

PALESTINE

Destruction in the West Bank, April 2002

This report is the first to be submitted by the Palestine National Committee of ICOMOS to the *ICOMOS World Report on Monuments and Sites in Danger* concerning Palestinian heritage sites at risk. The Committee was established in February 2002 and launched its first press release on 11 April 2002, to voice grave concern about the use of air and field artillery by Israeli forces in the historic old cities of Nablus and Bethlehem, in the West Bank, Palestine.

Old City of Nablus

The city of Nablus, with 113,000 Palestinian residents, suffered considerable damage and destruction during an 18-day air and ground bombardment by Israeli military forces, 3–21 April 2002. Most of the destruction occurred in the two-millennia-old historic core area in central Nablus, where 16,000 residents and hundreds of economically viable businesses are located. The large-scale attack on Nablus was part of an Israeli re-occupation of Palestinian territory in the West Bank that targeted major cities and villages. Since then, Israeli military forces have repeatedly re-entered the city causing more damage. Curfews on the city as well as movement restrictions between cities have complicated the task of making further damage assessment. (This report is based on the initial 'post-disaster' assessment made by the municipality: *Post-Disaster Damage Assessment for the City of Nablus* prepared by Nablus Municipality, 5 May 2002.)

Description

The Old City of Nablus is the historic core of the West Bank's largest city and a commercial hub for the agriculturally wealthy northern area. Founded in 2500–3000 BC by the Canaanites, it was rebuilt by the conquering Romans in the first century and called Flavia Neapolis, from which the name of Nablus is derived.

Prior to 3 April, the Old City was the most economically healthy of all old cities in Palestine, and one of the most beautiful. The very dense urban fabric was composed of the main commercial streets and six residential quarters formed of clustered courtyard houses and a traditional organisational pattern of winding alleys, attached residences and wider vaulted market places. Monuments include nine historic mosques (four built on Byzantine churches and five from the early Islamic period), an Ayyubid mausoleum, and a 17th-century church, but most buildings are Ottoman-era structures such as 2 major khans, 10 Turkish bath houses, 30 olive-oil soap factories (7 of which were functioning), 2850 historic houses and exceptional family palaces, 18 Islamic monuments and 17 *sabeel* (water fountains). Visible Roman ruins lie outside the Old City, and a few monuments within the Old City date back to the Byzantine era and Crusader period (*Riwaq Database*, Centre for Architectural Conservation). A Roman-era aqueduct system runs under the city, part of which had recently been preserved by the municipality and opened for visitors.

The city's economy has been built on traditional handicrafts and small-scale production of Arabic sweets, olive-oil soap, stone and woodcarving, hand-coloured floor tiling and traditional cafes that are mainly centred in the Old City. Nablus Old City is an

example of an authentic historic centre, with a viable economy and stable residency, and well integrated with the modern city.

Recent History

After the withdrawal of the British Mandate in 1947, followed by Jordanian administration thereafter, the city fell under Israeli military occupation in 1967, causing demographic changes in the city. The Israeli military constraints that were placed on local industry encouraged the commercial class to leave the Old City and to be replaced by poorer sectors and refugees from other areas, and indirectly caused the dilapidation of the housing stock.

Under recent Palestinian rule, the Nablus municipality, with the aid of a special architectural unit and several international donors, slowly began a programme of maintenance of the Old City to preserve its architectural features. It improved water and electricity infrastructure, laid flagstone paving and began treating sewage

Old City of Nablus





Old City of Nablus

problems. It also undertook a survey of historical buildings, in cooperation with al-Najah University, and embarked on restoring arches and the landmark Ottoman clock tower. Restoration of an Ottoman-era stables and adaptation for use as a children's cultural centre has been a showcase project of the municipality (*TURATH* Newsletter, Welfare Association, May 2002).

Cause of Destruction, 3–21 April 2002

The whole of Nablus, but particularly the Old City, was held under total curfew and subjected to 18 days of bombardment and targeted destruction from Israeli F-16s, Apache helicopter gunships, tanks and military bulldozers. The kind of military ordnance used ranged from heavy bombs and tank shells to strafing fire and remote-controlled explosives. The most pervasive damage was caused by military bulldozers that were used to batter the narrow alleyways of the Old City to widen streets to facilitate tank movement, in the process destroying façades and walls, and demolishing historic residential buildings. Israeli soldiers also used timed explosives to blow holes in walls and doors to create internal passageways through linked historic buildings, to facilitate the ground invasion. Tanks repeatedly re-entered the city in May and June, causing further damage.

Damage Assessment Method

A survey of the Old City, in addition to other areas of the city, was carried out by ten teams of four to five engineers, architects and municipal experts for five working days immediately after the first wave of destruction. The work was managed by a steering committee that consisted of the Nablus municipality and representatives of UNDP, al-Najah University, the Palestinian Engineers Association and the Palestinian Contractors Union. Damage assessment was prepared using evaluation categories adopted in the European Macro Seismic Scale of grade 1 (repair cost is 1–5% market value of building) to grade 5 (total collapse).

Conclusions

The loss of life, injury, loss of homes and livelihoods that resulted from the bombardment are incalculable in monetary terms. It was observed that all buildings in the Old City were effected to some

degree by the Israeli bombardment, ranging from light damage (broken windows) to total destruction. Municipal estimates of the cost of consolidation and repair and loss of structures in the Old City is US\$41.5 million as of early May.

Houses in the historic core are composed of multi- and split levels, small rooms, stairs and courtyards. It is extremely difficult to draw boundary lines between buildings; damage of any part of one house can affect other units of the attached, above or underneath.

- 64 buildings or groups of buildings suffered heavy structural damage or were totally destroyed (grades 4 and 5).
- 221 buildings or group of buildings suffered some structural damage and are unsafe. They need urgent repair and renovation. More may become unsafe during the winter when water will penetrate cracked walls.
- 60 families have been forced out of the Old City after their homes were demolished and many other families have evacuated unsafe homes for refuge in other areas of the city.
- As a result of the movement of heavy Israeli tanks, most of the newly tiled stone streets of the Old City, financed by donor countries, and original stone walkways have been severely damaged or destroyed, as well as the newly renovated water and sewage lines underneath.
- Restoration work such as consolidating structures, cleaning façades, erecting street coverings, repairing windows, doors and arches has been destroyed.
- The electrical network in the Old City has been severely damaged. Pylons and wiring have been felled.
- The streets were extensively damaged by tanks, including the sidewalks, curb stones, sign posts, utility poles, fences, landscaping, phone boxes and signs.
- More than 40% of the total number of built units inside the Old City are trade-based (Riwaq Database). Many of these businesses were structurally damaged, burnt or looted during the invasion.

Listed below are examples of damaged historical structures used as places of worship, residences, businesses and cultural heritage.

1. Al-Khadra Mosque

The oldest mosque in Nablus, Grade 4 damage. Originally a mosque that was converted into a church by Crusaders, it was converted back into a mosque in 1187. The mosque served the residential communities of Yasmeeeni and Qaryoun quarters in the Old City. Its features were a Mamluk minaret, simple but rich layout, intricate stone detailing and handmade wooden doors. The squared minaret built by the Mamluks was located near the original building, one of only two such monumental minarets existing in Palestine. Large parts of the mosque, including the main prayer hall of 150 square metres, were destroyed by Israeli tank fire followed by

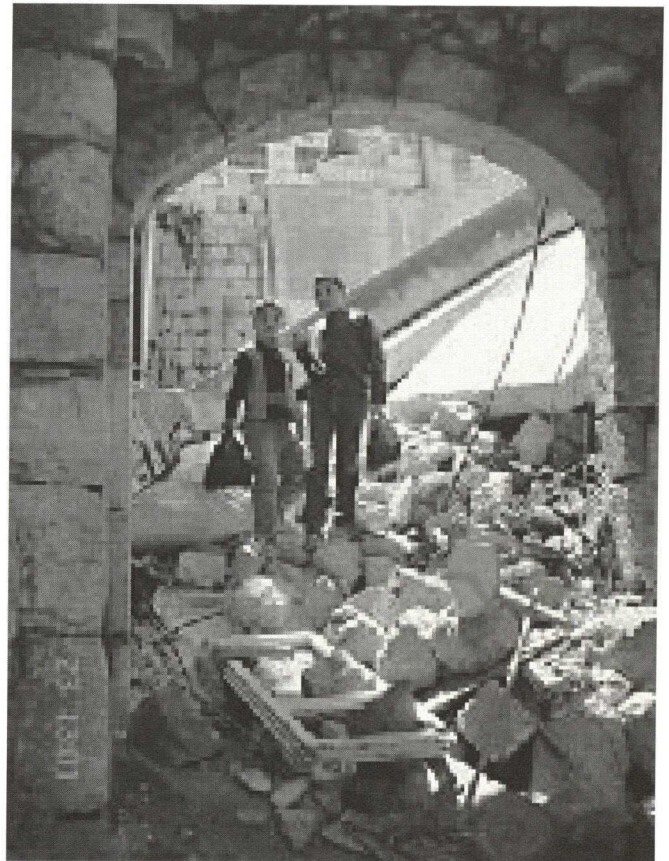
Al-Khadra Mosque



a bulldozer that demolished the main façade, two-metre thick walls and caused partial roof collapse at the western side, affecting the stability of the building and threatening the safety of nearby residential structures.

2. Hosh al-Shubi

Ottoman-era traditional extended family building, Grade 5 total damage. Located in the Qaryoun quarter, enclosing a rare public open space, the 300 square-metre building was inhabited by nine low-income families. Eight residents (three children, three women and two men) died when Israeli bulldozers tore down the buildings at night to gain access into the old city. Two elderly family members were rescued from the rubble one week later, after the curfew was lifted (*'Post-Disaster Damage'*, Nablus Municipality). The destruction of the house endangered the adjacent buildings and affected the structural stability of the entire block. Parts of the *hosh* are still standing, threatening the safety of people moving around the site.



Hosh al-Shubi

3. Al-Kannan soap factory site

Ottoman-era building, Grade 5 total destruction. Located near the main western entry to the old city, the site contained two olive-oil soap factories (al-Kannan and al-Nabulsi) and a group of houses belonging to eight families. The Kannan factory was hit by helicopter 'smart' bombs and totally burnt. The destroyed factories were two of the city's 30 famous 18th-century soap factories. The destruction affected 3500 square metres of built-up area in adjacent buildings and affects the structural stability of the residential blocks around the site. Two other soap factories were partially demolished: the Abu Shamat family factory was hit by tank shells that damaged the external walls, and the free-standing Masri family factory (built in 1890) was totally burnt from tank shells. Explosives were also placed inside the buildings.



Al-Kannan soap factory site

4. Al-Jadedeh (al-Shifa) Hammam

Ottoman-era Turkish bathhouse (built in 1720), Grade 3, partial damage. The structure, which is of historical and architectural value (built in 1790), was restored in 1992 and is one of only two baths that continues to function in the old city for social gatherings. Two helicopter 'smart' bombs hit the main hot bathing room of the hammam, creating large holes in the vaulted roof. The damage has seriously affected the stability of the historical structure and its unique architectural design.

Bethlehem Old City

A team of international and Palestinian experts assessed the cultural heritage damage in Bethlehem Old City, using a rapid technical survey of damages. Damage was classified according to four grades (superficial damage, slight structural damage, heavy structural damage and total collapse). A total of US\$1.4 million in damages was estimated, primarily grades 3 and 4, and loss in urban furniture. Direct damage to the Church of the Nativity complex from projectiles and fire was estimated to total about US\$77,000.

Damage Description

Most of the damage to the Old City was found in the market area and around the main street. The passage of heavy military vehicles in narrow alleys caused the following:





Al-Jadedeh (al-Shifa) Hammam

- stone pavement and urban furniture partially or totally destroyed;
- shop shutters crushed or shot at;
- corners of buildings and sidewalks crushed;
- numerous cars crushed and burnt, which caused damage to pavements and the façades of adjacent buildings;
- partial or total collapse of the internal structure from explosive devices placed inside buildings; many interiors were burnt, causing blackened façades, and damage to electrical systems;
- possible indirect structural problems on the buildings adjacent to damaged external walls.

Eight house-units were declared unsafe for residents (Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation / Bethlehem 2000).

The Church of the Nativity complex, where Palestinians had sought refuge from the attacks, was damaged by bullets, fire and one missile, but was probably saved from more serious damage by the widespread interest and appeals made by the international community. Within the church itself, wall mosaics, the roof and the external upper façade of the central nave suffered bullet hits that caused holes of up to 3 x 10 centimetres in diameter. In the Franciscan convent within the complex, damage was confined to pavement, plaster, frames, doors, electrical system, lighting system and walls. The external stone façade was blackened by smoke. A marble statue in the Church of St. Catherine and St. Jerome's cloister courtyard was damaged by bullets.

In the Greek convent within the complex, a missile hit a double cross vaulted room, damaged window frames and the base of the arch in the cross vault, causing a 20-centimetre hole. On the upper floor, three rooms and a staircase were seriously damaged by fire; there was also fire damage to wooden doors, handrails, plaster, pavement, windows, and walls in the rest of the structure. In one room an ancient painting and furniture were damaged. Bullets gouged holes (10 x 5 centimetres) in the external southern and eastern façades of the tower.

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Bethlehem, the Church of the Nativity

