

Gentrification and the Politics of Power, Capital and Culture in an Emerging Jordanian Heritage Industry

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This article presents an epistemology of the heritage industry in Jordan and an investigation of the dynamics of gentrification as a potential outcome of conservation projects. It argues that heritage conservation should not be approached only as a means for capital accumulation; nor should it be confined to the commodification of historical and cultural environments. Rather, heritage conservation should be seen as a complex activity aimed at fostering cultural continuity and genuine community development and participation. If heritage tourism is to be endorsed as a major component of a national economy, a dynamic and balanced interaction should be maintained between cultural heritage, host communities, and tourist-industry investments.

A standard definition of culture is the “totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought typical of a population or community at a given time.”¹ Duncan and Ley, however, have recently critiqued such a static definition of culture and its implications for cultural landscapes, and they have offered a new definition in which culture is conceived as a conflict between empowered and marginalized ideological and political interpretations of place.² Others have also written that culture is a dynamic concept, and that when it is forced into a static existence, it ceases to serve as a source of inspiration.³ The above distinction highlights a general misunderstanding that has come to surround efforts at heritage conservation. Unlike the conservation efforts practiced by specialists in such fields as archaeology and the preservation of artifacts, heritage conservation is a dynamic field. A comprehensive understanding of its processes must take into account a reading of the political, social and economic dimensions of cultural change. In fact, heritage conservation might best be defined as the ongoing management of change in the built and social environment.

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In Jordan the heritage-conservation movement is today faced with several obstacles that have become manifest in the absence of defined mechanisms, such as established administrative tools and channels for financial support. By default, conservation projects are today being approached as regular construction jobs, with no consideration given to local inhabitants or their culture. One fashionable form that such heritage conservation projects has taken, especially among architects and investors, is the commodification of the recent past as a heritage attraction, the experience of which may be sold to affluent consumers. Such a strategy, however, prioritizes capital accumulation over the welfare of host communities and living cultural heritage. It is causing severe disassociation, alienation and gentrification within those communities which contain conserved sites.⁴

The purpose of this article is to investigate the dynamics of gentrification in culturally live sites in Jordan. It is based on an interrelated study of the politics of power and legitimacy, capital investment, and culture among the major players in the Jordanian heritage industry: designers, conservationists, investors, local authorities, and host communities.

UNDERSTANDING GENTRIFICATION: SYNTHESIS OF CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

A working definition of gentrification is the “restoration of deteriorated urban property especially in working-class neighborhoods by the middle and upper classes.” The word originates from “gentry” (people of gentle birth, good breeding, or high social position) and “fication” (production or making).⁵ Thus, gentrification is related to the production of new social identities for the middle class (production of gentry) through the restoration or rehabilitation of deteriorated working-class neighborhoods. The problem with this definition is that it marginalizes the effects of such processes on the original inhabitants of a gentrified area. Further consideration of the essence and complexity of gentrification, therefore, might lead to an operational definition of the concept which stresses both a place- and a person-centered perspective.

From a place-centered perspective, gentrification can be defined as the “conversion of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city to middle-class residential use, [which] reflects a movement, that began in the 1960s, of private-market investment capital into downtown districts of major centers.”⁶ More recently, this use of the term has been expanded by sociologists to refer to such processes as they occur in rural settings as well. From a person-centered perspective, gentrification can be defined as the process by which low-income occupants of developed, adapted or rehabilitated areas in urban or rural settings are replaced by higher-income residents. The mechanism behind such displacement is well known, generally involving an increase in property values and tax assessments that the original residents cannot afford. They

are then forced, or tempted, to sell out for prejudiced amounts, leading to alienation and loss of culture and way of life.

Recent research has attempted to arrive at a synthesis of two modes for analyzing gentrification pressures: cultural analysis (involving such issues as production of social identity, displacement and demographic restructuring, and geographic preference); and economic analysis (involving such issues as consumption of past environments, capital accumulation, and increases in property values).⁷ According to such research, gentrification entails processes of spatial and social differentiation involving the consumption of past environments by outside investors or new, more affluent residents for the purposes of flexible accumulation of capital and the production of desired new forms of social identity (e.g., urbanity, high-style living, or association with “historic” environments).⁸

EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE HERITAGE INDUSTRY IN JORDAN

No clear definition exists of historical and cultural resources in Jordan today. In fact, post-1700 AD historical and cultural resources are not even protected by law, and have been plagued by widespread destruction and neglect. The management of cultural resources has also only recently been integrated into the scope of municipal planning practice, and no guidelines exist concerning intervention in already-existing historical settings.⁹ In the absence of such official policies, heritage-conservation projects in Jordan have in the last two decades become intertwined with the tourist industry. According to Masri, such heritage-conservation/tourism developments have been associated with a variety of themes and objectives — some concerned with local identity, others constituting little more than a refuge from reality.¹⁰

The following brief discussion categorizes some principal themes of these conservation projects. Because it is aimed at critically understanding conservation in Jordan, it attempts to single out only the main motives behind each project, and it is not intended to imply these projects do not have other motives. Obviously, to do each project justice, each would have to receive its own detailed study. But for the purposes of this paper, which focuses on gentrification, only the village of Umm Qais has been selected for in-depth case study.

Most heritage conservation projects in Jordan follow an approach in which heritage is viewed as a means for capital accumulation, and according to which each heritage site is treated as a commodity. This trend is being encouraged by wealthy investors who have tried to gain legitimacy through association with architects and conservationists. Since such projects are often based in rural villages, they often lead to severe gentrification and widespread displacement of original inhabitants. This fashionable trend can be seen in projects and proposals for luxurious tourist villages such as Taybet Zaman, Umm Qais, and Khirbet al Nawafleh (FIGS. 1A, B; 2).



FIGURE 1A,B. (ABOVE) The tourist village of Taybet in southern Jordan. Note the lack of differentiation between existing village fabric and new additions. **FIGURE 2. (BELOW RIGHT)** The tourist village of Khirbet al Nawafleh in southern Jordan after evacuation and deterioration, and before implementation of the conservation project. The village provides an example of the commodification of the cultural heritage resulting in gentrification.

Different levels of gentrification characterize these developments. In the case of Taybet Zaman in the Petra region, the entire village was rented from its inhabitants by Jordan Tourism Investments according to a long-term contract. The village was then transformed into a luxurious tourist attraction, and many of the former villagers were offered such low-income jobs in the new development as cleaning and custodial work (the investor's way of providing for community development and public participation).

In other conservation projects, architectural heritage has become a means for social differentiation and the production of a new social identity for the upper-middle class. The geographic constitution of such gentrified or conserved areas is crucial to the production of such new identities, which usually center around "urban living" and the consumption of high-class cultural products (e.g., alternative music and arts and crafts). Historic residential neighborhoods in Amman have become particularly favorable locations for this type of conservation activity. A perfect example is Books@Cafe, a recently completed adaptation of an historic house into a Westernized Internet cafe. Despite its high-minded intentions, the project constitutes an intrusion into a calm residential neighborhood, producing alienation and discomfort among the local community. And it has created a schizophrenic difference between the environments inside and outside the cafe, intensifying the separation between the neighborhood and its architectural heritage.

Unfortunately, very few conservation projects in Jordan prioritize community development, sustainability, or the re-

talization of heritage in the service of a larger community. In the pursuit of such goals, conservation might be viewed as a cultural act, and architectural heritage might be considered a source of inspiration. In such projects the regeneration of architectural heritage can also provide a tool to resist commodification of the environment. Usually, instances of this third type of heritage-conservation are initiated by artists and/or concerned conservationists, and they generally have a cultural/educational flavor. They also tend to emphasize differentiation in place and time between the various historical layers of a particular site. A good example of this type of approach is Darat al Funun, in Amman (FIG. 3A,B,C). After the 1970s, this site was abandoned and fell into neglect; but in 1993 it was conserved by the Shuman Foundation in a way that



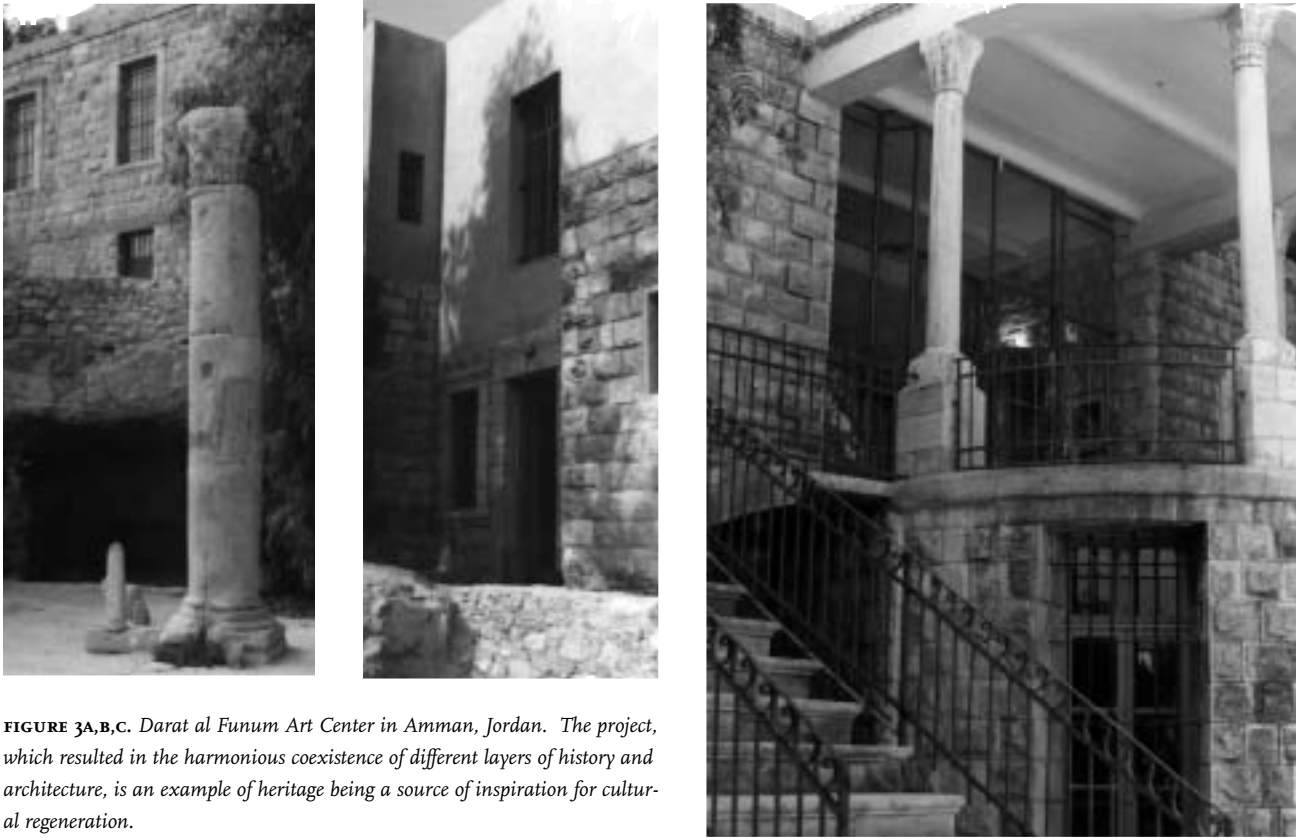


FIGURE 3A,B,C. Darat al Funum Art Center in Amman, Jordan. The project, which resulted in the harmonious coexistence of different layers of history and architecture, is an example of heritage being a source of inspiration for cultural regeneration.

allowed a panoply of cultural events and historical layers (ancient, Roman, Byzantine, and early-twentieth-century) to coexist. The programmatic objective of the project was to create a small, dynamic house of arts serving the Jordanian public. The project has attempted to connect with the community both physically, through its architecture and overall layout within the neighborhood, and spiritually, through its transparency and accessibility. It also rejected the current trend toward museumification of cultural heritage, aspiring instead to allow cultural heritage the opportunity to evolve and regenerate.

With the exception of those few such successful endeavors that prioritize cultural continuity and genuine community development and participation, the majority of heritage-conservation projects in Jordan today adopt the first alternative, which the author refers to as the *zaman* approach.¹¹ This trend is spreading in Jordan like a malignant tumor, lethal to heritage, since it acts as an obstacle to its regeneration and continuity.

UMM QAIS: HISTORIOGRAPHY OF A JORDANIAN VILLAGE

Historical research should provide interpretation of facts and events in both a temporal and a geographic context. Clear distinctions should also be drawn between mere

chronologies of events and interpretations of their meaning in place and time — a historiography.¹² Without a proper historiography of Umm Qais, the study of its architecture would be little more than a study of static objects, with little relation to underlying conditions of political, economic and cultural dynamics. According to Shami, in order to arrive at this level of understanding of nineteenth-century Umm Qais, one has to appreciate the importance of the prevailing land use system, contemporary processes of land registration and ownership, and the nature of trade networks that existed at the time. These factors all had a significant effect on the political, cultural and economic context of the village, as well as its layout and architectural composition.¹³

The village of Umm Qais is located in the northern part of Jordan, where it commands magnificent views of the North Jordan Valley, Lake Tiberias, the Yarmouk River Gorge, and the Golan Heights (FIG.4). Umm Qais also occupies the site of the ancient Greco-Roman city of Gadara, a city of the Decapolis famous for its poets and philosophers.¹⁴ Gadara had originally been founded as a military colony by the Ptolemies; but it was Pompeius, the famous Roman leader, who conquered it in 63 BC and initiated an extensive building program that included theaters, baths, temples, gateways and infrastructure.¹⁵ In 1806 the ruins of ancient Gadara were identified by the German Orientalist and explorer Ulrich Seetzen. Later on, the site was surveyed more thor-

oughly by G. Schumacher, another German traveler in Bilad al Sham, who wrote that it was uninhibited at the time.¹⁶

Under Ottoman rule during the second half of the nineteenth century the acropolis of Gadara was resettled by villagers arriving from such nearby settlements as Sama al Rousan and Malka. The layout of the new village, which took the name Umm Qais, followed the original plan of the Greco-Roman city but was built according to a Jordanian/vernacular style. During the second half of the twentieth century the settlement expanded along the main road connecting Irbid to Himmeh, which passed nearby. The name Umm Qais (originally *mkes*, which means “frontier station,” or “sac for measurements,” in Arabic) reflected the significant role the settlement played in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an Ottoman border post and center for collecting taxes, in the form of agricultural products, from the Hauran Valley.¹⁷ Today, the village provides archeologists, anthropologists and conservationists with an extremely rich heritage site, incorporating both the ruins of the Greco-Roman city and one of a very few genuine and well-preserved Ottoman villages in the region.¹⁸

A key historical condition affecting the development of the village in the early nineteenth century was the desire of the rulers of the Ottoman Empire to promote agriculture in Bilad al Sham to compensate for a drop in agricultural production from the Balkans, which was at the time subject to political unrest. The Ottoman government also aimed to achieve an increased level of state control in the region. A Land Code was initiated in 1858 to further these ends. It made it mandatory to register all lands under cultivation, and it specified that any land left unattended for more than three years was subject to confiscation by the government. In Umm Qais, the effect of this code was substantial, leading to a gradual stratification of the village community into two groups: landowners (*mellakin*), who had settled first in the village and who could therefore register most nearby lands; and share-croppers (*fellahin*), who worked these lands for the landowners, and who on rare occasions were able to register lands of their own.

One of the most prominent *mellakin* in Umm Qais was Falah al Rousan, who later became the Ottoman district mag-

istrate (*qaimmaqam*, or *mukhtar*). He occupied the most significant house in the village, Beit al Rousan, located at the apex of the old acropolis where it had a commanding view of the rest of the town.¹⁹ Generally speaking, there was also a strong connection in the village between cadastral patterns and power relations, on the one hand, and architectural patterns and village morphology, on the other.²⁰ *Mellakin* families resided at the highest levels of the village, building beautiful courtyard-style houses with elaborate detailing and vaulted roof systems. *Fellahin* settled in small scattered houses in the lower parts of the village. A third group, landowning families who had arrived later in the growth of the village, settled between these two groups in an intermediate location.²¹

By the turn of the century, following these general development patterns, the region of Bilad al Sham had achieved significant agricultural prosperity, and had succeeded in attracting the political and economic interest of both Britain and France. This led to the improvement of infrastructure and trade networks linking Umm Qais to such major cities in the region as Damascus, Irbid and Tiberias.

JOURNEY FROM PARADISE TO GHETTO

In 1967 the Department of Antiquities of Jordan proposed plans to excavate large new sections of the ancient city of Gadara. To further this plan, even though archaeological excavations had to that point been carried out without significant obstruction from the local community, the department issued a special “Legal Order” confiscating the houses and lands of the villagers. The change in policy with regard to Umm Qais reflected the government’s desire to demolish it entirely to facilitate the archaeological excavations. As such, it reflected a decision to privilege the heritage of one period (Classical Roman and Byzantine) at the expense of the continuity of another (the Ottoman-derived culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries).

Eventually, these government plans to demolish Umm Qais completely were abolished under pressure from Jordanian and German architects and anthropologists. But the displacement of the villagers was carried out nonetheless. Thus, in 1976 the inhabitants were forced to sell their houses and agricultural land to the government, and in the ten years that followed they were displaced to a nearby housing project (FIG.5). Following the relocation, most of the houses were left vacant, which caused them to deteriorate severely (FIG.6). The result of these policies was that during the 1980s the previously harmonious coexistence of different cultures, architectural orders, and ideologies in Umm Qais was dismantled under the direction of certain empowered scholars and authority figures who had chosen to prioritize one period of Jordanian history at the expense of another. Confiscations eventually amounted to about 460 *donoms* of agricultural land, for which the level of compensation was extremely



FIGURE 4. Map of Jordan with a blow-up of the Bani Kinana region in the north near the Syrian border.

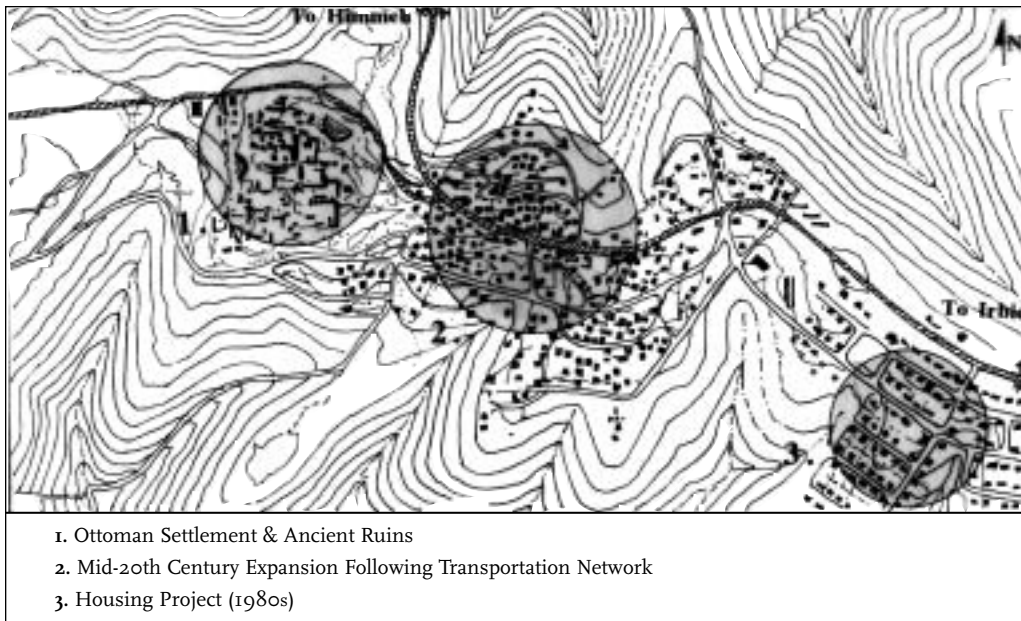


FIGURE 5. Site plan of Umm Qais with the three main zones of expansion: the Ottoman settlement and ancient Roman ruins, the mid-twentieth-century expansion following the transportation network, and the new housing project.

unfair. For example, a typical holding, consisting of a courtyard house with five to seven rooms and approximately five additional *donoms* of agricultural land, was bought by the government for only 12,000 Jordanian Dinars (JD). When the villagers objected, the government offered to sell them new housing units built by the Jordanian Housing Cooperation for about JD 10,000-19,000, depending on their size.²²

The housing project to which the villagers were moved was built outside the old Ottoman village along the highway to Irbid. Its site was a piece of land that was previously unfit for housing development because of its 35-40 percent slope. After their eviction, villagers were not allowed to build new houses of their own; instead, they were forced to inhabit dwelling units whose plans were borrowed from design prototypes that did not fit their life-style. For example, most villagers kept domestic animals, grew crops, and had water wells in their courtyards. In their old dwellings they had also enjoyed proximity to their agricultural lands. In the new housing units, such culturally-embedded practices became impossible. Exiled to this new ghetto, their former paradise waited in vain for their return (FIG. 7). Villagers make frequent trips to their former residences in the vacant and deteriorated old village, and there remembered sadly how their dignified and glorious past had been violated. In addition, now that the main source of their former living (agriculture) had been taken away, most villagers were forced to look for low-paying jobs in nearby urban centers such as Irbid. Faced with these conditions, it was not long before the villagers started to experience a sense of alienation from their old village. In fact, hostile feelings soon emerged between the villagers and their old settlement, which many began to view as a curse.



FIGURE 6. Effects of gentrification at Umm Qais: vacant and deteriorated courtyard houses and sterile but picturesque environments.

CONSERVATION EFFORTS AT UMM QAIS

After evacuation of the villagers, German and Jordanian archaeologists and architects started to call for the conservation of the old Ottoman courtyard houses. But although isolated and fragmented conservation projects started to appear, they lacked a cohesive approach or philosophy (FIG.8). In hindsight, it is possible to see how such projects failed for two reasons: first, because they failed to address the overall vernacular fabric of the village, with its streets and nodes and organic character; and second, because they failed to attempt to relocate at least some of the villagers back to the dwellings. In the absence of these crucial measures, the projects could offer little more than a museumification of the cultural heritage, turning a once vivid and living heritage into a staged artifact. The following is a brief synopsis of some isolated attempts to restore and adapt the village's courtyard houses and community structures.²³

In September 1987 the restoration of Beit Malkawi was completed. This house was adapted to serve as a headquar-

ters for archaeological teams (mainly German and Jordanian), and as a storage site for archaeological finds. Ironically, the house's original owner, Ahmad Malkawi, the former mayor (*mukhtar*) of the village, was asked to stay in one of the wings of the house and work as a guard. Thus, his family was the only one that was able to stay behind.

Another significant house, Beit Rousan, was adapted into an archaeological museum (FIG.9). This project tragically resulted in the demolition of authentic village walls to create larger internal courtyards, however. The walls of houses in Umm Qais had served as important space definers, helping create sequential movement from public, to semipublic, to private space. But this project compromised the historic spatial integrity of an important area of the village. In addition, the museum's emphasis on ancient findings marginalized the Ottoman heritage and the traditional life-style that motivated the design of building (FIG.10).

In 1991 the former village school was adapted into a resthouse and Italian restaurant (after relocating the school

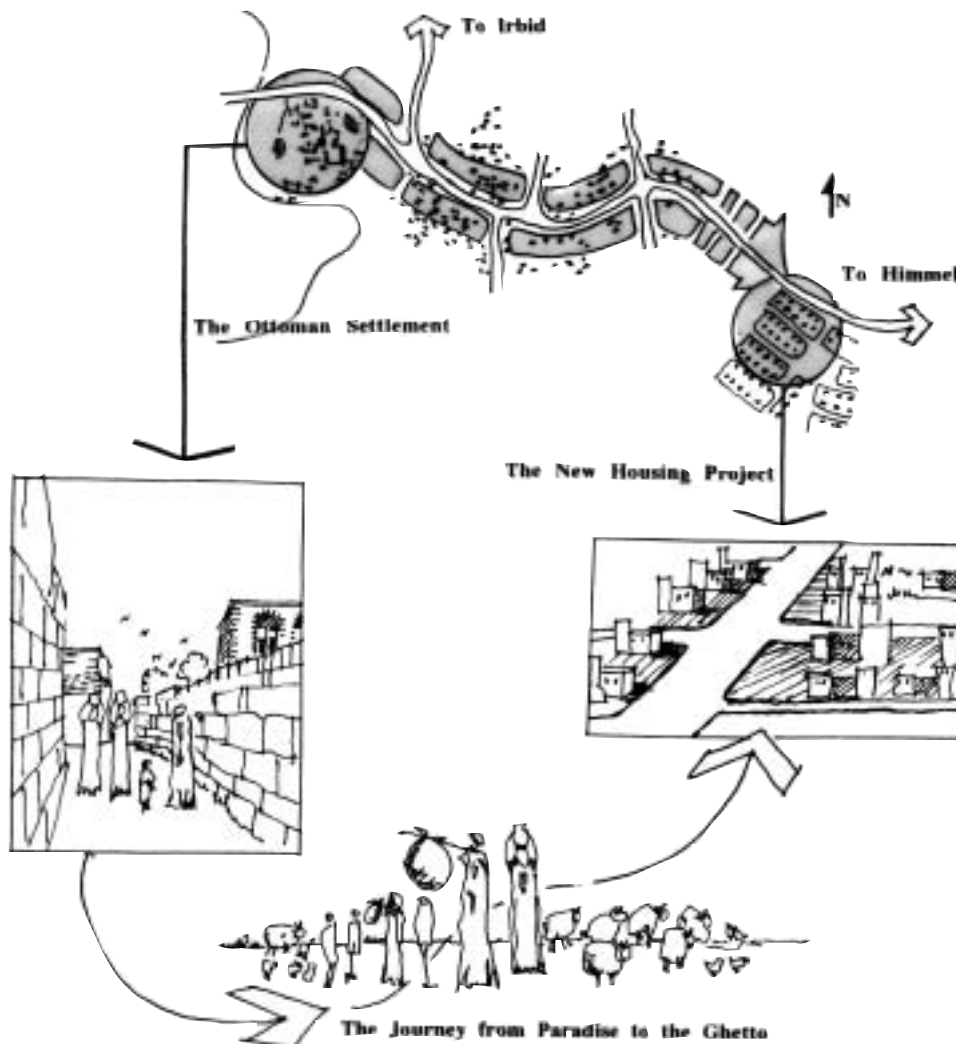


FIGURE 7. The journey from paradise to ghetto. The relocation of the villagers from the Ottoman settlement to the new housing project.

to the new housing project as a way to pressure the villagers to move). The project was primarily intended to serve tourists and upper-middle-class visitors from Amman. The adaptation, which was funded by Zara Investment Company, resulted in the unnecessary demolition of the north wing of the former U-shaped structure — consisting of two rooms, one from the turn of the century and another from the mid-twentieth century — and its replacement with a terrace and two cross-vaulted structures. Previously, three periods of vernacular architecture had coexisted harmoniously in the school. But the new structures are confused with the old ones, creating difficulty for any future reading of the history of the place (FIG. 11). The new function for the building, as an

Italian restaurant, was also strongly rejected by the local community, which considered such a use to be unsuitable for one of the village's previously most significant structures.

Finally, in 1994 the same investment company that had adapted the school proposed to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities that the whole former Ottoman-era settlement be turned into a five-star tourist resort, with all associated amenities, including restaurants, bars, hotel rooms, and swimming pools (another *zaman* indiscretion). The ministry has so far granted the company initial acceptance for this scheme, although legal proceedings have not yet been finalized. One reason for the delay has been legal problems resulting from the change in land use (from archaeological

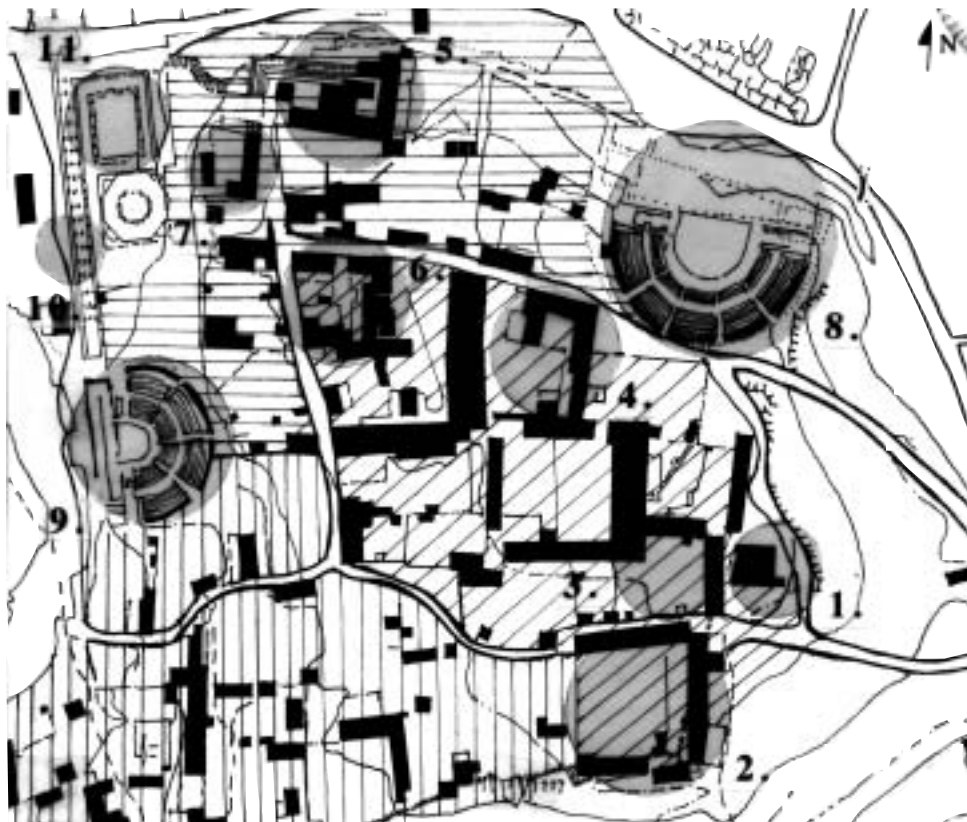





FIGURE 8. Site plan of the Ottoman settlement and ancient ruins, indicating the three immigration zones of the late nineteenth century and the current main features in the village.

Late 1800s Immigration Zones:

-  Landowners (*Mellakin*)
-  Cultivators (*Fellahin*)
-  Minor Landowners (Late Arrivals)

Main Features of Ottoman Settlement

1. The Village Mosque
2. Beit Malkawi (Now: Archaeological Headquarters)
3. Beit Hishboni
4. Beit Rousan (Now: Archaeological Museum)
5. Village School (Now: Tourist Rest House)
6. Beit Omari (Now: Police Station)
7. Courtyard House (Now: Department of Antiquities Office)
8. North Theater
9. South Theater
10. Roman Shops
11. Basilica Church

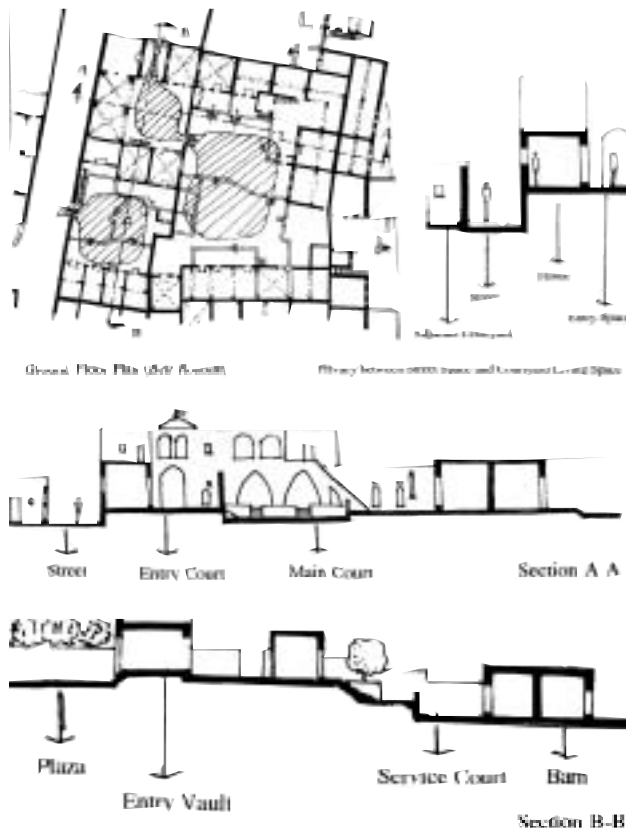


FIGURE 9. *Beit Rousan before the adaptation and demolition of walls which negatively effected the sequential flow of space and experiences. The documentation of this house and the whole village before gentrification was carried out by the author between 1987 and 1988.*

site to tourist resort). Another has been opposition from the local community. Although designs for the tourist resort call for the retention of uses in those courtyard houses that have already been adapted, the original inhabitants of the village feel they should be part of the decision-making process concerning redevelopment of the village, and should be able to operate and manage tourist facilities there.²⁴

Recently, the author has sensed that new alliances are starting to form between the archaeologists (who once were the villagers' enemies, and who were the main reason the gentrification process began some fifteen years ago) and the local community. Neither approves of the proposed scheme for the village by the tourist investment company, and both realize that once the village is sold in its entirety to the private sector, all possibility of the villagers returning will be ended.

ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK AT UMM QAIS

A major source of information regarding conflicts at Umm Qais has been extensive fieldwork undertaken by the

author over the last ten years. This research has been qualitative/exploratory in nature, based on analytic induction (working with the pieces to get to the general picture), rather than deduction.²⁵ In addition, the author has adopted a collective approach to inquiry, accommodating the value systems of the studied community.

Ethnographic fieldwork has been integral to this long-term effort. Since the author rejects the notion of a sharp division between background research, fieldwork and theory, fieldwork has been fully integrated into all phases of the research, with all its complexities and biases.²⁶ And during the last season of fieldwork at Umm Qais (1998), the author depended mainly on ethnographic fieldwork methods to elicit information from the local community.²⁷

In the first stage of this recent effort, frequent participant observation and informal and unstructured interviews were conducted over an extended period of time. These efforts were characterized by a minimum of control over



FIGURE 10. (ABOVE) *Beit Rousan after adaptation into an archaeological museum.*

FIGURE 11. (BELOW) *The village school after gentrification and adaptation into a resthouse and Italian restaurant. The project resulted in a distorted reading of the evolution of place, since there is no distinction between the existing building and the new additions.*

informants' responses. Valuable key-informants in the village were also identified, facilitating the researcher's entry into the community. The purpose of this initial stage was to get the people of Umm Qais to open up and express themselves in their own terms and at their own pace.

In the second stage of the recent fieldwork, the author, with the help of undergraduate students of architecture, distributed some 250 copies of a letter to the community, containing a history of the conflict at Umm Qais and describing the rights of the indigenous inhabitants. The purpose of the letter, which was discussed in small focus groups all over the village prior to being distributed, was education and public awareness. In addition, 50 semistructured interviews, based on a previously determined interview guide, were conducted with representatives of various social and age groups. The interviews had several objectives; among these were to elicit local reactions to the gentrification process, to construct comparisons between previous and current living conditions, and to elicit reactions to the fragmented heritage-conservation projects in the old village and the comprehensive proposal for its conversion. The following is a brief synopsis of results of this ethnographic fieldwork.

Almost all interviewees (96 percent) were opposed to their relocation to the housing project and said they preferred their old life in the village. The 4 percent who favored life in the housing project credited their view to the availability of modern utilities such as electricity and running water. The entire community expressed eagerness to move back to the old village if it could be restored and upgraded with proper infrastructure. The interviewees expressed unanimous dislike for their new housing-project units, which they often compared to prison cells. And they elaborated on the unsuitability of such units for an agricultural life-style, since, among other reasons, they provided no storage space for grain, no courtyard space for daily cooking or the keeping of domestic animals, and little sense of community spirit. In addition, they sited a worsening of community economic conditions, since most young people were choosing to abandon agriculture for low-paying jobs in nearby urban centers.

In terms of changes to the old village, interviewees were generally accepting of the adaptation of the Rousan house into an archaeological museum, even though many felt the adaptation should have more closely reflected their living heritage and life-style. But the whole community was outraged by the closure of the village school and its adaptation into an Italian restaurant. They felt that the school represented a significant part of their past, and that it was inappropriate to change such a former place of education and learning into a place of sin and alcohol-drinking.

Almost 95 percent of the interviewees expressed disapproval of the plan to sell the village to the investment company for redevelopment as a five-star resort. They proposed instead a scenario in which they would be able to return to certain parts of the old village and participate in smaller

tourism-related projects with the help of the government. They felt this option could also improve the quality of heritage tourism in the village by bringing life back to it. All villagers expressed a desire to be included in the decision-making process, and all opposed secret deals between what they referred to as a "strategic investor" and the government. They felt they were being denied such a voice, however, because their local council had been disempowered.

One clear finding of the fieldwork at Umm Qais is that different interest groups, with various degrees of legitimacy and power, hold different pasts to be of value, and at times these pasts are deeply contradictory. Archaeologists value the ancient city of Gadara at the expense of the more recent Ottoman settlement. Conservationists value the recent past of the Ottoman village and its courtyard houses. Investors value the potential for capital accumulation through transformation of the village into a tourist resort. And members of the local community value an authentic way of life manifested through a living tradition of agriculture and life in large courtyard (*hosh*) houses, which they associate with long-term economic stability and the sense of belonging to a shared place.

THE ETHICS AND POLITICS OF COMMODIFYING THE PAST

If heritage tourism is to be endorsed as a major component of a national economy such as that of Jordan, a dynamic and balanced interaction should be maintained between living cultural heritage and investments in tourism. In an attempt to establish principles to govern such a fragile and sensitive relationship, ICOMOS (The International Council on Monuments and Sites) has recently been researching an International Cultural Tourism Charter (ICTC).²⁸ In the following sections, this article will try to reflect on the realities and complexities of heritage tourism at Umm Qais with respect to the principles of the ICTC.

The case study of Umm Qais indicates how heritage conservation is a complex activity with many ideological, political, and economic ramifications. Yet before discussing the politics of consuming the past, it is essential to understand how important cultural changes have been initiated during the second half of this century. Harvey has suggested that such cultural change may be credited to the shift from modernism to postmodernism.²⁹ He has argued that postmodernism has surrendered itself to processes of commodification and commercialization of the environment and social life. Thus, a shift has taken place from a culture of production (Fordism) to a culture of consumption and flexible capital accumulation.

If historic sites are to be developed for tourism, excellence, protective strategies, and thorough research should guide this development in order to ensure a genuine cultural experience for the tourist and protect the rights of host com-

munities.³⁰ Due to its rich ancient, classical and modern history, the majority of tourists coming to Jordan (about 78 percent) seek a distinguished cultural experience. Yet tourist products and services in Jordan (e.g., museums, visitor centers, and site management and interpretation) were given a “poor” or “fair” rating by about 40 percent of tourists. One reason is that tourist products in Jordan suffer from overemphasis on antiquities and a below-standard level of service and facility provision.³¹ At the same time, local strategies for improving tourism overemphasize the economic dimension, viewing the country’s cultural resources primarily for their money-generating potential. Such an emphasis, however, tends to negate the very *raison d’être* of cultural tourism, for when culture is exclusively viewed from a demand/supply perspective, it is reduced to a packaged experience. True cultural tourism, on the other hand, is a socio-culturally embodied phenomenon with diverse dimensions and untold influences, of which economics is but one.³² This would seem to indicate that in Jordan the tourist experience should be emancipated from its present economic emphasis so it can begin exploring alternative value systems and paradigms.

Gentrified environments, such as that of Umm Qais, by contrast, offer little more than a means for capital accumulation and the construction of new social identities for those who occupy such places at the expense of their authentic heritage and the well-being of former inhabitants. Meanwhile, in return for long-term economic stability through their former agricultural activities and related local industries, those who are displaced are forced to accept short-term and occasional economic stability in the form of demeaning, low-income jobs in the tourist industry.

The case of Umm Qais shows how the commodification of the living heritage presents serious ethical problems associated with the fashionable *zaman* approach to heritage conservation in Jordan. Developing strategies and theories of conservation and interpretation in historical and cultural sites—in addition to facilitating research on the sensitive interaction between tourist investment and the cultural heritage of a host community—may help shift cultural tourism away from such an exclusively economic approach, to one with a more dynamic socio-cultural focus.

The ICTC is aimed at establishing guidelines to promote such a dynamic interaction between tourism investment and cultural heritage. One of its principal objectives is to facilitate and encourage a dialogue between conservation interests and the tourism industry about the importance and fragile nature of heritage places, collections, and living cultures. Yet, achieving a sustainable future for these cultural assets presents a serious challenge for policy-makers, especially at a time of increasing globalization.

FEUDAL LANDLORD (INVESTOR) VS. PEASANT (VILLAGER)

Unfortunately, no such dynamic interaction between tourist investment in heritage places and the rights and needs of host communities has been maintained in Jordan. The balance has clearly shifted in favor of capital investments, benefiting certain empowered individuals at the expense of the authenticity and continuity of cultural heritage and host communities. In general, the author is not against private investment in heritage sites, but he is critical of the dynamics of such investment in Jordanian villages such as Umm Qais. Here a just representation of all stakeholders (e.g., investors, the host community, and archaeologists) has not been retained.

At Umm Qais, the current approach to heritage conservation and tourist investment continues to empower certain interests, and privilege certain pasts, above others. In particular, the local community has been marginalized and disempowered. Architects or conservationists have unintentionally abetted this process by lending the legitimacy of their specialized knowledge to the insensitive plans of investors, and their participation has helped communicate a distorted view of the motives behind such projects to the public. Granted, consensus is very hard to achieve in such contexts: investors usually seek capital accumulation; conservationists are interested in protecting the built environment; and the local community is concerned with improving its living conditions and sustaining its heritage. But specialists need to play a more active role in attempting to reconcile these competing interests, rather than serving the interests of investors alone.

Most investors claim their projects for historic sites will aid the community at large by providing job opportunities for local residents. But such claims must be seen as camouflage for their primary goal, flexible capital accumulation and monopoly control over the heritage resource. For this reason, one-time monetary compensation for displaced residents, or even replacement housing, will always be an unfair trade-off. Ironically, most local inhabitants end up returning to their own villages as low-income employees (e.g., maids, waiters, and cleaning staff). By hiring the local community at sweatshop rates at the tourist village, tourist investment companies are further able to eliminate all possibility that competing small tourist operations might flourish in the area. In seeking such monopoly control, tourist investment companies act as feudal landlords in heritage-conservation and community-development clothing.

The reality of what has happened at Umm Qais strongly contradicts the principles of the ICTC. For example, Principle Four of the charter stresses that host communities and indigenous people should be involved in planning for conservation and tourism. Principle Five emphasizes that tourism and conservation activities should benefit the host community. The charter further stresses that a significant proportion of the revenues derived from tourist investments

and programs in heritage locations should be allocated to the conservation and interpretation of those places. And it states that tourism projects, activities and developments should minimize adverse effects on the cultural heritage and the life-styles of local host communities. One means of achieving such objectives, and a just division of benefits between tourist investment and the living heritage of host communities, is to encourage genuine public participation and promote a serious and educated monitoring of tourist investments in fragile, culturally-live sites like Umm Qais.

STAGED VS. LIVING HERITAGE

One of the primary objectives of the ICTC is to communicate the significance of heritage and need to conserve it both for host communities and for visitors. Yet, ever since the residents of Umm Qais were evacuated, the village has deteriorated, and it is now in danger of becoming a dead artifact, which can no longer communicate its significance either to the public or its previous residents. The current comprehensive proposal to develop the site as a tourist village would complete this “freezing” process by packaging the artifact for the pleasure of a passing audience. Meanwhile, the living architectural heritage, together with the lives of its former inhabitants, has been denied the right to evolve, mature and regenerate.

At such sites in Jordan, the living past, which could be a valuable source of inspiration, is being replaced with staged, beautifully wrapped, and essentially fake environments. And cultural landscapes with rich living histories are becoming mere displays of artifacts and building forms without the support of a genuine way of life.³³ Such trends will eventually result in a schizophrenic separation between the contemporary inhabitants of such places and their cultural heritage. All parties involved in heritage-conservation projects need to remember that a country’s most important resource is its people, and that without them, culture and cultural production loses its special meaning.

Conservationists, in particular, should not be passive participants in the conservation process. When possible, they should call for genuine community development and discourage all types of gentrification and relocation. They should further be wary of being used by investors seeking legitimacy for self-serving schemes. In addition, local communities need to develop strategies of resistance to help them oppose developers and gentrifiers. One such strategy might entail the formation of local development councils, which might draft their own plans for development and investment. Yet to form an opposition is not enough; opposition must be serious, active and educated. Cultural literacy will be key to this effort: local inhabitants and their local councils must become educated and informed about the values and significance of their cultural heritage, their past, and

the importance of its proper continuity and interpretation.

There is much at stake in such an effort. Regional cultural heritage can be seen as a source of inspiration for future generations and a means of resisting globalization. Along these lines, many sociologists, anthropologists and geographers have argued that proper heritage conservation may be used as an effective counter-force to the cycles of capital accumulation expressed in many new developments.³⁴ And architectural historian and theoretician Kenneth Frampton has argued for the importance of heritage conservation and the continuity of regional architectural forms and characters as a way to resist popular commodification of the built environment and social life. Regional architectural form may become particularly instrumental in such resistance to late capitalism and flexible accumulation if not only the form, setting, and structures are conserved, but also the underlying technologies and know-how.³⁵

This article has argued that heritage conservation should not be undertaken as a specialized activity of learned archaeologists or historians for the pleasure of the elite. Nor should it be seen only as a means for capital accumulation as practiced by empowered investors, or as high-class heritage commodification for the purposes of constructing new social identities for members of the middle and upper-middle classes. Rather, heritage conservation should be seen as a complex activity aimed at enhancing cultural continuity, genuine community development and participation, and the reaffirmation of the sense of belonging to a shared place and way of life.

There is such a thing as native truth. This brief synthesis of ethnographic fieldwork at Umm Qais has attempted to show how such truth may emerge if the point of view of the local community is taken into consideration. Native truth may then form the foundation for a sensitive and dynamic development policy in places such as Umm Qais, one that creates the desired dynamic and balanced interaction between cultural heritage and tourist investment.

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18. The word Ottoman here is used to describe vernacular Jordanian architecture built during the Ottoman period (at the turn of the century). It is not meant to describe a specific resemblance to the Ottoman architecture of Anatolia — even through some subtle similarities exist.
19. Shami, "Umm Qeis."
20. A cadastral pattern is one describing property ownership lines.
21. Kienzle, "Umm Qais."
22. Some of the survey data on the local community's reactions to the current conservation and development projects at Umm Qais were collected by *Ho'obsh* and *Zakarneh* in the Spring of 1998.
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All photos and drawings are by the author.

