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Doorways of Traditional Houses in Bethlehem

Prepared by : Sherin Fares Jeries Sahouri

Registration No: 20611023

Supervisor: Dr. Shadi Ghadban

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The names and signatures of the examining committee members are as follows:

1. Head of Committee: Dr. Shadi Ghadban, Signature: .....
2. Internal Examiner: Dr. Mohammad Abdel Hadi, Signature: .....
3. External Examiner: Dr. Iman M. Amad, Signature: .....

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Abstract

A doorway is an opening in a wall, with a door, which provides a passageway into a space or a means of access or participation. Over the years, the value of doorways has developed and changed according to needs, desires and the available skills and resources. In this thesis doorways are being studied as a structure, form: space and symbol of historical, architectural and social development. This will be explored taking Bethlehem as the case study where the significance of doorways has been and continues to contribute to its architectural image and character today.

In general, this thesis aims to study and analyze the doorways of Bethlehem while highlighting the most important stages of its history and how they reflect on the architectural components of its buildings. To achieve this goal a deductive approach is used. The thesis contains three main parts: Theoretical, practical part and analytical. The theoretical part focuses on three main subjects: the historical development of doorways in the world, the history of Bethlehem and the development of doorways in Bethlehem. The practical part focuses on the documentation and description of existing doorways in the old core of Bethlehem, while the analytical part, depending on the output of the two previous parts, concentrates on an analysis of the values of Bethlehem's doorways.

By reviewing the architectural, social and urban fabric of the city of Bethlehem, three main results were founded:

- The shape and style of Bethlehem doorways are not random and they can be classified in clear and specific categories depending on their configuration, function and style.
- The various phases of historical, political and economic changes in Bethlehem were echoed in the development of doorways, both functionally and aesthetically.

- The doorways of Bethlehem have their own special and significant character which is not found in any other city.

Bethlehem plays an important part in the history of Palestine and has a distinct character as the birthplace of Jesus. Its doorways contribute to creating its identity and make it unique. The destruction or loss of its doorways means that the authentic image and integrity of its history are partially lost as well.

الملخص

الباب هو عبارة عن فتحة في جدار، بالإضافة إلى أنه جهة لإغلاق هذه الفتحة. و تدل هذه الفتحة على وجود صلة مع فراغ أو وسيلة للدخول أو المشاركة. وقد تطورت قيم الأبواب وتغيرت على مر السنين وفقا للاحتياجات والرغبات والإمكانيات. وفي هذه الأطروحة، ستتم دراسة الأبواب كهيكل وشكل وحيز ورمز تاريخي وتطور اجتماعي ومعماري. كل هذا من خلال أخذ مدينة بيت لحم كحالة دراسية، بصفتها شاهدا حيا على أهمية أبواب المدينة تاريخيا، فضلاً عن صورتها المعمارية وطابعها في الوقت الحالي.

وتهدف هذه الأطروحة بشكل عام إلى دراسة وتحليل الأبواب في مدينة بيت لحم، من خلال تسليط الضوء على أهم المراحل التاريخية التي انعكست على هذا العنصر المعماري الهام في مبانيها. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، تم اتباع نهج استنتاجي.

تحتوي هذه الأطروحة على ثلاثة أجزاء رئيسة هي: النظري والعملي والتحليلي. ويركز الجزء النظري على ثلاثة مواضيع رئيسة: التطور التاريخي للأبواب في العالم وتاريخ بيت لحم، وتطور الأبواب في بيت لحم. ويركز الجزء العملي على توثيق ووصف الأبواب الموجودة في قلب مدينة بيت لحم القديمة، في حين أن الجزء التحليلي يركز على تحليل قيم أبواب بيت لحم، وذلك اعتمادا على مخرجات الجزء النظري والعملي.

ومن خلال استعراض النسيج العمراني والاجتماعي والحضري لمدينة بيت لحم، فقد تم التوصل إلى ثلاث نتائج رئيسة وهي:

- لم تكن طريقة صنع وتصميم أبواب مدينة بيت لحم عشوائية، بل يمكن تصنيفها ضمن أقسام واضحة ومحددة، اعتمادا على تكوينها ووظيفتها ونمطها.
- إن المراحل العديدة للتغير السياسي والاجتماعي والاقتصادي في مدينة بيت لحم قد انعكست على تطور الأبواب من حيث وظيفتها وجمال شكلها.
- أبواب بيت لحم لديها صفة هامة ومميزة، لا تتوفر في أية مدينة أخرى.

تشكل مدينة بيت لحم مرحلة هامة من تاريخ فلسطين، بالإضافة إلى مكانتها الخاصة، بوصفها المكان الذي ولد فيه يسوع المسيح، كما أن أبواب مدينة بيت لحم فيها مميزات خاصة تساهم في خلق هويتها وجعلها متميزة عن غيرها، وإن ضياع أو فقدان هذه الأبواب يعني فقدان صورتها الأصلية وصدق تاريخها أيضا.

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1.1. Background

A doorway can be defined as an opening through which to enter a building, part of a building, or an enclosure. Its immediate structure and surroundings nearly always lend it considerable architectural magnificence (Curl, 2000). The doorway symbolizes not only a way of reaching another space, but also a ***space*** in itself, and this significance is often conveyed by their mysterious dimensions (Coelho 2009, p.1 of 1). Doorways also have an aesthetic function; they are used to generate different impressions of what lies beyond and for example hide or separate particular areas of the building.

Doorways can furthermore have symbolic significance. They are often endowed with ritual purposes. Guarding or being given the keys to a door for example, or the act of being granted access to it can have a certain significance. Similarly, doors and doorways frequently appear in metaphors or allegories in literature and the arts, often as a sign of change (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Door). Doorways are also used to communicate cultural codes. In China, for example, the state of the universe can be represented by whether doors are open or closed: the closed door is considered "yin" representing passive, female energy while the open door symbolizes "yang" conveying the masculine, active energy. The universe is thought to swing continually between these two poles. As well as communicating cultural codes, doorways can be used to represent religious concepts. In Christianity, Jesus declares himself to be the way through which all men can be saved by comparing himself to the door of salvation through which mankind can pass through to eternal life. For this reason the figure of Christ is often found on the main gates of cathedrals often with celestial protective forces alongside him (Coelho 2009, p.1 of 1).

Throughout history doorways have had the same role

When man created his first dwelling place he made it accessible by constructing an opening and to ensure safety and privacy he covered the opening with a panel. Doorways can be said to **reflect something unique of the owner** and more than any other part of a structure, reflect the architectural preference of the owner. Doorways are almost always the mechanism in a space or building's construction that enables movement between the inside and outside, and between internal spaces (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Door). According to Martin Heidegger the twentieth century German philosopher, the door is the foremost point of a dwelling, which in the most basic sense delineates a territory in because it defines a location (Philippe and Lenclos 2001, p. 6) .

The way doorways are used varies according to different ***needs***, the ***time*** and the ***place***. Their purpose is often much more than a means of safety and protection; indeed the actual value of *doorways* lies not only in the wood or iron placed in an entrance or gap in the wall to cover it but instead they have for thousands of years had particular functions including aesthetic, artistic, economic, political and historical. Doorways are considered an important aesthetic element for example, in any building because they impact the visitor's first impressions of the space they have entered, most significantly the idea that they are moving from a less bounded space to one that is more contained.

The use of gates at the entrance to properties has evolved in step with the development of ancient buildings and is thus thought to reflect the changing needs and nature of society. When the door was first made, it was a **single** rock and this was then replaced by a piece of wood with a particular form and style according to the typical architecture of that period. The latter is influenced by: tradition, function, aesthetics and economic factors.

In Palestine in general, and in Bethlehem in particular, the diversity of doorways tends to vary in terms of structure reflecting new stages of history or functional developments. Old

buildings in Bethlehem have been influenced by the design of the Church of the Nativity for example; it has a simple structure and is characterized by overlapping multi-layers which are designed to protect the inhabitants from fear of enemy attack in times of war. It's development can also be said to have been influenced by family structures and living standards. Another episode in history, the end of the Ottoman rule together with the arrival of missionaries and the re-entry of migrants, brought about the establishment of schools, monasteries, churches, hospitals, as well as structures like buildings which resemble the palaces of Europe (Elali 1990, p. 51-53). These historical events have both directly and indirectly affected doorways and the development of their use because they are an integral part of the development of buildings in this area.

A building's entrance is one aspect that contributes to creating its identity and makes it distinct from others; it can therefore be recognized as an aspect of a building's collective features which makes it recognizable. Preserving therefore an original doorway directly contributes to preserving its authenticity and its original identity. Indeed doorways are an important part of a building's history and should be preserved, studied, documented and their value communicated to future generations so that their significance is not lost in history. Indeed the destruction of a traditional doorway in a building can have a negative impact on the building's value and its harmony. And original doors in a building play an important role in defining the age and architectural style of a building.

1.2. Importance of the Study

Doorways as an architectural, aesthetical and functional element are not being studied and analyzed in Palestine in general and in Bethlehem in particular, despite the fact that they are one of the most important factors which indicate the building's original identity, style

and age. In this study Doorways are being analyzed, studied and documented for the first time, the fact that makes it unique and not repeated.

Bethlehem has been chosen as the main case study of this thesis for many reasons, which can be summarized as follows:

- The architectural and religious significance of the old city of Bethlehem.
- The variety of its doorways.
- Many original doorways are still preserved.
- The doorways of the city have not been studied.
- Recently many doorways are being neglected and replaced with new ones without even being studied and documented.

1.3. Goals of the Study

This study proposes to examine the development and the different values of doorways in Bethlehem by surveying and recording existing structures; a framework of research questions has been used to do this.

The main goal and sub goals are as follows:

Main Goal: To create a classification system for doorways in Bethlehem using a number of key values and characters.

Sub Goals: 1. To assess the impact of political, historical, aesthetic, functional and economic factors on doorway structures.

2. To define phases of development in doorway construction in Bethlehem.

3. To reaffirm the value of Bethlehem's doorways.

The purpose of this study - the classification of doorways in Bethlehem - aims to explain why doorways in Bethlehem have developed in the particular way that they have done. Particular research questions have been chosen to ascertain this information, taking into account research criteria which has been used for other field studies

Main Question: What is the classification system of doorways of the city of Bethlehem?

Secondary Questions: 1. How are historical, functional, aesthetic, economic and architectural factors reflected in the form and space of a doorway?

2. **How** *and* **Why** Bethlehem's doorways differ from other cities' doorways?

1.4. Methodology of the Study

The research goals will be achieved by using a survey strategy to explore a single case study. This is a cumulative approach which builds up a wide scope of information by researching the case study area in a general way and then moving to the more specific; conclusions are drawn accordingly. Initially a general study of doorways around the world will be carried out, while this will be followed by those of the region before finally reaching the specific case study of Bethlehem's doorways. All arguments and conclusions will be based on information which has been obtained from the field work.

In order to tackle the goals of the study defined above, a number of more specific areas will be investigated and analyzed:

- The history of doorways in the world and in Palestine and in Bethlehem especially

Studying the doorways of Bethlehem was in many ways like a journey. A doorway is steeped in mystery. It encloses spaces, hiding and protecting that which lies beyond it and opens up to reveal something which is unknown, perhaps somber or secret. Thus doorways can be seen literally as thresholds in life, transitional zones to areas of sacred ground or symbolic passageways to other worlds. Doorways in Bethlehem have without a doubt considerably defined its architectural, historical and social urban character.

In this thesis the subject - doorways- is studied deeply for the first time, and not only in Bethlehem but in Palestine in general too. The thesis is thus unique, indeed locating data related to the study was difficult because very little exists. It is because of the lack of readily available information that the study depended to a high degree on analyzing and critiquing data generated by the study's field work.

The fact that doorways are extremely significant architectural components of a structure is a well renowned fact however the study showed that they are more than this: the doorways of Bethlehem are as authentic and distinct as the city's different phases of history. Each city in the world has its own character which develops through specific circumstances which are unique to that place.

It is mainly historical and social developments that brought about the variety of doorways' styles and functions. These different phases in Bethlehem's history, which were firstly reflected in its social, architectural and urban fabric, had the largest influence on the development of the doorways of Bethlehem. All the significant phases were mirrored in the doorways' structures; these phases inspired a wide variety of details, forms and architectural styles to do with the doorways. In conclusion random events in history structured the development of all aspects of life in Bethlehem and meant that a system of categorization could be created to describe these developments.

Four research objectives have been discussed in this overview of the doorways of traditional houses in Bethlehem: firstly the classification system of Bethlehem's doorways; secondly the impact of political, historical, aesthetic, functional and economic factors on doorway structures; thirdly the phases of development of doorway construction in Bethlehem; and fourthly an understanding of the value of Bethlehem's doorways.

1. Bethlehem Doorways Classification :

Doorways, as a multifunctional and aesthetic space, are categorized according to more than their exterior form or shape. Configuration, function and form are the main three components that shape the doorway's structure and lend it importance. The configuration and form of doorways in Bethlehem vary a great deal which makes them difficult to compare and categorize; all however have fixed or movable components which can compared and contrasted. A doorway's function is also a way of categorizing it, taking into consideration the doorway as a whole: the opening itself, the two spaces it connects and how they work together as one unit. It can be said therefore that a doorway can be categorized according to its components or its function.

The materials used to construct the doorway include stone, timber or cast iron. The main construction material which makes up the fixed part of the doorway is stone, while timber and cast iron are the usually used for its movable part, the door. Stone is the main building and decorative material in Bethlehem due to its availability in the city itself and in Palestine in general. The stone used for constructing and decorating doorways tends to be better cut than other parts of the elevation and different in colour and texture. In the past wood and iron were imported from surrounding areas for example Cedar wood was brought from Lebanon while iron was manufactured in Palestine and probably imported in pieces from Europe, particularly at the time of the Ottoman rule.

The function of Bethlehem's doorways varies according to the building, or more specifically the house, in question. Six different types of doorway were identified in the survey, each one forming the connection space between the public space and the private one. The first, which is the oldest and most common type of doorway, connects the main street or stairway directly with the main room of the peasant house. Reflecting the lifestyle of that period, doorways were simple in design and were limited in size. Another three types have also been identified from around the beginning of the late 18th century which connect the main public space with a transitional area in the house; this area is often the lobby of the house, its Liwan or the Riwaq. Such entrances are located most commonly in the center of the main elevation, they are more extensively decorated and are larger in width and length. This type of doorway was also used as an entrance to the house's courtyard and was often traditionally a main entrance from the wider family's home leading to other smaller and more private entrances for each part of the family. Doorways of this type, which connect the street with an open space, vary in design and size depending on the available interior free space and its function. The last version explored in this piece investigation is a doorway which connects the public space with the staircase of the home. These doorways tend to be normal in terms of their width but are much higher than expected which enables light to enter even the tallest part of the enclosed area. The doorways are simple in design and less grand than the others.

Doorways can be classified according to their form: that of the opening and that of the door itself. An opening can be identified by its outline, the proportions of the opening and its location. There are a number of shapes which characterize the entrance. The oldest version is the rectangular doorway; a second version which is very traditional is the rectangular doorway which features a rectangular transom light- the transom light is common because it functions as a source of daylight and air circulation. The third type of doorway is