all the villages involved in the project attended the ceremony, among the participants there were Mr. Abd el Jabar Shaib, Head of the Village Council of Ijnisinya; Mr. Ali Ibrahim Abdo, Head of the Village Council of Bayt Umrin; Mr. Ali Azem, Mayor of Sabastiya, Mr. Mohammad Ghazal and Mr. Qusai Azem, members of the Municipality of Sabastiya; Mr Ghassan Ghaleb, President and Mr. Inad Assun, Coordinator of the Club of Bayt Umrin. They have had an important role for the development of the activities of the project. Delegations of other local institutions were also present.

After the speeches, the Village Council and the Youth Centre of Nisf Jubayl offered presents to the participants. The ceremony included a show of the children of Sabastiya, organized by the Cultural Centre and a show of the children of Nisf Jubayl, organized by the Youth Centre.

The Youth Centre has been inaugurated by H.E. Sami Musallam, Dr. Izzat Ayoub, and Mr. Mohammad Falah Qader. An exhibition of mosaics and drawings done by the children about the historical sites of the territory was organized for the occasion. The event was closed by a lunch, offered by the Municipality of Nisf Jubayl.



The inauguration day



