

## Revival of Cultural Heritage: The Case Study of the Ottoman Village in Umm Qais

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### Abstract

This research is focusing on the improper approaches followed in cultural resources management in Jordan taking the Ottoman village in Umm Qais as a case study. The village has been expropriated by the government to gain control over the whole archaeological and historical parts, establish a buffer zone for protecting the site and to exploit it for developing tourism services. However, this marked disintegrated actions that led to chaotic management which just forced the inhabitants to abandon the village without comprehensive planning for the following actions of preservation. Consequently, the marginalized role of the local community in managing the site caused the loss of identity and loyalty to UmmQais. This paper suggested some solutions that could contribute to any future projects for reconsidering the cultural recourses management of the site and the involvement of the local community.

**Keywords:** Umm Qais, Gadara, rehabilitation, Cultural Heritage, community development, Ottoman period.

### Introduction

This research discusses the problem of cultural resources interventions in Jordan based on a case study of Umm Qais village. This research explores the paradigm of the revival of cultural heritage versus the community and policies of expropriation of their own properties. The research examines international charters and approaches that could enhance the intervention aspects for cultural resources.

This research aims to conduct a holistic approach for studying the practices of cultural heritage revival in Jordan and mainly for the region of Umm Qais as a case study through the following steps. First, reviewing previous literature and

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publications regarding intervention aspects conducted at the site and second, conducting preliminary visits and field survey at the site to evaluate its current state. These two phases assisted in updating knowledge about the history of the site and the chronology of previous interventions that had been conducted. By combining those two steps, intensive research was conducted to investigate the following issues:

- Management and planning decisions adopted in the last two decades.
- The lack of activation of some legislation related to cultural heritage.
- The expropriation of the village by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.
- The absence of a comprehensive action plan for the archaeological site that regulates the balance between the protection of the site and its cultural assets as a conservation issue.
- The problem of dealing with the site of Umm Qais as an entity isolated from the surrounding environment.

#### **Location and Surroundings of Umm Qais**

Umm Qais is situated 110 km north of Amman. The strategic location of Umm Qais was an important factor in its settlement. Umm Qais covers the east side of a triangular plateau. The site of Umm Qais is situated 378m above sea level and the surrounding area is forested by oak trees and shaded by olive trees. The Yarmouk River is visible to the north; the south offers the forested hills of Ajloun, the Irbid plateau to the east and Jordan valley to the west. Nestled in the hillside, Umm Qais offers a breathtaking panoramic view to Lake Tiberias and the Golan Heights. These rich surroundings made it an excellent location offering the inhabitants a serene view of the fertile northern Jordan Valley (Weber 1989).

#### **Historical Background of Umm Qais**

The current town of Umm Qais is the site of ancient Greco-Roman city of Gadara, one of the cities of the Decapolis. The Greeks were the first to marvel at the breathtaking view and established their acropolis there. Later, Romans, Byzantines, and Ottomans left their own marks on this site. Gadara was mentioned in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century in the Ottoman tax records as *mkes*, which means in Arabic a frontier station for gathering taxes. Gadara is the ancient Semitic name of

modern Umm Qais. It means a wall, as an indication of its highland topography, which makes it seem like a fortification or fortress (Mershen 1992 ) (Figure 1).

The intensive succession of occupation during the city's rich past has deposited gigantic cultural layers at the site. The city has witnessed natural crises in which earthquakes destroyed many buildings during the early Islamic period from 661 AD until 799 AD (Al-Asad and Bisheh 2000). After that, the city declined and Gadara soon became just another village. Later, it was reoccupied during the Ottoman period and recovered its significance as a major town.

Today, the region of Umm Qais as a whole can be divided into two main parts: the ancient city of Umm Qais including the Greco-Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman occupation levels and the modern village of Umm Qais and the rural landscape including farms and green spaces within the region (Segal 1988). The Greco-Roman remains are of great importance and are especially interesting in that they show the main features of an integrated Roman city in terms of city planning, monuments, and artistic works, as well as its distinctive type of basalt stone (Kerner 1994) (Figure 2).

As Umm Qais is on the road from Damascus to Tiberias and hence to the Palestinian seaports, overlooking Lake Tiberias and the Golan Heights, it attracted people during the Ottoman period to construct the village (Figure 3).

### **The Current Situation of Umm Qais**

The historic site of Umm Qais today represents a complex collage of landscape elements from a number of historic periods: Roman, Byzantine and Islamic. In such a dynamic system, there is a continuing element of growth, modification, and development. While any historic site derives its primary significance from a particular historic period, alterations or additions may have acquired a significance of their own. The fact that the landscape components in Umm Qais region have changed over time tends only to increase its significance as a historical setting. However, the modern human interventions including archaeological excavations and restoration conducted within the site in the last decades have disturbed the cultural landscape and caused the destruction of some buildings as a result of the wrong policies (Chitty 1999).

## **The Socio-Economic and Political Impacts on Conservation**

### ***The National Development Plans***

The government went through some development plans on a national level where some sites were affected adversely; some of them deteriorated and were neglected in the long run especially because of the delay of the implementation for the plans that had been formulated.

One of these plans was the Five Year Plan for Economic and Social Development 1981-1985 by the National Planning Council of Jordan (1981), whose main goal was to protect cultural heritage as well as increase the awareness of its cultural value among the people, by promoting heritage sites as a support for the country's economy through making heritage sites tourist destinations. However, the implementation and results were far from the set goals. This national plan had other impacts on the city of Umm Qais in terms of tourism, local community, and the management of the site as described in the following points.

### ***The Tourism Industry***

Since the 1980s Umm Qais has been one of the main destinations for the tourism industry, deriving from the fact that the Roman cities in Jordan are of great importance and they are in high demand by international tourists and therefore the cultural value of the site was no longer as important as its economic value. In other words sites now are just protected by reconstructing them and attracting new visitors to generate sustainable income for the country and this is the general idea of how to keep sites alive.

In 1988, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities analyzed the site in their management plan and identified the opportunities shown by the existing assets of Umm Qais, which encourage tourists and visitors to go there, on the supply side and the actual needs of these tourists and visitors of that site as the demand side. Their plan relied on the fact that the Roman site consists of uncovered remains and monuments of different Classical, Roman Byzantine and Islamic periods and includes the abandoned village as a good example of traditional village architecture in Jordan.

In 1989, five houses of the village were restored for use as a rest house, museum, police post, and safe parking. A large parking area was also installed

beside the archaeological site with a capacity of 200 cars and 15 large buses. The purpose of those projects was to attract more tourists and visitors to visit the site (Figure 4).

### *The Local Community*

The local community in Umm Qais had been mostly families of farmers and cattle ranchers mainly settled in the old Ottoman village. The village is distinctive with its heritage houses built on a common architectural model based on a courtyard with rooms and other parts surrounding the courtyard. The courtyard was a very significant architectural component that contributed to the daily life of the community and their social life when they lived in this area.

The courtyard house represents a model for the collective social, political and economic functions of the peasant community during the nineteenth century in northern Jordan. The various social systems in the study area were centered on kinship which were manifested in the form and order of the various spaces in the courtyard house. The nature of the landscape was a determinant factor in the location of courtyard houses, which was triggered by the climate in the area (Alhusban and Al-Shorman 2011). This whole idea of the courtyard house can be reenacted to show tourists the way of life of the local community and to learn about the history and culture of the area.

The main activities of the villagers were located within the surrounding agricultural areas, but the governmental intervention in the region and the weak plans implemented for the development of the region included the expropriation of the Ottoman village and giving the villagers new real estate in compensation in addition to promising them that they would be involved in the management of the new projects in the region including the old city of Gadara.

The original plan for the city was to reestablish the integrity between the archaeological section with the traditional Ottoman village, which would protect the site from vandalism, in order to establish a single integrated cultural entity, so they started the rehabilitation of the Ottoman village as a cluster for artisans and shops for handicrafts as a good source of income for the locals on the one hand and as a part of their cultural identity on the other.

The Roman part experienced excessive excavations parallel with some humble restoration works concentrated on the principle monuments such as the western theater. Most of the conservation efforts were reconstruction and far from proper principles of conservation.

### ***Management and Planning Problems***

The main problem facing the site is the existing management and planning processes adopted in the last two decades since the first intervention, or better expressed, the first disturbance, due to misunderstanding the wholeness of the context and the decisions that had been taken earlier to intensively exploit the existing cultural resources.

Cultural heritage legislation has not been fully activated in Jordan and so enforcement for heritage preservation is lacking. In the case of Umm Qais a major problem is the interpretation and understanding of the whole regional context of the site and the impact of that context on preserving the ancient city of Umm Qais. This can be understood from the first intervention of the site when the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities took a decision in 1972 to take over ownership of the entire Ottoman village located within the archaeological site, a decision that was implemented during the 1980s by buying out its people and taking them to a new housing project in the modern village of Umm Qais.

This was done to expand the archaeological site and give the Department of Antiquities the authority to excavate and uncover more Roman structures that lay under the Ottoman village, and to start planning for the conservation and management of the site.

This expropriation of the village created a conflict between the local people and the Ministry of Tourism that remains an obstacle for any development plan. In addition there is no comprehensive action plan for the archaeological site that regulates the balance between the protection of the site and its cultural assets as a conservation issue and the cultural and economic impact of the site on the perception of the visitors and local people as a development issue. This leads to the need to investigate the management and planning process for the identification, conservation, interpretation and promotion of the archaeological site of Gadara by

which an appropriate comprehensive action plan towards the management and protection of the site could be developed.

The long term policies that were adopted in Umm Qais as a tool of conservation were focused on isolating the extant above-ground remains from the surrounding environment as well as from the local people. The ancient city of Gadara was treated as an entity isolated from the surrounding environment, supposing that the above-ground relics are the only remains from the past and that it was necessary to isolate them as much as possible. That action stands as a major destructive decision parallel with the expropriation of the Ottoman village since the cultural remains are only one component of the ancient environment, which includes the cultural context of the ancient city of Umm Qais, the agricultural landscapes, and the natural landscapes that all together form the entire regional context of the ancient city of Gadara (Figure 5).

Therefore, understanding the ancient sites is a prerequisite for making decisions about conservation and planning. The lack of a scientific approach and methodology in measuring the needs of the archaeological sites and weak management are much more destructive for the sites than natural threats. The proper approach that is needed is best described by the *Approaches to Heritage Conservation and Management* formulated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Centre and agreed upon internationally by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre identified two main approaches to heritage conservation and management based on international best practices. The first approach is the 'conventional approach' and the second is the 'values-led approach'.

The conventional approach is based mainly on the countries' own priorities for national conservation. This is supported with national legislation established for this purpose. This approach received global recognition through doctrines such as the Venice Charter and the work of organizations such as ICOMOS. The main

components of this approach to planning are:

1. Defining (identifying) (implied significance)
2. Documenting
3. Assessing conditions
4. Planning for conservation interventions

The recently developed values-led approach has gained popularity for its ability to address some of the complexities surrounding heritage and in particular its applicability to World Heritage. This approach became better known through the Burra Charter, first developed by ICOMOS Australia in 1979 and subsequently updated. The Charter promoted the assessment of the significance of a place – based on the values attributed by all stakeholders (not only by experts) and the use of a Statement of Significance – as a basis for developing conservation and management strategies.

This concept was developed further by the work on Conservation Plans by James Kerr (1982). He brought a systematic approach to developing conservation and management plans based on values and, more importantly, on the cultural significance of a heritage place to society. This approach adopts the premise that people in society ascribe various values to heritage. The main components of this approach to planning are:

1. Collecting data
2. Assessing significance (values and attributes)
3. Assessing conditions
4. Planning for conservation / management

Thus, bad practices and wrong policies within the site may cause serious disfiguration of the remains as well as disturb the natural-cultural harmony of the ancient context. Expressed more philosophically, the visual presentation and authentic view may have been lost so far, and this is so evident here in the case of Umm Qais in which the neglect of regular site maintenance and the lack of a well-defined conservation policy caused several problems at all levels including structural damage, erosion, bio-deterioration, and visual disturbance.

### **Some Important Factors for Appropriate Treatment**

Based on the methodologies adopted by UNESCO – the ‘conventional approach’ and the ‘values-led approach’ – some factors can be considered for appropriate treatment for the sites. The standards are neither technical nor prescriptive, but are intended to promote responsible preservation practices that help protect the irreplaceable cultural resources of Umm Qais. They cannot be used to make basic decisions about which contributing features of a cultural landscape should be retained and which can be changed. But once a specific treatment is selected, the standards can provide the necessary philosophical framework for a consistent and holistic approach for a cultural landscape project (Feilden 1982).

There are many practical and philosophical variables that influence the selection of a treatment for a landscape. These might include the extent of historic documentation, existing physical conditions, historic value, proposed use, long and short term objectives, operational and code requirements (e.g. accessibility, fire, security) and anticipated capital improvement, staffing and maintenance costs. The impact of the treatment on any significant archaeological and natural resources should also be considered in this decision-making process. Therefore, it is necessary to consider a broad array of dynamic and interrelated variables in selecting a treatment for a cultural landscape preservation project.

For some cultural landscapes, especially those that are best considered ethnographic or heritage landscapes, these guidelines may not apply. However, if people working with these properties decide that community coherence may be affected by physical place and space or if there is potential for loss of landscape character whose significance is rooted in the community's activities and processes (or other aspects of its history) this guide may be of service.

### ***Resource Conservation and Development***

The purpose of resource conservation and development is to accelerate the conservation, development and utilization of natural resources, improve the general level of economic activity, and to enhance the environment and standard of living in designated resource conservation and development areas. It improves

the capability of Umm Qais, tribal and local units of government and local nonprofit organizations in rural areas to plan, develop, and carry out conservation and development projects. It is important to highlight that cultural resources conservation can contribute to improving the quality of life through community participation and development which leads to sustainable communities (Feilden and Jokilehto 1993). More efforts need to be harnessed to enhance and protect the heritage assets from loss due to lack of adequate planning and conservation guidelines and maintenance and their enforcement (ArcheoMed Project 2014).

### ***Interpretation***

Interpretation can help in understanding and “reading” a site. According to the ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites, interpretation refers to the full range of potential activities intended to heighten public awareness and enhance understanding of a cultural heritage site. These can include print and electronic publications, public lectures, on-site and directly related off-site installations, educational programmes, community activities, and ongoing research, training, and evaluation of the interpretation process itself. The quality of the visitor experience in Umm Qais is low due to the lack of site development and support services, and inadequate presentation and interpretation (ArcheoMed Project 2014).

Presentation more specifically denotes the carefully planned communication of interpretive content through the arrangement of interpretive information, physical access, and interpretive infrastructure at a cultural heritage site. According to ICOMOS (2008), it can be conveyed through a variety of technical means, including, yet not requiring, such elements as informational panels, museum-type displays, formalized walking tours, lectures and guided tours, and multimedia applications and websites. Interpretive goals should complement treatment selection, reflecting the site’s significance and historic character. Umm Qais possesses varying levels of integrity or differing periods of significance, both of which can result in a multi-faceted approach to interpretation. In some cases, interpretation and a sound interpretive strategy can inform decisions about how to treat a landscape of the archaeological and heritage sites (Stanley-Price 2005).

### ***Accessibility Considerations***

It is often necessary to make modifications to cultural landscapes so that they will be in compliance with current accessibility code requirements. The idea of rehabilitating the Ottoman village needs to provide access to the historic area for visitors.

Work must be carefully planned and undertaken so that it does not result in the loss of character-defining features. The goal is to provide the highest level of access with the lowest level of impact on the integrity of the landscape.

### ***Suggested Rehabilitation Projects for the Ottoman Village***

It is suggested to exploit part of the Ottoman Village as an artisan cluster for producing handicrafts that should be operated in cooperation with the local community. This project could facilitate community-based socioeconomic development by creating culture-based industries (handicrafts and tourism) in areas adjacent to cultural heritage sites in the Ottoman village, while also improving the management of cultural assets, particularly at the local and national level. The project's primary activity concerns the funding of interrelated subprojects in and around a limited number of communities containing sites and other assets of cultural importance (Figures 6 and 7).

In order to better rehabilitate the village a set of actions are suggested, including: a) the implementation of a social and needs assessment at the site; b) the development of mechanisms of community-driven development to be implemented at the site and then scaled-up elsewhere; c) the design of a system for participatory monitoring and evaluation for the project; d) tourism assessment both at the site and at the national level; e) the provision of technical assistance to design and implement capacity- building interventions improving the management of cultural assets at the national level. The design has been done, but the implementation of this component raises a strong need for supervision; and f) project management and oversight.

## **Conclusion**

This research focused on the practices of cultural heritage revival in Jordan and mainly for the region of Umm Qais as a case study. The research also discussed some key issues surrounding the growth of cultural tourism in the region in order to provide a sound framework for its development, especially in policy-making and promotions. With a sound framework, an appropriate balance between economic and social growth and environmental sustainability would hopefully be achieved.

The general scope that this research has taken is the exploitation of the region's valuable resources that are not yet fully developed nor carefully managed. The establishment of heritage and cultural-oriented projects for the region is the best solution for the protection of the Umm Qais region and beyond that will maintain its significance for future generations. This study could be a good reference for such philosophical and social aspects related to heritage revival in Jordan, not only as a case study for a specific site such as Umm Qais but also as a theoretical study for any future projects that could be suggested for other sites and destinations and through activating the role of local community as one of the most important partners in cultural resources management and to focus on considering the local socio-economic development aspects which will contribute to the success of such projects.



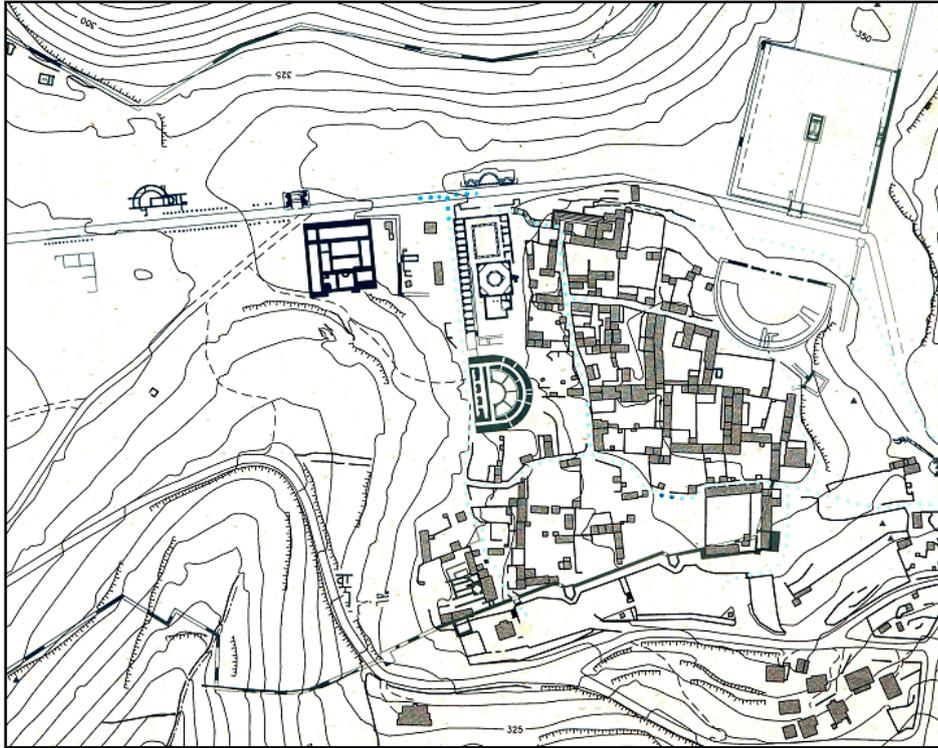
**Figure 1: The archaeological part of Umm Qais with the Ottoman Village to the left. (Source: DAI<sup>1</sup>)**



**Figure 2: A view of the Octagonal Byzantine Church at Umm Qais (Source: DAI).**

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1. <sup>1</sup> Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts (<http://www.dainst.org/en/project/gadara?ft=all>)



**Figure 3: General Plan of Umm Qais showing the potential and management opportunity within the site. (Source: DAI)**



**Figure 4: A view of the Ottoman Village with the parking area and the restored houses to the right (Source: DAI).**



Figure 5: A view of the Ottoman village on the hill from the archeological area (Source: DAI).



Figure 6: The Ottoman Village with the detailed trails and circulation routes. (Source: DAI)



**Figure 7: Two views of the Ottoman village showing the traditional architecture.**

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## إعادة إحياء للتراث الثقافي: القرية العثمانية في موقع أم قيس الأثري كدراسة حالة

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### ملخص

يركز هذا البحث على بعض الممارسات غير السليمة المتبعة في إدارة المصادر التراثية في الأردن من خلال دراسة حالة للقرية التراثية التي تعود للفترة العثمانية في موقع أم قيس الأثري. حيث تم استملاك هذه القرية من قبل الحكومة الأردنية من أجل إدارة الموقع بأجزائه الأثرية والتراثية وللعمل على استغلال القرية التراثية لتطوير الخدمات السياحية في الموقع. ولكن هذا الإجراء غير المنظم أدى لضياع هوية المكان من غير وجود خطة شمولية لتطوير الموقع ومن غير تفعيل دور للمجتمع المحلي الذي تم استملاك قريته الأصلية منهم. لذا يركز هذا البحث على دراسة هذه الحالة وطرح بعض الحلول والأفكار التي يمكن أن تؤخذ مستقبلاً بعين الاعتبار من أجل تحسين خطة إدارة الموقع ومن خلال تفعيل مشاركة المجتمع المحلي في هذه العملية.

**الكلمات الدالة:** أم قيس، جدارا، إعادة التأهيل، التراث الثقافي، تطوير المجتمع، الفترة العثمانية.

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