

# **DISCOVERING AL-BURJ**

**PAST, PRESENT  
AND FUTURE**



# Discovering Al-Burj: Past, Present and Future

## CRIC 2021

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The publication “Discovering Al-Burj: Past, Present and Future” summarizes a remarkable archeological project funded by the Italian Agency for Development and Cooperation. I can only be proud for the contribution provided by the Italian Government to such endeavour.

The project is fully in line with the overall support traditionally ensured by Italy to Palestine and its people, as it targets the preservation and promotion of the cultural and historical Palestinian identity.

I truly hope that, with the support of all the agencies involved in this initiative, tourism can flourish again in such a fascinating area after the prolonged crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Discovering Al-Burj can be instrumental in this regard, by contributing to rediscover invaluable archeological sites and to make them available to experts and visitors alike. By taking a step back in time, they will be able to admire what our ancestors left to mankind.

**Consul General of Italy in Jerusalem**

**Giuseppe Fedele**





This book is the final product of SUMUD and represents the culmination of an exciting cooperation experience for CRIC. We have to give credit to AICS for having understood its importance and potential by selecting the project among many others.

Throughout the project, scientific research and philological restoration were intertwined with the socio-economic processes of workers' training and cultural rediscovery of the archaeological heritage of Al Burj.

It was with great satisfaction that we witnessed the involvement of families, local authorities, schools, and citizens in the re-appropriation of spaces and the history of places, including moments of leisure and the launch of economic activities related to historical and archaeological artefacts. In this magnificent land we have seen the rebirth of stones and walls, not to separate, but as tools that contribute to strengthening the spirit of the community, safeguarding collective identity and projecting it towards possible future development.

Like a tree, a project grows and develops luxuriantly only if its roots are in a good soil made up of human, social and political relations. And we would like to give special recognition to all the partners in this project, and especially in this case to the competence, seriousness and passion of the Mosaic Centre, which for years has been carrying out this important work of cultural heritage enhancement, education and sustainable and inclusive tourism development in many places in Palestine.

Of course, there is still much to be discovered and recovered in this and other small towns in the area, and we hope that this project can serve as a forerunner and a model for future interventions.

In the same way, we hope that this publication will be widely distributed, especially among young people, and that it will stimulate professionals and investments so that interventions such as these can be multiplied, contributing to reaffirm the right of the Palestinian people to live on their own land.

For our part, we renew our commitment to continue along this path, together.

**Marilia De Marco**

**Centro Regionale di Intervento per la Cooperazione - CRIC**







# Mosaico Center

## Foreword

The idea of this publication emerged after the conclusion of the activities of the Project "Sumud in free land - Support to economic development in Southern West Bank: promoting a sovereign and sustainable agriculture in harmony with the history of the surrounding area, to encourage an inclusive and conscious form of tourism", which carried out archaeological excavations and research, and conservation and enhancement activities in the village of al Burj, in Hebron governorate.

The publication aims to promote a minor site in Palestine, largely unknown and little investigated, one of the many examples of under-valued archaeological sites in Palestine. We are aware of how historical and archaeological sites can be an essential resource of the territory and could be a development tool, mainly when the promoted actions are not limited to simple research and conservation work but are closely linked to the local population.

The project had a positive impact on the community and the site itself by consolidating and saving a part of the Citadel in danger of being lost forever. At the same time, we have recovered structures that will be placed at the service of visitors and the community, enhancing the Citadel's history and focusing on the evolution of the various types of dwellings in the region of al Burj.

These projects are great opportunities for job creation and developing research, excavation, and conservation works at a local level. It was also a pilot project in the field of inclusive tourism, and one of the first minor archaeological sites where special attention is put to accessibility (Culture for all).

With this intervention, the Mosaic centre confirms itself as one of the Palestinian institutions most committed to safeguarding the Palestinian heritage in favor of local communities' sustainable development.

**Arch. Osama Hamdan**

**President Mosaic centre**







# The Past

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Roman road to Beit Jibrin passing near the  
village of Al-Burj, c. 1900-1926





# Location

Al-Burj is a village in the Dura region, which is part of the Governorate of Hebron. It is located 25 km southwest of Hebron, lies 464 meters above sea level, and is bordered by Tell Beit Mirsim to the north, Al-Ramadin to the south, Al-Bireh to the east, and to the west by the Green Line (1949 Armistice Agreement).



**General view of the western area of Al-Burj with the Separation Wall**

# Palestinian Territories



MURO DI SEPARAZIONE

MURO DI SEPARAZIONE  
IN COSTRUZIONE



The purpose of this map is to illustrate travel regions. This is not a political endorsement of any claims over the sovereignty of these territories.

# What's in a Name?

Al-Burj simply means “tower” in Arabic; a name that is attached to a number of archaeological sites in Palestine, which was problematic when establishing the early research at this site. Also, the area has had different names throughout its history. It was first recorded during the Crusader period as *Castrum Ficuum*, “Fig Tree Castle” in Latin. It was also known at that time as *Castrum Le Fier*—“Castle of the Fierce” in French. Muslims called it *Majdal al-Habayeb*, or *Bajdal al-Janab*. In the nineteenth century the area became known as *Al-Burj*, or *Burj al-Bayara*, and more recently (twentieth century), *Khirbat Al-Burj*, *Qalaat Al-Burj*, and also *Birket Abu Touq*.



**Burj al-Bayara, (Al-Burj) marked in red on the Palestine Exploration Fund Map of the region, 1880.**







**General view of the Citadel with the west wall after restoration and the moat.**



**Stone column base found at the site.**



**Detail of an ancient stone, reused in the arch of the door and decorated with birds.**

# A Mansio or Roadside Inn

Items as old as the Copper and Bronze Ages (4000-500BC) have been discovered at Al-Burj. Archaeological excavations southeast of the village have also uncovered three rooms of a Roman bath, a large early Roman wine press, as well as remnants of mosaic floors, fragments of pottery and glass vessels, and coins dating to the late Roman/early Byzantine period (third quarter of the fifth century AD). These finds show that Al-Burj was inhabited at least until this time. An early Byzantine watchtower, built over the wine press, was uncovered at the site, along with a smaller wine press and a kiln for bricks and pottery; these also date to the Byzantine period (5th-7th c. AD).

This archaeological evidence—particularly the presence of the bath house—coupled with the fact that the main road connecting Beersheba, Hebron, and Bayt Jibrin passed near Al-Burj, concludes that in the Roman period there was a mansio, (roadside inn) at the site. By the Byzantine period, the area was most likely given over to agricultural and industrial concerns, which explains the presence of the presses and furnaces. There is no evidence as yet of how the area developed from the beginning of Islam until the arrival of the Crusaders.



**Coins emerged from the 2006 archaeological excavations south-east of the village.**





**Room paved with mosaic found in the 2006 archaeological excavations south-east of the village.**



**Fragments of archaeological finds emerged from the 2006 archaeological excavations south-east of the village.**



**Detail of a wall emerged from the 2006 archaeological excavations south-east of the village.**

# A Crusader Citadel

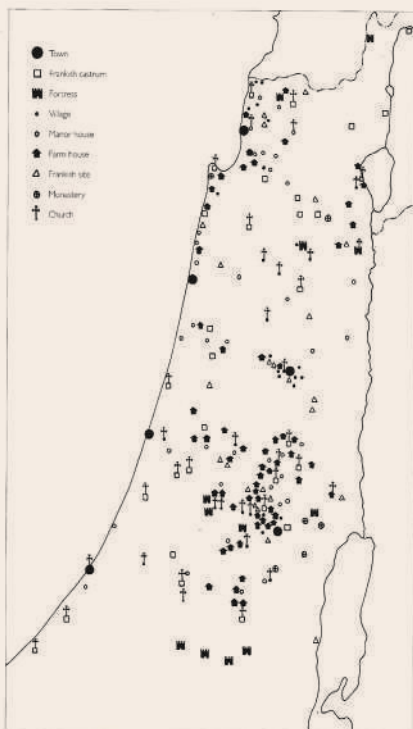
In the twelfth century a Crusader citadel was built on the top of a hill near the site, to defend the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099-1187), of which Palestine was then a part. Al-Burj Citadel was one of four such defense structures in the southwest, in a line with the Al-Dhahiriya, Al-Samou' and Al-Carmel citadels.

Al-Burj Citadel isn't mentioned in western sources that recount the conquests of Saladin, founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, nor does it appear on modern maps of the "Latin" or Crusader Kingdom. It is known, however, that after defeating the Crusader army in the Battle of Hattin in 1187, Saladin turned and waged his campaign from the south. Prior to the battle for Jerusalem, Saladin took Ascalon, because of its strategic importance as a link between Egypt and Syria. Then the other citadels in southern Palestine, including Al-Burj, fell to him.

The historian Ambroise, in his account of the Third Crusade (led by English King Richard I, "the Lionheart"), states that Saladin, after the Battle of Arsuf on December 7, 1191, ordered the destruction of several citadels in southern Palestine, so that the Crusaders could not return and try to re-take them. One of them was Castuum Le Fier, or Al-Burj Citadel. Ambroise also reports that Richard the Lionheart expelled the Turks from Castuum Le Fier on May 29, 1192, before they could completely re-fortify it. Imad al-Din describes Al-Burj in detail, but refers to it by the name of Majdal al-Habayeb; Abu Shama calls it Al-Burj Citadel Bajdal al-Janab. Imad al-Din listed the citadels that were conquered by Muslims in 1187; Majdal al-Habayeb (Al-Burj) appears after Majdal Yaba or "Mirabel" and before "Darom" (which is now called Deir al-Balah), and Gaza.



**Imaginary encounter between Richard the Lionheart and a Saracen, Miniature from Luttrell Psalter, c. 1325-1335.**



Map of Crusader Settlements. The first on the left, at the bottom of the map, is the Citadel of Al-Burj.



Saladin rex Aegypti from a 15<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript.

Richard the Lionheart Embarks on the Third Crusade, Glyn Warren Philpot, 1927.





# Protection in times of War and Peace

Al-Burj Citadel was described by biblical archaeologist Dr. Edward Robinson in the late nineteenth century, and was included in the 1881 Survey of Western Palestine. It is built on a series of caves, tunnels and water wells, and is defended by a perimeter moat cut into the rock. Its almost square floor plan is 48.2 x 48.4 meters. Part of the south wall turns inward slightly, to follow the rock bed and form the southeast corner. The Citadel currently rises about 5 meters above the rock bed.

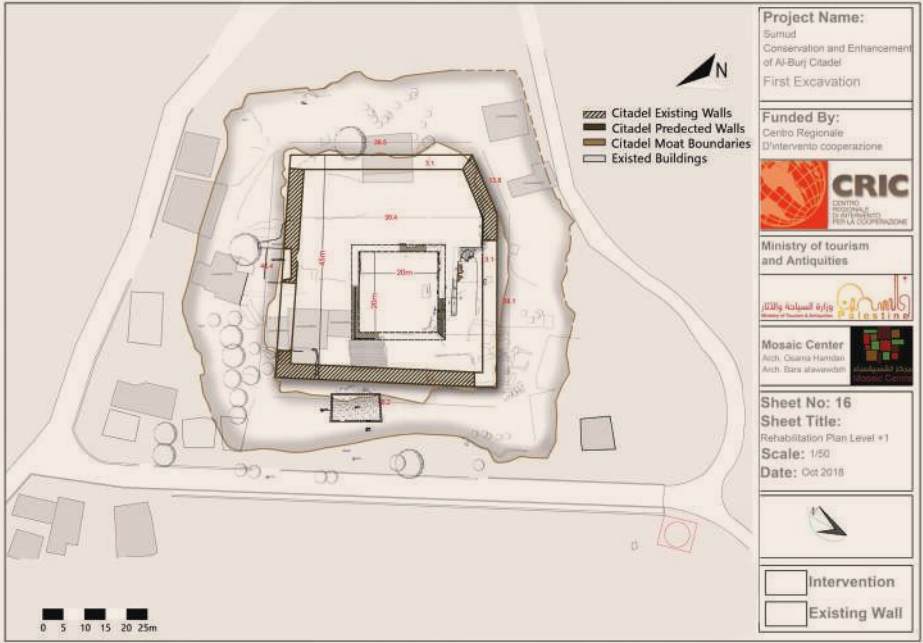
The ruins of a small chapel are adjacent to the Citadel's southern wall. There is also a 25 x 20 meter defense tower inside the Citadel, surrounded by a sloping wall or glacis. Victor Guerin noted this in the later nineteenth century.

Al-Burj Citadel not only defended the southwestern borders of the Crusader Kingdom; it was also a haven for the Frankish farmers of the area. The surrounding agricultural lands were considered a part of the citadel complex by the Crusaders; the farms served the citadel and the citadel controlled and protected the surrounding area, including the farms. Al-Burj Citadel also guarded the road that connected the western region of Hebron with Palestine's southern region. Passages near the outer wall, probably used by the warriors inside the Citadel, can still be seen in the lower level.

After its destruction by Richard the Lionheart, the Citadel remained in ruins. Some of its stones were re-used in the surrounding houses; the nearby caves, as well as the ones in the moat were also used as homes for the locals and their animals.

**Citadel's western wall before conservation works.**

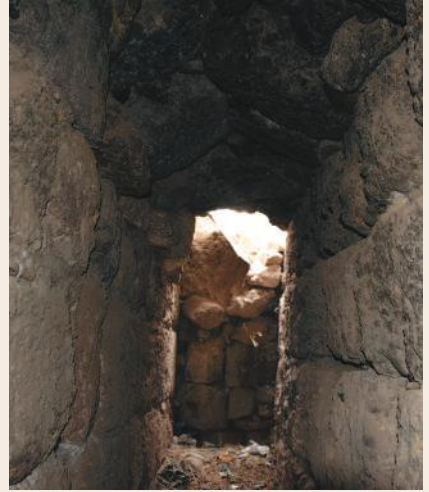




Plan of the Citadel with the moat drawn by arch. Osama Hamdan



Northern moat of the Citadel



Passage for military use near Al-Burj Citadel's western wall in the lower level

# Construction Techniques at Al-Burj Citadel

Quarry locations were chosen by their relative ease in transporting the stones to the construction site. For citadels that were built on rocky hills, like Al-Burj, building materials were also obtained by excavating a defense moat from the surrounding rock.

The outer, rectangular wall of Al-Burj Citadel is limestone. Its courses, or rows of stone, average about 40-45 cm in height, while the length of each stone ranges from 55-65 cm. Only the northwest corner of the Citadel's outer wall still stands; its stones are larger than those of the rest of the wall, as it was a Crusader technique to reinforce the corners of their structures.

Embossed masonry is a common element in Crusader and Islamic building techniques. The edges of the stone face were chiselled away, creating a border around the face of the stone and often leaving its rough surface untouched. This method saved processing time and therefore money; it also facilitated the stone's placement into the walls. Over time it became a favorite aesthetic choice as well. Embossed masonry is found only in the northwest corner of the Citadel's outer wall.

"Diagonal-chiseling" a stone surface is a technique specific to Crusader architecture; it quickly prepared the stone to receive and hold plaster, and is common on Crusader structures, especially churches. It is not, however, found on Al-Burj Citadel's walls. It might have been used on the stones of the inner walls of the building, but these have yet to be excavated.

**Detail of a Crusader diagonal-chiseled stone with a mason's mark found in the archaeological site of Bethany.**







The use of a treadwheel crane and other devices in the building of a tower in a 13<sup>th</sup>-century drawing

Embossed masonry in the lower part of Al-Burj Citadel's wall



# The Glacis

The barely visible ruins of a glacis, or defensive slope, exist outside the Citadel's northwest corner. Inside the Citadel, more ruins of a wall and glacis—part of an internal fortified tower—were found. The excavations carried out in 2020 further revealed the southern side of this tower. Adding a slope or glacis to a wall is typical in western fortified construction, especially in Norman architecture. This technique has also been used in many castles in the Middle East, including in Palestine.



**The glacis in the Castle of al Karak in Jordan**



**Glacis in the northern part of the tower inside Al-Burj Citadel**





**Glacis in Al Burj Citadel emerged from 2020 archaeological excavations**



**Glacis and moat in Belvoir Castle**

**Glacis in the northern part of the tower inside Al-Burj Citadel**

# Opus Gallicum (Reinforced walls)

The Crusaders in the Holy Land masterfully renewed and adapted a distinctive building technique called opus gallicum, or Gallic work. It is the reinforcement of a masonry wall by inserting wooden beams transversely and at regular intervals, creating a kind of internal support scaffolding. The Crusaders used stone columns instead of wooden beams, ingeniously re-purposing the Roman/Herodian-era stone and granite columns that abounded in the region. Opus gallicum was widely used in coastal citadels in the Middle East; the most prominent examples are in Caesarea, Sidon, Baalbek, Beirut and Ascalon. Al-Burj Citadel had “gallic work” in the northwest corner of the outer wall. This technique was also used in Islamic citadels.



**Opus gallicum technique in Ascalon**



**Detail of opus gallicum technique in the Byblos Crusader Castle in Lebanon**





**Opus gallicum technique in the north-west corner of Al-Burj Citadel**



**Detail of opus gallicum technique in the western wall of Al-Burj Citadel**



# The Old Village of Al-Burj

There are many caves, houses, and sheds in the vicinity of the Citadel; most are now deserted or neglected. In the past they were the dwellings of the poorer families in the area, who were mostly from the village of Dura, and worked as shepherds or tobacco farmers.

The old village of Al-Burj clustered around the Citadel, but has since expanded to the south-east, down the slope of the hill to the Wall of Separation.

Old Al-Burj village is noteworthy for its range of historical buildings and housing types: cave dwellings, hosh (courtyard) housing, “simple-type” houses (single-family detached houses), “rural” houses, and even structures that incorporate one or more of these types.

## The village of Al-Burj.





**Cave dwelling inside the southern part of the moat of Al-Burj Citadel.**



**Cave dwelling inside the northern part of the moat of Al-Burj Citadel.**



**General view of Al-Burj village**





# Cave Dwellings



**General view of old Al-Burj village with cave dwellings.**

The lives of the Palestinian people have been linked to the natural caves of the region since ancient times, and are the area's oldest inhabited structures. They were often "built out" to meet the needs of the families living in them. Digging artificial caves for dwellings is also a part of the area's history, though the lengthy process of carving a cave from the rock was a method that developed over time, across historical periods. A large number of the caves in Al-Burj were at one time used as dwellings, primarily the ones in the southern, northern and western parts of the village.

The cave floor was usually lower than the outside ground level, so one walked down a few steps to enter the cave. The cave opening was fronted by a stone wall with just enough space for people and animals to slip inside or to load in any necessary goods or materials. Some caves had windows; sometimes also small openings in the facade for ventilation and lighting. Smaller caves often only had one source of light and air: either through the door or through a *rosaneh*, or round opening in the ceiling of the cave. Hay or household goods could also be loaded into the cave through this opening.





**Interior of a cave-dwelling in Al-Burj carved into the rock.**

**Organization of the cave space.**



**A cave-dwelling in Al-Burj closed by a stone wall.**



# Organizing the Cave Space

The cave was equipped and organized to meet the needs of its inhabitants. There was a sahawa (raised platform) for sleeping, enclosures for the animals and troughs for feeding them. Many caves had carved niches and holes for lamps or to store household items and food, even a kerosene lamp. Sometimes the interior rock faces of the cave were plastered with lime mortar.

Living in the caves was difficult. In the winter they were dark and damp. The family and their livestock lived in the same space, which became crowded as the family grew. By the early nineteenth century, the population had increased to the extent that the inhabitants in the region began to build and live in detached stone houses, leaving the caves to be used for storage and to shelter their animals.



**Organization of the cave space.**

**Plastered niches inside a cave-dwelling.**







**Cave dwelling with plastered interior rock faces.**



**The fireplace for cooking and heating inside a cave dwelling.**



# Hosh or Courtyard Housing

The original single-family house was often enlarged, as the family grew, by adding new residential wings, storerooms, barns and sheep pens, which became a complex around an internal courtyard. This courtyard, or hosh, was semi-enclosed or completely closed to the outside, and functioned as a barrier between the private and public domains. Sometimes there were additions to the upper floors of the houses around the hosh, but in Al-Burj this was rare. Most houses had areas that were paved with flagstones.



**Double windows in a hosh façade**





**Aerial view of a hosh with the various functions. You can see the well in the center and the taboon beside it**



**A house in the hosh**



# Living Together in the Hosh

The hosh, or open-air, sunlit common area of courtyard style housing, was the most important area in this type of construction, as it was the focus of domestic activities throughout the year. People could sit together in the hosh and chat, especially on summer evenings. Children could safely play in the hosh, under their parents' watchful eye.

The hosh usually contained the cistern, which was filled by rainwater and run-off from the courtyard roof. The cistern water was used for drinking, cooking, cleaning and laundry, as well as to water the animals. Another typical hosh feature was the taboon (oven), primarily used for baking bread. Sometimes one taboon served several households, and was placed as far from the home entrances as possible, to minimize the occupants' exposure to the smoke.

The front door of courtyard style houses opened onto the hosh; next to the front door was the mastaba (raised platform), where one could entertain guests, dine, or even sleep on warm summer nights. Mastabas were paved with stone tiles or cast concrete, and were half a meter higher than the courtyard, to keep out the dirt or even animals from the common courtyard areas. Near the mastaba, was the zeer, a clay jug incorporated into the courtyard wall with only the mouth exposed. Like a refrigerator, it kept the drinking water cool and readily available, and seemed to be a common feature in Al-Burj.

## **Mastaba in front of a house inside the hosh**





**A taboon**



**Entrance door to the hosh**



**A zeer incorporated into the courtyard wall to keep the drinking water cool**

# “Simple-Type” House

Interestingly, some houses in Al-Burj, constructed around the turn of the twentieth century, are free-standing, unconnected, single family dwellings, or “simple-type houses” which are not characteristic of traditional Palestinian villages, where the houses are usually clustered together. These simple-type houses were one-roomed and small, with walls up to a meter thick, as ancient stones were typically re-purposed for use in their construction. To frame the doorway or windows, however, some of these stones were specially carved and decorated, and stood out from the rest by their refined cut and size.

The arch of the door, especially the keystone, was often beautifully decorated with various inscriptions and carvings, sometimes even with the construction date. There was often a star with a half moon, the symbol of the Ottoman Empire. Small stones, used as decorative filler, were often pushed into the spaces between the arch of the door and the stones of the walls.

Most of these simple-type houses are cross-vaulted, with small windows and openings in the upper walls for ventilation. They have a courtyard in front of the entrance. The absence of large furnishings and the maximum use of wall recesses allowed the single room of this house to function as bedroom, guest room, kitchen, dining room, and workroom. Bedding, clothing and accessories were stored in wall recesses and were only brought out at night.

It took at least three months to build one of these houses, and there was no architect to draw up plans or supervise the construction work; so the prospective home owners had to plan and carry out the construction themselves. The stones were taken ready-made from nearby ruins and transported on camels to the building site. Roof construction took at least ten days. Finally, the plaster—a mixture of clay, straw and lime—was applied, and the home was ready for occupancy.

## Simple-type house.







**Inside a simple-type house.**



**Segmental arch with ancient stones in the front door of a simple-type house.**



**Simple-type house.**



**Decorated modern stones in the arch of the door.**

# Palestinian Rural House

Sometimes a larger house, which included a front living room and a main back room, was divided into two levels connected by steps. The upper level was used for sleeping and the lower level for storage. The front room was used as the main living and activity area.

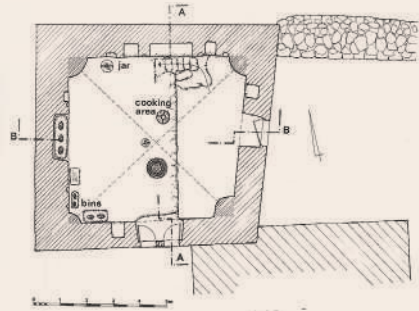
The family lived with their animals/livestock for practical reasons: the animals were secured, and they also were a source of warmth on cold winter nights. Internal divisions within this traditional rural house were created through the use of levels, a front entrance level (qa' el-bet) and a higher level at the back (mastaba), were used by the family mostly during the winter.

The upper level was paved with lime mortar, and often divided into sections, using hawabi (storage bins of varying shapes and sizes), to provide privacy for the family members sharing the space. These hawabi stored cereals and legumes. Openings at the top were used to pour in the food, while holes in the bottom of the bin released the food. They were usually closed with improvised rag stoppers. Producing these bins using clay mixed with straw was the responsibility of the women in the household. The lower area comprised different levels, to prevent the animals from reaching areas used for cooking or housework.

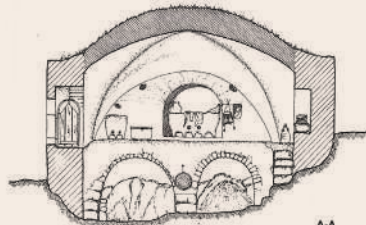
Outside the rural house was a courtyard area, bounded by a *sinsile* (stone dry wall), and containing the *taboon* and summer cooking area. This "single dwelling" courtyard also had a washing area, and a water well. Often the family's former dwelling place—a cave—was in the courtyard as well, now used for storage or to shelter their animals.

The village of Al-Burj is characterized by the presence of more than one housing style, both in terms of space as well as architectural elements. This is due perhaps to the overlapping historical phases of the styles, as well as the changing socio-economic circumstances of the inhabitants of the village.

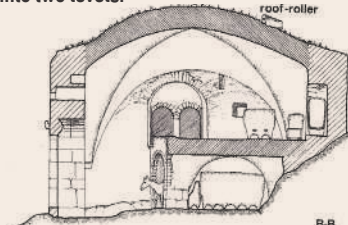
In Al-Burj it is easy to see the evolution from cave dwellings to courtyard house. In some constructions it is even possible to see the accretion of architectural styles, from simple caves to houses with small windows and then to more recent houses with larger windows.



Plan of Palestinian rural house.



Section of Palestinian rural house divided into two levels.



Section of Palestinian rural house divided into two levels.





Inside a Palestinian rural house divided into two levels.

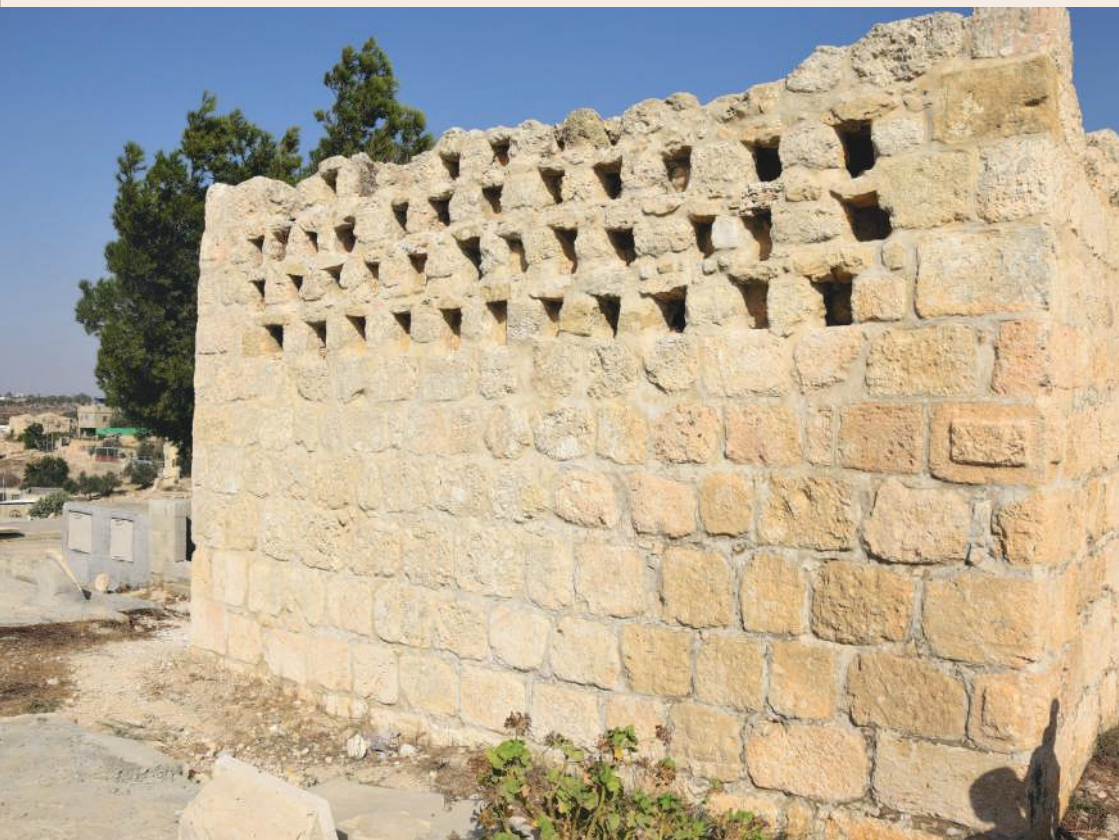
Hawabi: storage bins to store cereals and legumes.



# Places of Interest Near Al-Burj Citadel

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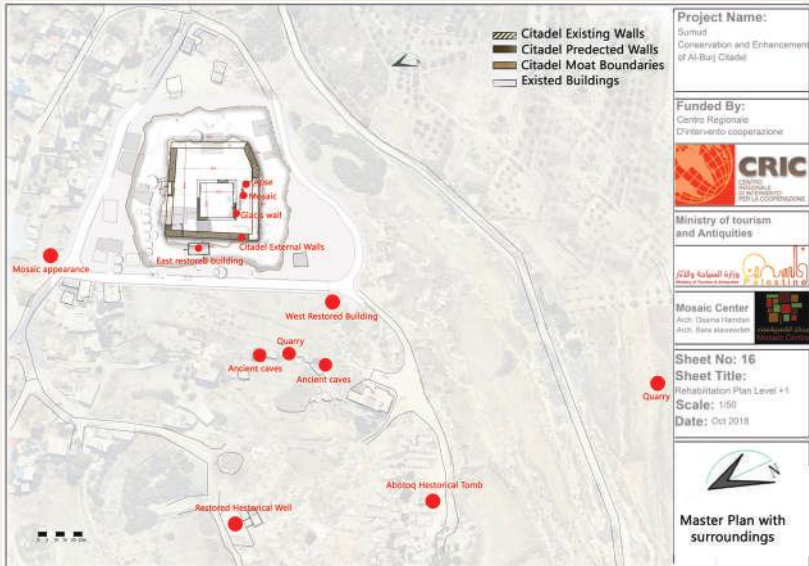
**West façade of Maqam Abu Touq.**

# Maqam Abu Touq

The shrine (maqam) of Sheikh Abu Touq lies southwest of the Citadel and is now surrounded by the town cemetery. It was built using ancient stones, and its corners are embossed, a typical Roman stone technique. The upper western facade has many rectangular holes. The maqam is square and barrel-vaulted, with walls plastered in lime mortar. The east-west oriented stone tomb is in the middle of the chamber, and is covered with a green cloth. The mihrab is in the southern façade. Sadly, about a year ago the shrine was vandalized, particularly the south and west sides.

**Abu Touq Pool** Not far from the Shrine of Sheikh Abu Touq, is a 20 x 12 meter pool known locally as Abu Touq Pool (because of its proximity to the shrine). Part of the pool was cut into the rock, and a meter-thick wall surrounded the rest. One of the corners once had steps leading to a lower level. The pool was a reservoir that collected rainwater from the slopes of the rocky hills during the winter season, and was used for agriculture and grazing. It dates to the Roman/ Byzantine period, and is still in use by the local population today.

**Stone Quarries** Near the Citadel, to the west, is a smallish stone quarry. The caves next to the quarry are former dwellings. Another larger quarry lies south of the Citadel, in the middle of the hill, past the valley. These quarries are thought to have served the region.



Plan of Al-Burj Citadel with the places of interest in the surroundings





**The tomb and the mihrab inside the Maqam Abu Touq.**



**The area of Abu Touq Pool covered with a concrete slab**



**Stone quarry near the Citadel.**

# Contemporary Al-Burj

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# “SUMUD in Free Land”

The “SUMUD in Free Land” Project is funded by AICS (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation) and CRIC (Centro Regionale di Intervento per la Cooperazione), in partnership with Educaid Italia, the Italian Network for Disability and Development (RIDS), the Land Research Center and the Mosaic Centre, in cooperation with the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Sumud means “steadfastness” in Arabic.

Conservation activities carried out by the Mosaic Centre focused on preserving and enhancing part of the Al Burj Citadel and some adjacent structures. The Project also preserved a two-vaulted construction with two caves, and rehabilitated it into a small interpretation center called the “Storytelling House”, and a coffee shop with restroom facilities. The Project collaborated with the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities to conserve the outer wall of the Citadel, as well as excavate the small church and a wall of the internal tower and glacis.

The Project also promotes accessible tourism in Palestine. Particular attention was paid to access; ramps and walkways aid entry into the “Storytelling House”, the Citadel and the coffee shop. A wheel-chair accessible restroom and Arabic/English Braille panels for the visually impaired have also been provided.

## Al-Burj Citadel before conservation works





**The project team visits the site.**



**The local community welcomes representatives of AICS, the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, and local and international associations.**



**Al-Burj landscape.**



# Researching and Investigating Al-Burj

Compiling historical research on Al-Burj was a particularly important phase of the project, as bibliographic information about the Citadel and the site is extremely scarce. This prompted the collection of oral testimonies from local residents, which revealed customs, the ways their dwellings developed and how past generations lived, as well as socio-economic and cultural relationships.

We also assessed the other archaeological and historical sites in the region to help determine and facilitate our intervention in Al-Burj. This assessment included an analysis of the factors that threaten Palestinian cultural heritage. We also studied the legislative context of cultural heritage; the players and authorities involved in managing the cultural heritage of the Governorate of Hebron, as well as their protection and enhancement policies.

Next was the graphical documentation of the selected intervention areas, including photogrammetry using drone photography, an analysis of the areas' state of conservation, and a proposal for the conservation and enhancement of these areas. There was a particular focus on inclusion and accessibility in the proposal.

## **The Mosaic Centre team at work on the survey and documentation of the Citadel**



**Surveys and documentation of the  
Storytelling house.**



**During the photographic documentation  
of the area around the Citadel.**



**Using the drone to document the site.**





**A white mosaic floor near the Citadel was recorded during the survey.**



**Photogrammetry of the excavation area of the chapel inside the Citadel.**

# Reconstruction of the West Wall of Al-Burj Citadel

The west wall of the Citadel, while the best preserved, still had many problems due to abandonment and lack of maintenance in the course of its nine centuries of life. Important parts of the external masonry were missing, many of which were fortunately recovered in the process of cleaning and clearing the moat.

After careful research, study and preparation, the meticulous work of matching and re-inserting these missing stones into the wall was accomplished. This was intense and exhausting work, given that these large and heavy stones had to be lifted into place by hand, and without the assistance of a forklift. But the result was well worth it—the formerly eroding west wall is now newly consolidated and robust.

**View of the west wall of Al-Burj Citadel after conservation works.**







**During the reconstruction and consolidation of the west wall of the Citadel.**



**Elevation - East**

**Graphic documentation of the façade of the Citadel.**



**During the reconstruction of the Citadel.**

# Storytelling House

The Storytelling House was fashioned from an abandoned house, consisting of two rooms and two caves hewn under the Citadel's western wall. With the installation of explanatory panels and a film, the spaces were transformed into an interpretation center, to "tell the story" of the history of Al-Burj village and Citadel, as well as the evolution of the area's dwellings.

The house and the moat were cleaned; decades, even centuries of accumulated dirt and grime were removed, and the structures were consolidated. The mortar joints (kohle) were properly replaced, the roof insulated, and the floors, doors and windows were renovated.

## The Storytelling house before conservation works



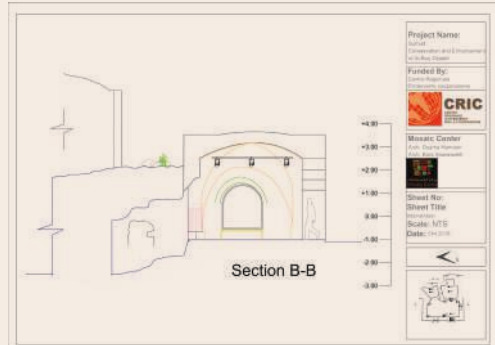




Inside the Storytelling house after conservation works



During conservation of the façade of the Storytelling house



Architectural design for the Storytelling house

Inside the Storytelling house before conservation works



# Improved Services for Tourists

Feedback from visitors and colleagues confirmed the necessity for refreshment and restroom facilities at Al-Burj—no such public services exist in the area. Thus another ancient structure was identified for preservation and enhancement, and was restored and transformed into a rest and hospitality area. This structure now offers food and drink prepared by the local women of the village, as well as restroom facilities, including a wheelchair-accessible bathroom.

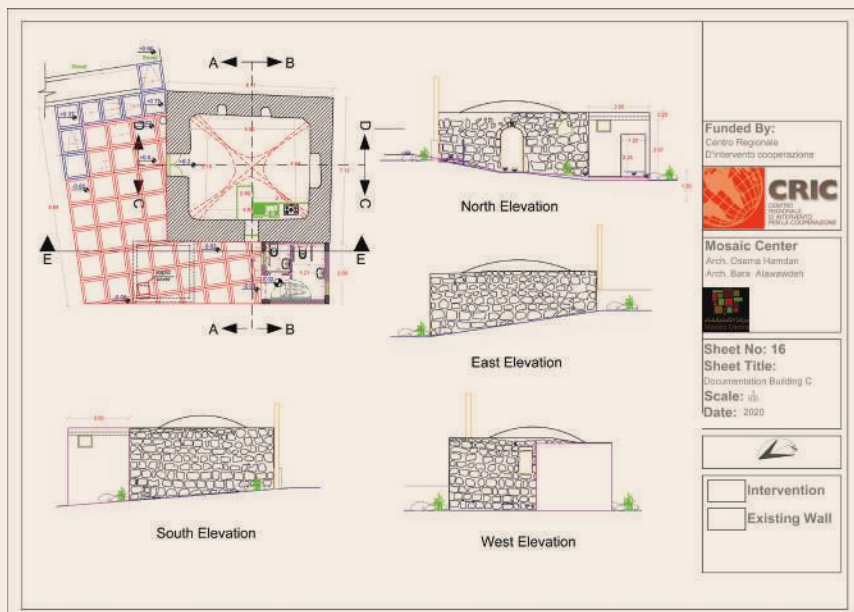


**The coffee shop before conservation works**



**The coffee shop after conservation works**





**Architectural design for the coffee shop area and services**



**During conservation works  
inside the coffee shop**



**During conservation works  
outside the coffee shop**

# Tourism for All

“SUMUD in Free Land” was a pilot project in the concept of accessible tourism in Palestine. Al-Burj is one of the only cultural heritage sites in the country where the issue of providing access for all has been raised and successfully tackled. This is only the first phase of the project; the ultimate goal is to provide access to all elements of interest within the Citadel and its surroundings.



**Accessibility ramp to the Storytelling house and the Citadel area**



**The situation of the area before the installation of the ramp**





**During the construction of the ramp**



**During the construction of the ramp**



**During the construction of the ramp**

# Excavate and Discover

Prior to the SUMUD Project, no scientific researches or archaeological excavations had been carried out at Al-Burj Citadel, ever. Thus, the Project was an incredible opportunity to conduct primary archaeological activities at the site, to preserve essential knowledge of the area before it is lost, and to provide professional growth opportunities for the Palestinian team.

Excavations carried out in October 2020 in conjunction with the Palestinian Department of Tourism and Antiquities uncovered the ruins of a small church, believed to have been built after the outer wall of the Citadel and on top of an older building. A mosaic floor was also found, most likely from the Byzantine period, as it extends under the church's northern wall, and thus was extant before the Crusaders built the church. The discovery of the mosaic floor confirms the site was inhabited in the Byzantine period. These early interventions and excavations show the great potential of this site. The Mosaic Centre also consolidated and protected the discoveries that emerged from these excavations.







**During the archaeological excavations of the chapel**



**The apse of the chapel which emerged from the archaeological excavations**



**Detail of a leaf in the mosaic**

# Local History, Local Community

It is imperative that conservation practices and policies foster a culture of heritage protection. Raising awareness and respect for cultural heritage in the local community is essential, especially in a situation like Al-Burj, where the ancient and traditional architectural landscape is disappearing.

Local residents must be offered the opportunity to actively engage in the recovery of the sites in their own communities, thereby ingraining a sense of responsibility for the future conservation of their local heritage and improving the quality of life and the economy in the area. The SUMUD Project directly involved the young people of Al-Burj in the conservation and enhancement of the site, and also provided “on-the-job” training so they could become technicians capable of collaborating in future protection activities.

During the conservation work, we encouraged visits to the site, both local and foreign. We organized tours for the local schools and educator workshops about the site and its local and national importance for area teachers. We also organized awareness-raising events in the community, including a site clean-up campaign.

## **The project staff collects evidence of the use of space from the owner of the hosh**







**Schoolchildren visiting the project and the Citadel**



**Young people on a volunteer day to clean up the Citadel area**



**Villager visiting the restoration site**

**The Governor of Hebron visits the project**



# The Al-Burj of the Future

## Cultural Heritage Counts

The theory of developing an area's cultural heritage as an economic resource for the community can be summarized simply enough: Local heritage site attracts visitors, visitors generate income, income becomes capital for local development.

However, having an existing heritage site does not automatically equal economic growth in the area, nor can conservation or enhancement of such a site be completely successful unless the following are also in place:

- A serious and specialized cultural offering
- Effective, even expanded local area production to support the site
- Sufficient demand to warrant this heightened production
- Efficient cultural management, tourism, and local level services

Understanding and promoting the local cultural landscape is essential when developing programming for a heritage site; priority should be given to activities that utilize local human resources and as well as regional goods and services, like artisanal and agricultural products or traditional handicrafts. The area's cultural landscape is a key contributor to the quality of life in the area—the backbone of the region's identity and in turn the local economy.

Properly conserved and enhanced archaeological sites have been particularly successful in supporting community development, because this type of project often uses an integrated approach, designed to connect with and draw on local, nearby and regional resources. These projects often incorporate not only typical material products (food, crafts) but also local traditions and ephemera (feast days, celebrations, etc.); they also pro-actively court local business involvement in the site, as well as existing human resources, hospitality services and access infrastructures.

### **The potential of the landscape in the village of Al-Burj**







**Traditional food**



**Investing in the future**



**The generation of the past transmits experience for the future**



**International tourists visiting the area of Al-Burj**

# Cultural Heritage Conservation in Palestine

Heritage conservation is essential in Palestine, especially as a means of preserving national identity. Unfortunately, many Palestinian sites are at risk from “urban development”, and not enough attention is paid to their preservation, maintenance and enhancement. Consequently, the majority of Palestine’s archaeological sites and traditional buildings suffer neglect, decay, and vandalism. Implementing conservation policies and projects is also fraught with difficulties, including a lack of qualified personnel, clearly defined methodologies, and technology. Another serious problem is the widespread concept of investing in new buildings in the name of progress and development at the expense of preserving cultural heritage.

There is good news: recent legislation enacted to protect the country’s heritage is definitely helping to improve the situation.

## The state of conservation of rural architecture in Al Burj village







Inside a cave dwelling



A Crusader period room in the Citadel



Detail of decoration inside a house



Processing of earth and straw plaster inside traditional houses

# The Al-Burj Guesthouse: Experiencing Generations of Dwellings

After studying the potential of the site, we confirmed the existence of various abandoned housing structures, of different historical periods/styles of living space. These structures present the evolution of dwellings in this region, and therefore must be preserved.

Future actions are planned to recover, rehabilitate and enhance some of these structures by establishing a guesthouse. The idea is to balance hospitality and traditional use of the environment, while respecting the original use of the buildings. The guesthouse will provide accommodation where currently none exists. It will give visitors and tourists the opportunity to stay in the area and enjoy the rural life of southern Palestine, while visiting sites in the region and boosting the local economy.







**Inside a cave dwelling**



**Experiencing the traditional rural life in Palestine**

**Guest-chamber in Dahariya in 1940**



# The Discovering the Real Al-Burj

In order to create a successful cultural heritage “attraction”, it is necessary to physically study and research the Al-Burj Citadel and surrounding area. The results will help reveal the history and to even inform the future identity of the Al-Burj site. Excavations at Al-Burj will also yield architectural remains and artifacts that must be preserved; some might also be used to interpret the Citadel’s importance in the community, region and Territory. They will bring Al-Burj Citadel to life for the visitor.

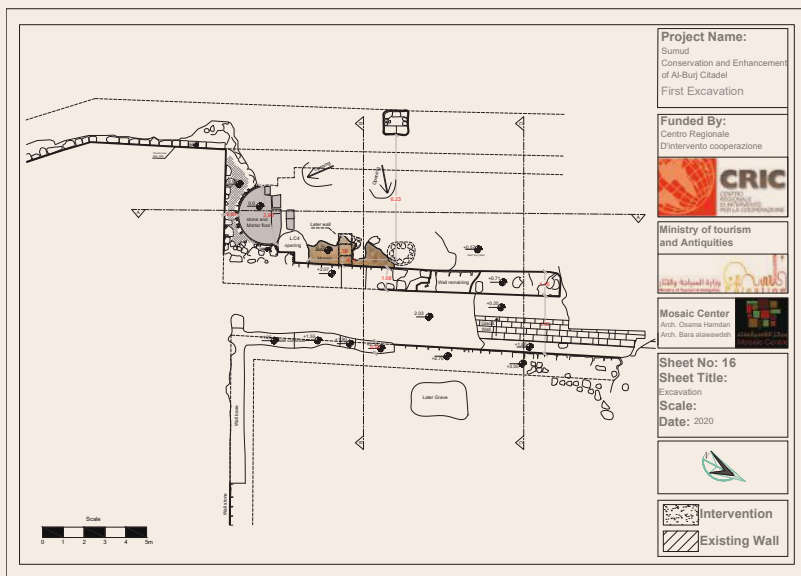
These archaeological excavations and other investigation activities are also important opportunities for local researchers and students, to build and expand their cultural heritage knowledge base and skill set, and to participate in writing about and interpreting their own heritage. Locals near the site could participate in various excavation – and conservation-related activities, as well as be trained and employed in the future maintenance of Al-Burj. Locals can also canvass and encourage private companies in the area to offer services promoting Al-Burj.







**Aerial photo of the area near the Citadel**



**Documentation of the 2020 excavation area**

# Continued Commitment to the Community

Every effort must be made to ensure that the local population realizes the benefits—including economic—that a properly-managed cultural heritage site can bring to the community. The current non-committal attitude towards archaeological sites must be transformed, through knowledge and empowerment.

Happily, the SUMUD Project awareness-raising activities carried out in Al-Burj generated an overwhelmingly positive response from the local inhabitants. Their curiosity about and pride in their own heritage was extremely gratifying. It was immediately determined that local community members should be directly involved in all future project phases, and that awareness-rising campaigns focusing on the historical, artistic, social and economic value of the site must be organized. Guided visits of the site will also be expanded, and carried out through schools, associations and local institutions. Outreach meetings will also be convened in the community, to hopefully engage already-interested associations, private sponsors and donors.

Analyzing the strengths and weaknesses in the relationship of the Al-Burj site with the local economic system prompted some future short-term interventions involving the potential of agriculture and traditional handicrafts. The proposal is to recover several other ancient area structures in order to house these income-generating programs, which also promote and interpret the history of the region around the Citadel.

## Guided tour for university students in Al-Burj







**Involving the local community in conservation works**



**The contribution of the previous generation to the future of Al-Burj**

**Involving the local community in conservation works**



# Connecting and Sharing Resources: A Day Trip in Southern Palestine

Al-Burj cannot be considered an isolated site. Indeed, it is part of a projected conservation and enhancement program that will include a local "itinerary" linking the surrounding area: starting from the city of Hebron, and including Dura and its museum, Beit Mirsim, the old city of Dahariya with its tower and Ainab al Kabir, etc. We foresee visits, connections and collaborations (both environmental and archaeological) with these nearby resources, which have the potential to enrich both the local and regional communities.

Thus the future development of Al-Burj will be integrated into the regional and Territorial context, creating synergies with local and national economic networks, and becoming a part of the Palestinian cultural heritage industry, with these fundamental components:

- The archaeological site itself, and enhancements
- Related regional resources (historical, environmental, heritage, programming) that can support the Al-Burj site, or be supported by it
- Institutions and companies that can provide/donate conservation or enhancement to Al-Burj (excavations, restorations, services, accommodation).

To integrate Al-Burj into its larger Territorial context, it will also be necessary to improve related territorial resources (environmental, programming and events, material and non-material culture) and territorial infrastructures (transportation, recreation, hospitality, etc.).

## Dahariya historical center







**The site of Ainab at Khabir**



**Landscape in Al-Burj area**

**Byzantine baptistery in the vicinity of Al-Burj**









