



# **SABIL AL-JAZZAR**

Architectural Documentation  
of the Exterior Wall Fountain of al-Jazzar Mosque

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January 2010  
International Conservation Center

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## INTRODUCTION

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Built into the exterior wall of the Al-Jazzar Mosque complex, the ornate Ottoman Rococo sabil is viewed by nearly every visitor to the Old City of Akko. A unique structure, it is unlike any other located in Israel. After observation of visitors and locals alike, it appears however, that very few recognize its distinct intricacies and beauty that have remained relatively well preserved in throughout its two century lifetime.

Upon request of the Mosque authority, the following architectural documentation has been undertaken as a step towards the contribution to the sabils conservation.

### Methodology

The documentation process was approached through the work of a building surveyor in conjunction with the compilation of architectural drawings and the development of a 3-dimensional computer model of the structure. The 3D model helps the viewer gain a greater understanding of the various components and design techniques employed by the builder of the structure through the exploration of form and detail. The model can be viewed within the architectural drawings chapter of this report.

In addition to architectural, an extensive photographic documentation has been conducted to identify significant details and overall massing, and compiled to form an interactive, navigable representation of the structure in situ. This 'Photosynth' employs a method of computer generated photo stitching to allow the user to actively select and view any number of photographs captured of the structure that has been applied to the synth, in an effort to investigate current conditions, pathologies, or any other issue to be analyzed.



Synths of both the exterior and Interior can be found online at:

<http://photosynth.net/UserProfilePage.aspx?user=alisonhortig&content=Synths>

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

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Part of the larger mosque complex built by the ruler Al-Jazzar Pasha in 1781-1782 C.E. The mosque itself is built on a raised platform above a large Crusader period barrel vaulted cistern used to distribute water to the residents of the Ottoman city. The main entrance to the mosque courtyard is flanked by a series of shops and a *sabil* (water distribution fountain) immediately to the west of the grand staircase.

The sabil, was constructed in A.H. 1208 (1791-1792 C.E.), during the reign of Al-Jazzar Pasha in the honour of Suleiman the Magnificent. Other sources state its construction date as A.H. 1196, while the translation received of the inscription indicate the above date of A.H. 1208 (Dichter; Petersen 2001). Confusion also lies in inscription translation stating “It is from and for Suleiman”. Both of these disparities could imply the structure was either constructed by Jazzar during his reign, eight years following the completion of the mosque in dedication to Suleiman the Magnificent, which this report assumes, or renovated at a later date by Suleiman Pasha during his reign at which the inscriptions were added.

As both a political and social gesture the ruler was further able to assert his power as an effective ruler of the people by constructing a public water service. Sabils functioned to provide water at no expense to the residents in a time where there was no city plumbing system, and few homes relied solely on beneath ground cisterns for fresh water. Often, an attendant would occupy the interior of the sabil and distribute cool drinks, fruit, and water to patrons.

### **Religious Significance**

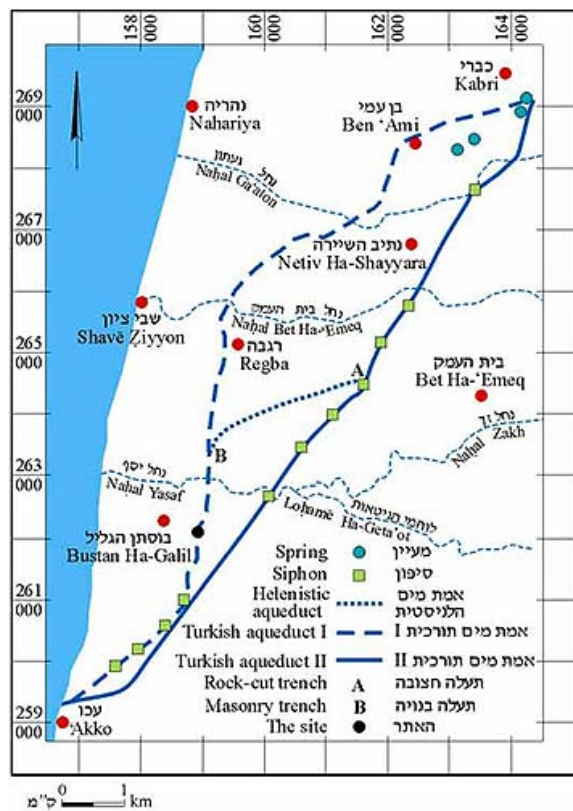
According to Islamic belief, water is considered a gift from god, and mankind is the steward for ensuring God’s gifts be distributed to the people. “And Allah sends down rain from the skies, and gives therewith life to the earth”. (Holy Qur’an 16:65). As a gesture to Allah, sabils were established to quench both thirsty travelers, pilgrims, and local residents, in an expression of hospitality.

Mosques commonly utilize sabils for ablutions (ritual cleansing prior to prayer). Al-Jazzar Mosque houses both a sabil designated for ablutions in the courtyard of the complex, as well as the public sabil located on the exterior wall (which this report documents).

## MAPS AND LOCATION



1. Akko is located on the Northwestern coast of modern day Israel.



2. Originating at the Kabri spring (see above map), approximately 15km north of Akko, water was carried by an extensive aqueduct system built by Jazzar.

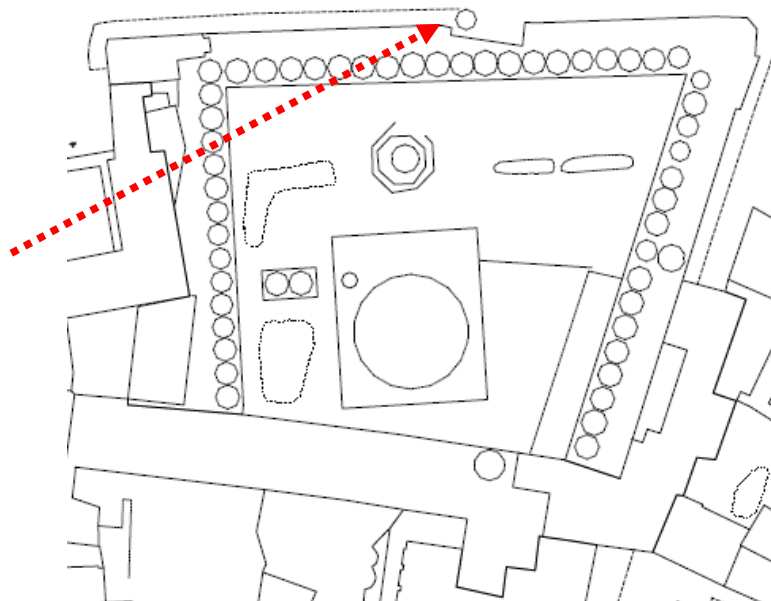


3. Aqueduct pictured above.





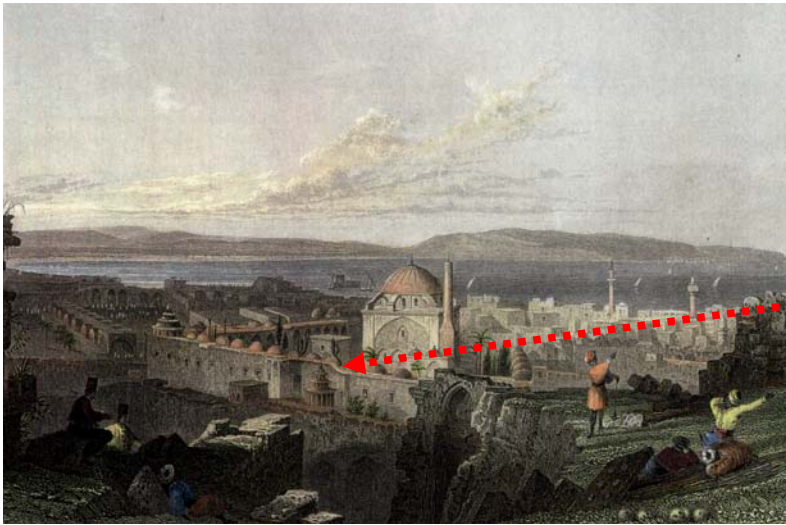
4. Aerial view of the old city of Akko, showing the Al-Jazzar mosque and its relation to the sabil and the rest of the city.



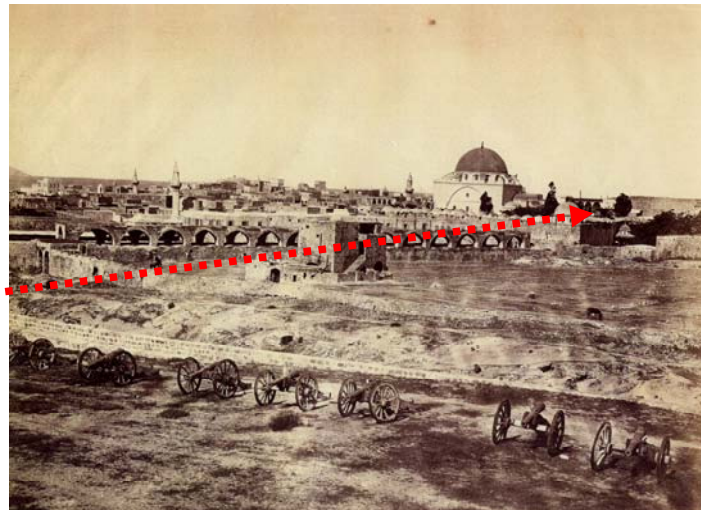
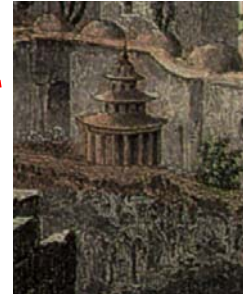
5. Mosque plan based on city survey.

## HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION

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6. 1836 artist's representation of mosque complex and sabil.



7. Photograph dated approx. 1870-1890 looking west showing mosque and sabil in relation to the Turkish bazaar. It should be noted that the minaret usually adorning the mosque courtyard cannot be seen.



8. Photograph of unknown date, showing the mosque complex and sabil amongst sand and ruins.  
(Enlarging of image is incomprehensible)



## GENERAL DESCRIPTION

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### Exterior Architecture

The kiosk style sabil is attached by kurkar stone to the walls of the Al-Jazzar Mosque complex, and is designed in Ottoman Rococo style, defined by elaborate decorative elements and typical motifs. Located within the context of the busy Al-Jazzar Street, the structure lies in between the north mosque entrance stairs and a series of vendors stalls.



The edifice protrudes from the walls in a symmetrical octagonal shape, with five sides exposed and constructed. Two concentric marble steps lead up from street level partially surrounded by a small channel that appears to have functioned in such a way as to catch overflow from patron's water containers.

Structural elements have been carved of white marble that is thought to have originated from the ruins of Caesarea. The base panels have been carved simply, and show piecing together of materials where there may have been a lack of supply.

At eye level, five forged iron grilles painted a rich hunter green are flanked by six marble columns each topped with an intricately striated capital.

Based on the shape of the columns, it appears the grilles were originally designed with the overall structure. Above each of the grilles is a carved seashell motif and Islamic calligraphy inscription.

The roof is comprised of overhanging green wood eaves and a small lead dome atop a circular extension with clerestory windows that have remains of colorful arabesque tile work around the frames.

Access to the interior of the structure, which is currently utilized by a vendor for storage, is through an iron door to the right, framed with marble moulding.



## HISTORICAL AND PHYSICAL ANALYSES

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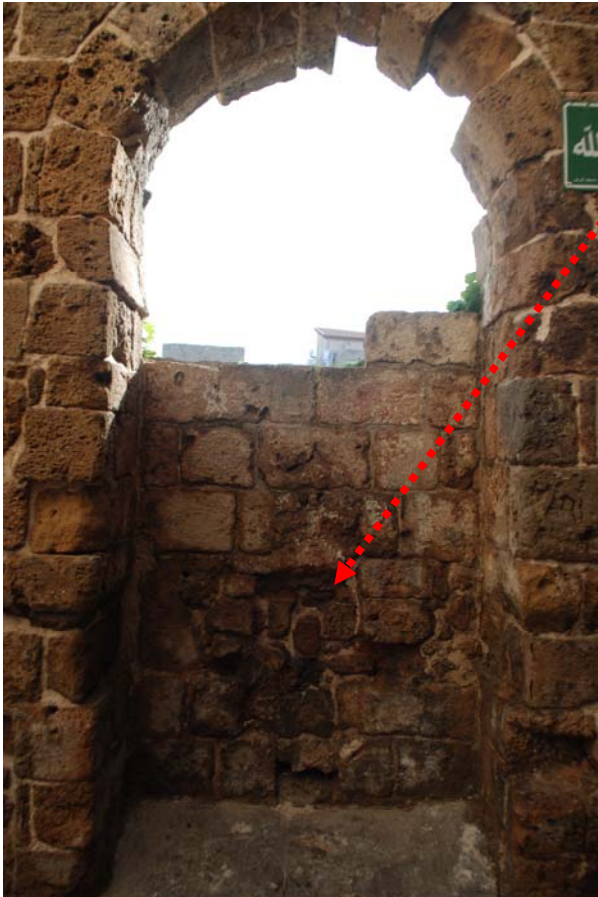
### DEVELOPMENT SEQUENCE

In its original use, the sabil functioned as a public use fountain for use of the city's residents. It is unknown as to when the aforementioned use was discontinued as there are limited records available.

Currently, the street facing the north entrance to the mosque complex, is flanked with vendors and restaurants. The sabil itself is utilized as storage for the current tenant vendor and is no longer functional for the public.

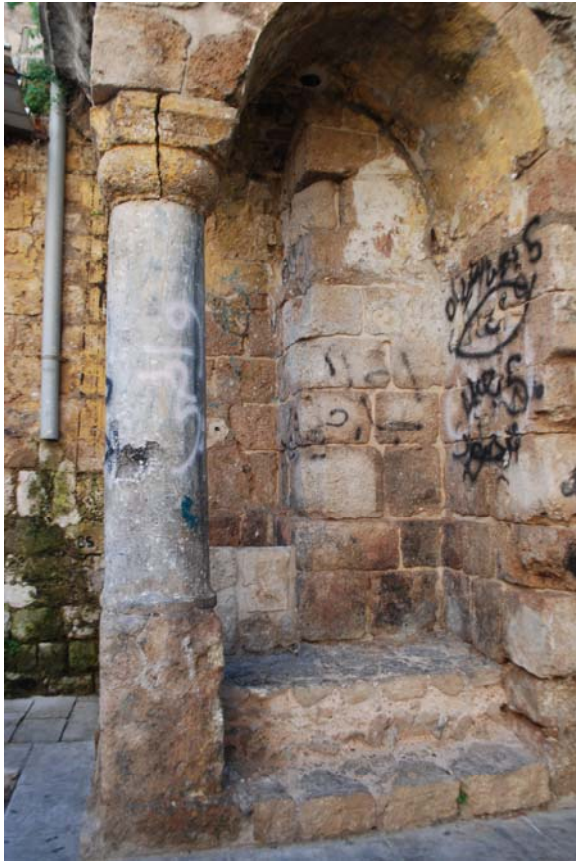
### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Akko is home to several sabils of varying types that were in public use during the Ottoman period until recently, a few still function as water spigots.



Evidence of a wall sabil located in the southwest area of the old city of Akko.





The majority of the sabil of the city were purely functional are as simple as a large rectangular basin and a water spigot. The ornament of sabil Al-Jazzar stands out among those of Akko, as well as throughout Israel and abroad.



Evidence of corner wall sabil near the current shuk of the old city of Akko. Remains of a recently used basin and spigot. Minimal ornamentation on capital.

## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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### HISTORICAL

- The sabil's construction dates to 1791-92 which places it, at the writing of this report at 219 years old. In a city such as Akko, the age of this structure when its relatively good condition is taken into account is highly relevant to its importance.
- Rumored to be only the second structure of its kind in the world.
- At the time of its development, the sabil was utilized by the ruling power to assert their political legitimacy as a system that could provide basic necessities for its subjects.
- A high level of craft and attention to detail in the smoothness of the marble carvings, and artisanship of forged metalwork.

### SOCIAL

- The function and site of the sabil was as shared space for the public to obtain water. During those times, it is likely that the people would congregate and socialized as this was a common meeting place, much like the proverbial water cooler of today.

### RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL

- As noted previously, the sabil is a typical Islamic structure which makes reference to the significance of stewardship of God's gifts on earth for the heavens. Islamic belief holds sabils in high regard, and sabil Al-Jazzar is not only a city fountain, but attached to the mosque complex.

### AESTHETIC

- A true representation of Ottoman Rococo design, and vernacular Ottoman construction techniques and methods.
- Currently, the structure is seen by any number of hundreds of thousands of visitors to Akko each year, and photographed by many. The visual aesthetic is pleasing in its detail, symmetry, and uniqueness compared to other structures on a nationally.



## PHYSICAL SURVEY

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### CONNECTIONS TO STREET AND WALL



The street is separated from the sabil by a small channel that partially circles the structure. Thought to have been designed to capture overflow from patron's water containers. Marble steps have been placed directly into grade which has evolved over the years.



The kurkar stone wall is moulded to fit directly up to the edges of the column. The unity of the two masses implies the two were constructed together.

## PILASTERS AND MOULDING



The panels of the exposed walls are constructed of curved carved marble of which are attached carefully carved moulding pieces and pilasters which fit against the panels with little seam.



Of note is the lack of alignment of the capitals to the overall column and pilaster axis.

The elaborate roof structure is supported by six columns, carved of white marble, laid atop the base, each above a corresponding pilaster. They are capped on each end with an iron ring designed to allow shifting and settling of the structure. The column is carved in such a way that it has two protruding edges to allow the grilles to be attached securely.

Above the columns is a series of capitals, one after another, carved at varying depths with decorative acanthus leaves and curves.

## GRILLES



Between each column and the next, is a forged iron grille with distinctive 's' curves and leaves.

Grilles are attached to the lips of the columns with clamps (below).



The upper wall structure is set atop the supporting columns and composed of white marble paneling, surrounded by intricate capitals. In between each column is a carved clamshell scroll and carved Islamic calligraphy inscription.







## INSCRIPTIONS

A series of bas relief carvings (qit'a) in the marble encircle the upper mouldings of the sabil from west to east (right to left). Human imagery and representation is forbidden by Islamic law, which inspired artistic calligraphic descriptions of stories and quotations from the Qur'an. The carvings located on the sabil, are Islamic calligraphy, of Arabic text in Turkish Arabic language. The calligraphy can often be difficult to read, even for Arabic speakers, translations can be seen on the following page.



	Arabic	Hebrew	English
	انه من والى سليمان	זה מסולימאן ולמענו	It is from and for Suleiman
	بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم	בשם אלוקים הרחמן	In the name of the merciful God the Lord
	سل عما يسألون ولي	מה שיידרש ממני	Whatever is asked of me
	يجد الهم عن عظيم البناء	נוכחותו של אלוקים נמצאת בתוך המבנה	The presence of God is within the building
	امور العالمين يشير	אלוקים מנחה את מעשי האנשים	God guides people's deeds
	اهدنا الى السراط المستقيم	הדריכנו אלוקים בדרך הנכונה	Guide us God, to the correct path
	وفي رحب بناء الكابري بخير	המבנה מביא את המים הנפלאים מכברי	The building cradles the great water from Kabri
	الى اقرب جنات النعيم	על יד הגנים המרגיעים	Near the gardens of bliss
	في سنة الف وثمانيه ومائتين	בשנת אלף מאתיים ושמונה	In the year one thousand, two hundred, and eight.



## ROOFING

The roofline is expressed by a broad painted green wood overhanging eave. The edge of the eave is shaped of scalloped lead.

A slowly sloping roof leads to a small white plastered octagonal wall, with square clerestory windows framed in wood and iron bars.



Window pediments are implied by application of azulejo (glazed tiles) of arabesque vegetal forms.



The dome is clad with lead painted green, and topped with a crescent moon finial (above) representative of its relationship with the mosque as an Islamic structure.

## INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

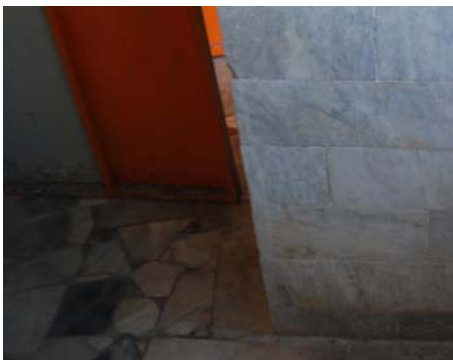
The interior of the sabil contains a central fountain and five basins (qarqal) that correspond with the exterior grilles that were used to collect flowing water. The floor and wall cladding is tiled marble that appear to have been a later addition.

The back wall contains a marble carving within a niche under a small arch flanked by three small windows that appear to have been cut into the wall at a later date. Behind the interior and into the walls of the mosque complex is the current storeroom for a merchant, however it appears to have been a smaller intermediary water reservoir that distributed the waters from the larger cisterns through to the sabil and fountains contained within.



## INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL DETAILING

### FLOOR



The flooring is tiled with a monochromatic marble mosaic, of varying shades of gray. Because of the varying colors and haphazard laying of the stones, it appears to have been a later addition to the interior.

## COUNTER



The counter platform on which the basins sit is constructed of precisely cut marble.

A small section appears to have been cut out at a later date to assist in the functioning of the water flow. Through the section, earth and stone infill is visible between the interior and exterior walls.

## SOUTH WALL AND NICHE



A small arched niche is recessed into the south interior wall which contains a marble carving which mimics the clamshell lintel of the exterior.

A small rectangular basin rests at the foot of the carving that is currently utilized for storage.





## CENTRAL FOUNTAIN



A large double tiered fountain (fisqiyya) sits a few centimeters off centre of the circular space. The element is smoothly carved of marble, and contains an iron pipe that water may have flowed through at one point. The edges of the tiers are scalloped.

A small tube has been attached to the base for use by the current vendor tenant of the space.

It is incredibly uncommon for an object to be off centre in an Islamic structure due to their belief in any centre point being an axis mundi in which to communicate with God. Because the fountain is in this position, it would indicate that it was either a later addition or moved when the floor was replaced.



## BASINS



Each exterior grille is backed by a corresponding marble basin (qarqal) on the interior. The basins were used to flow water through from the water system to allow patrons to reach in with a cup to fill their jugs.

## INTERIOR DOME AND CEILING



Above the exterior grilles begins the dome structure that supports the cupola. Plastered and painted white, with marble accents, the dome allows light to penetrate through five perforated clerestory windows.



## BACK ROOM

Behind the south wall of the interior of the sabil, a small back room that currently functions as storage for the vendor tenant appears to have originally been utilized as a reservoir for water that was stored in the cisterns beneath the complex.

The space is characterized by a broad stone arch with remnants of hydraulic lime plaster containing evidence of terracotta, and ash or similar water resistant material.

At the base of the north wall of the back room is a small terra cotta pipe that would have allowed water to flow through into the niche of the sabil.



Adjacent to the arch in the ceiling is a wide shaft that would have been used to enter the reservoir for maintenance or water collection.









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SABIL AL-JAZZAR

AKKO, ISRAEL

PROJECT NAME AND ADDRESS:

SABIL AL-JAZZAR  
AL-JAZZAR ST.  
AKKO, ISRAEL

DATE:

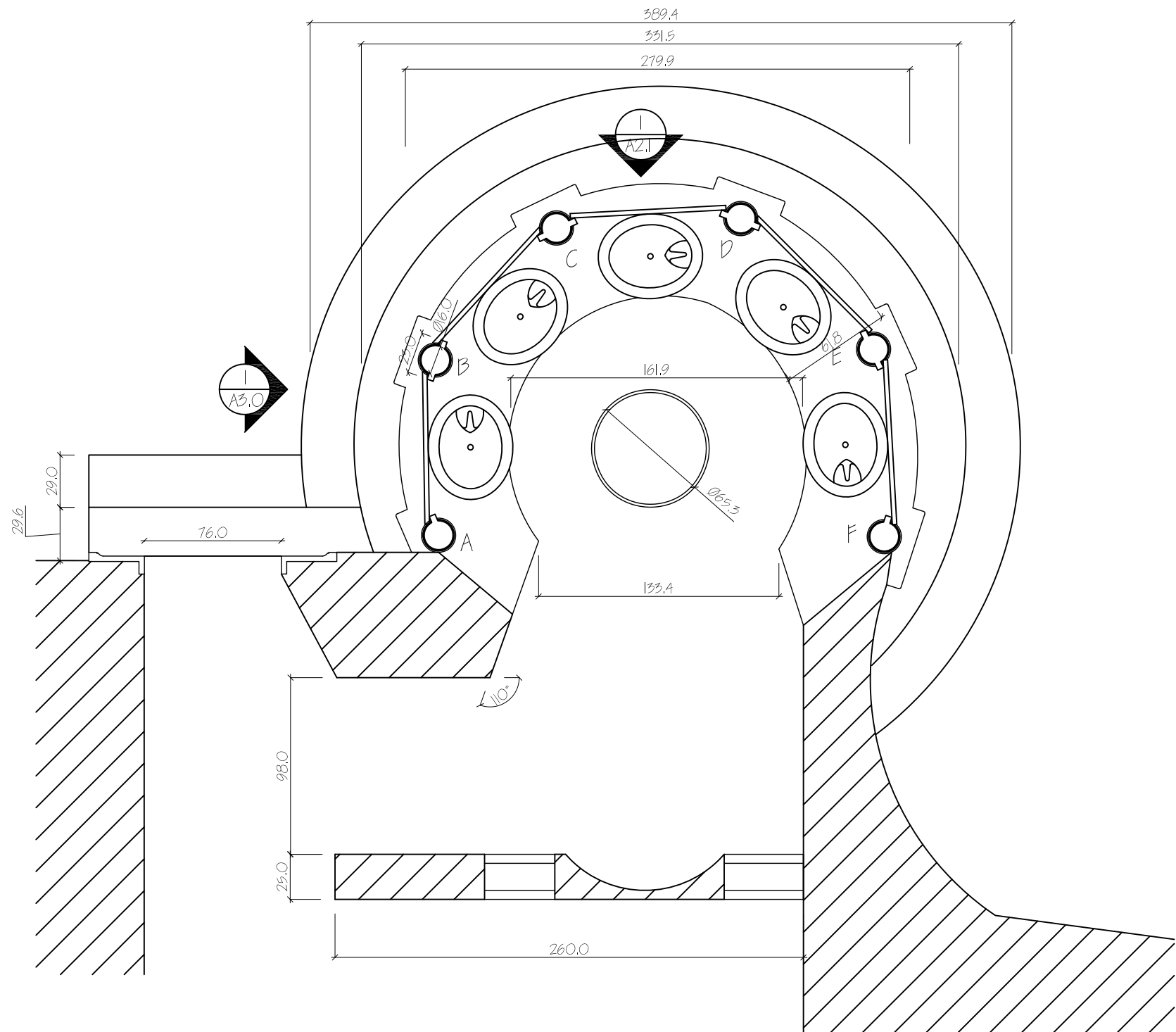
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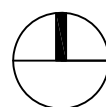
FLOOR PLAN

SHEET:

AI.O



1 FLOOR PLAN  
AI.O SCALE 1:75





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DATE:

27.01.2010

TITLE:

EXTERIOR ELEV.

SHEET:

A2.0



1 EXTERIOR ELEVATION  
A2.0 SCALE 1:100



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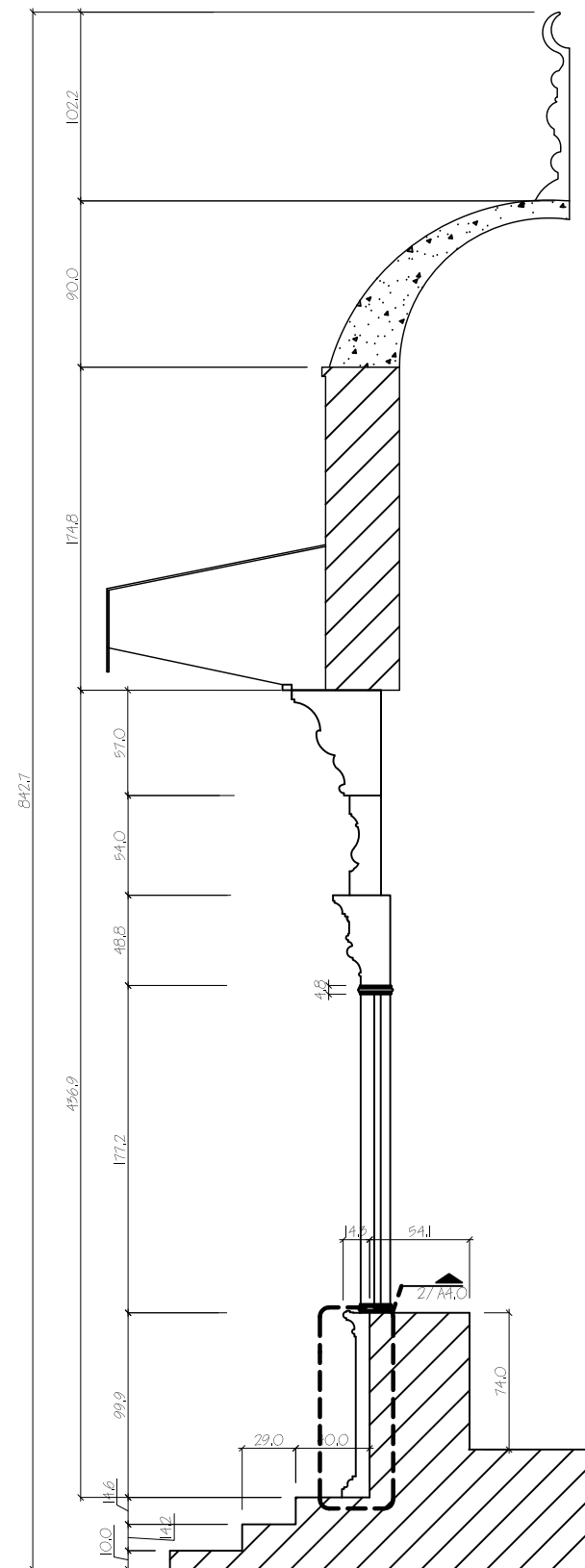
DATE:

27.01.2010

TITLE:  
E. SECTION

SHEET:

A3.0



EAST SECTION  
SCALE 1:100



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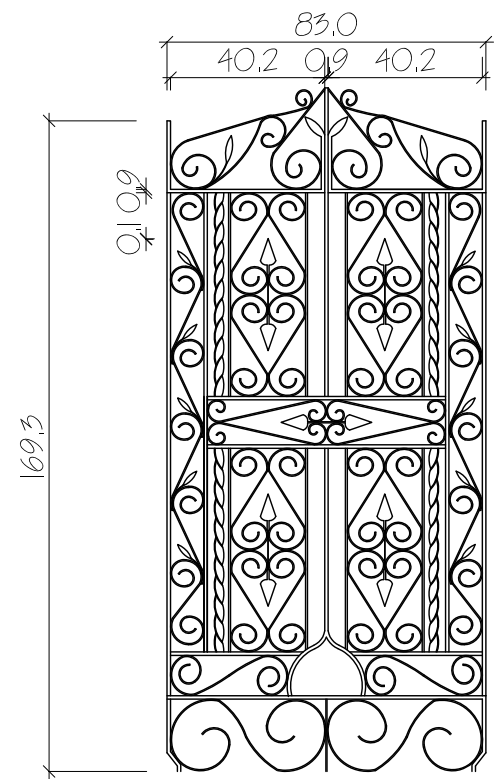
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AL-JAZZAR ST,  
AKKO, ISRAEL

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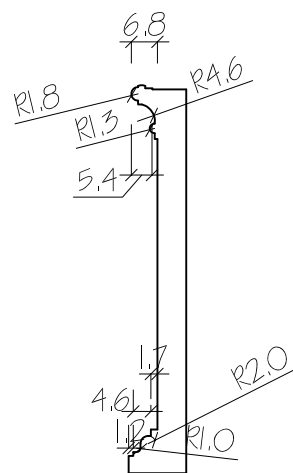
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DETAILS

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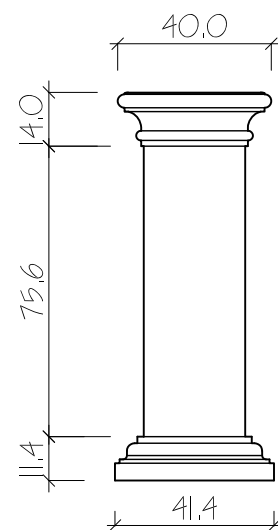
A4.0



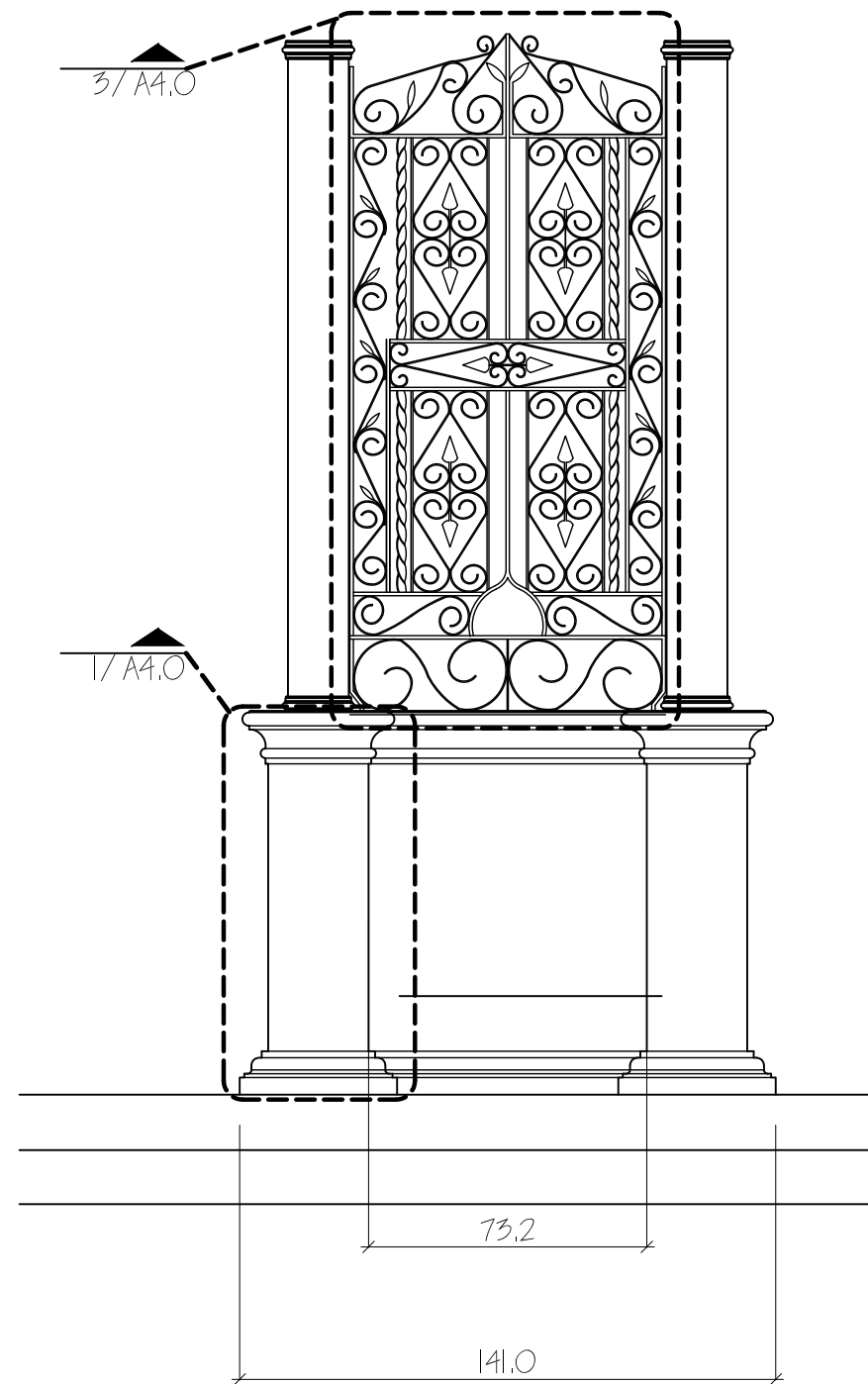
2 GRILLE DETAIL  
A4.0 SCALE 1:50



4 PILASTER SECTION DETAIL  
A4.0 SCALE 1:50



3 PILASTER DETAIL  
A4.0 SCALE 1:50



1 SOUTH EXTERIOR ELEVATION  
A4.0 SCALE 1:50

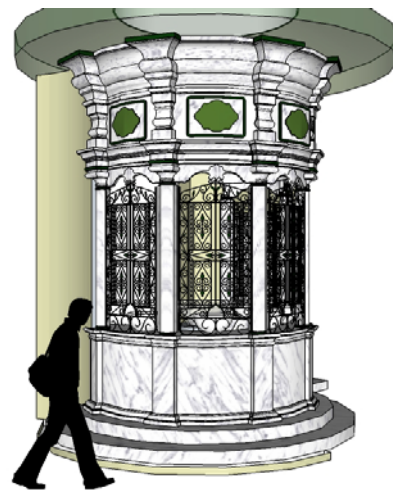
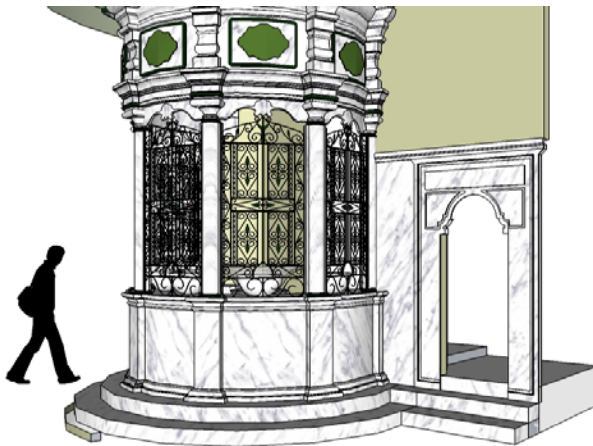
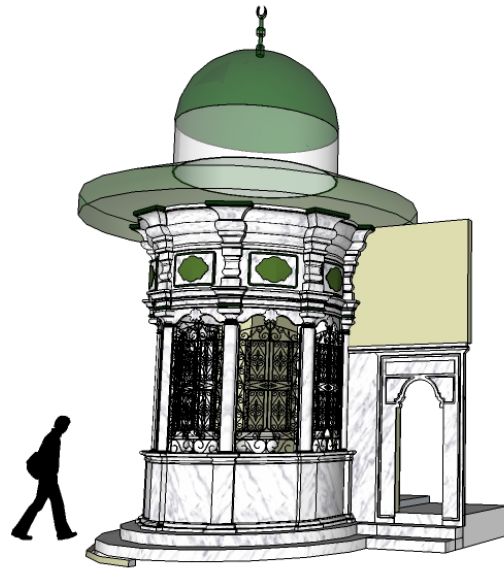


### 3D MODEL

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Through the use of computer-aided modeling, a researcher is provided the ability to study a structure with greater precision in situations where the site may be inaccessible at times or there is limited visibility. While much time was allotted on site to study the sabil, the construction of the model enabled a higher understanding of the materials and building techniques originally employed.

The following are selected captures of varying angles of the model of the sabil. Elements which are represented as transparent had not yet been surveyed for accuracy.



## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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This report has attempted to give the reader a clearer, more in depth architectural view of a structure of great importance to the city of Akko and its residents. While the old city of Akko is currently undergoing immense changes and improvements, certain objects can fall behind due to ownership rights or other surrounding issues.

Further survey work should be undertaken to include the roof and ceiling areas and back room. With its significance established, and preliminary architectural documentation complete, it is recommended that further evaluation of the structure be undertaken by a conservator to assess the possibilities of reuse as a visual attraction.

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### PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Lonely Planet
2. Israel Antiquities Authority
3. Israel Ministry of Tourism
4. Historical Akko Photograph Archive of Shelley Peleg
5. Old Acre Development Company
6. Historical Akko Photograph Archive of Shelley Peleg
7. Library of Congress
8. Historical Akko Photograph Archive of Shelley Peleg

All other photographs are property of the writer of this report.

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