

Beiteddine Palace stands as a key symbol of Lebanon's cultural heritage. This publication sheds light on a distinctive feature of the monument—and of Ottoman palatial architecture more broadly: the oriels, adorned with the endangered 'Ajami decorative technique.

In 2024–2025, under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture / Directorate General of Antiquities, the Fondation Nationale du Patrimoine launched a meticulous restoration campaign focused on the Dār al-Harīm and Salamlek oriels. This effort combined structural rehabilitation, surface conservation, and the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage.

Through contributions from the specialists who led the restoration, the book explores the historical significance of the oriels and the many challenges faced during their preservation. Readers are invited into the heart of the process, gaining insights into both the intricate construction systems and the layered ornamentation. The publication also highlights the investigative methods and advanced techniques used to ensure these emblematic features endure for generations to come.



The Restoration of the Historic Oriels at Beiteddine Palace



## The Restoration of the Historic Oriels at Beiteddine Palace

*A Journey Through Time and Craftsmanship*





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Direction & follow-up: Houda Kassatly, Nathalie Chahine

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Email address: [al.ayn.editions@gmail.com](mailto:al.ayn.editions@gmail.com), [fnpatrimoine@hotmail.com](mailto:fnpatrimoine@hotmail.com)

Website: [www.al-ayn.com](http://www.al-ayn.com), [www.lebanonheritage.org](http://www.lebanonheritage.org)







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*A Journey Through Time and Craftsmanship*

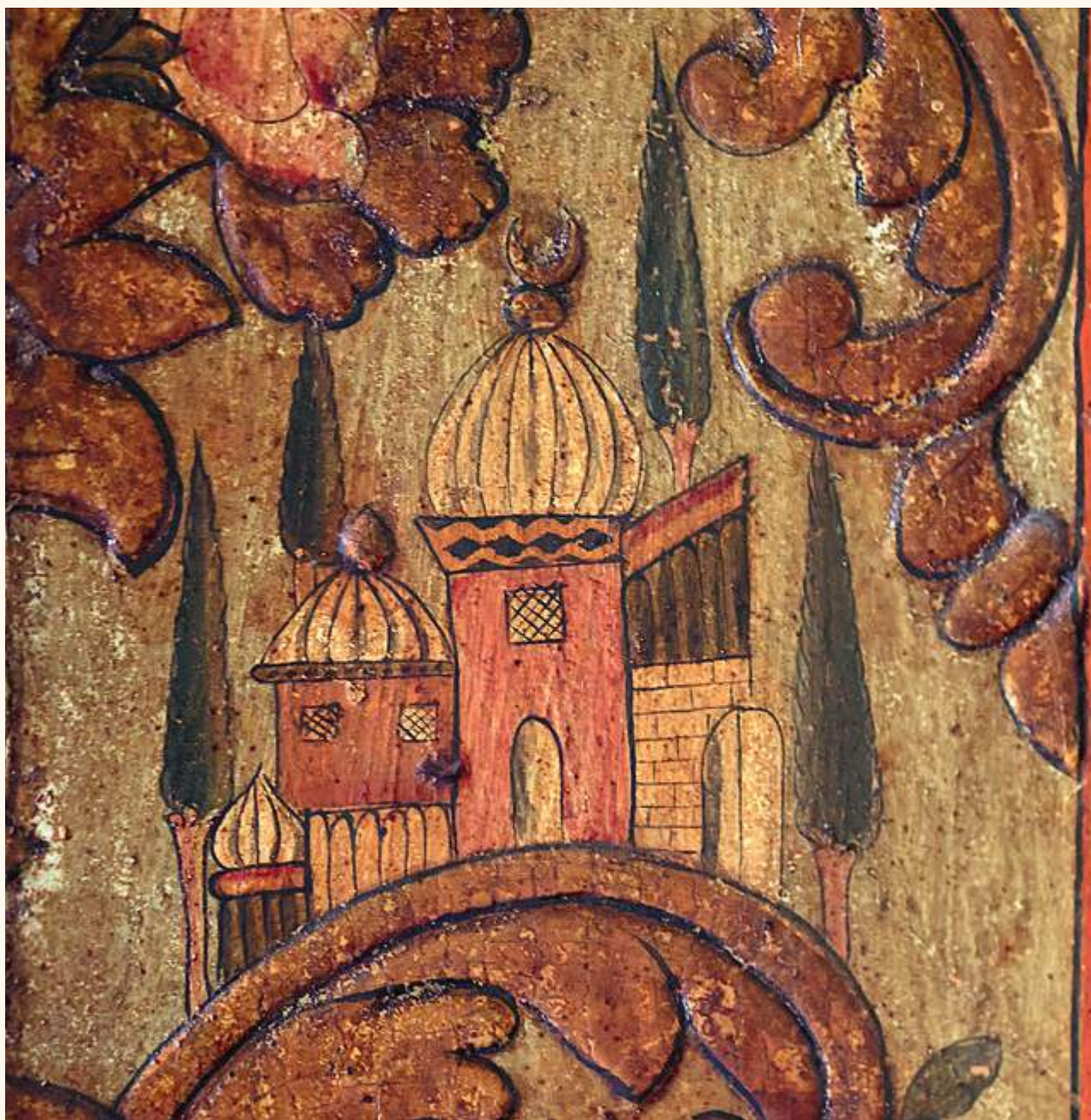
*Hadi Awaida, Nathalie Chabine, Roland Haddad, Shadi Kbalil, Yasmine Majzoub, Myriam Ziadé*



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## Transliteration

*Arabic words have been transliterated according to the system used in the JMES (International Journal of Middle East Studies). Arabic names are left in their familiar forms.*

ا	ā
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	h
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	s
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	‘
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
و	ū (when with skun)
و	w (when with haraka)
ه	h
ة	a
ى	ā
ي	ī
آ	ā
ء	‘
ال	al-

## Forward

*Dr. Ghassan Salamé*

Minister of Culture, Lebanon



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Lebanon's architectural heritage is a living testament to its rich history, diverse cultural traditions, and extraordinary artistic legacy. Among its most treasured landmarks stands the Beiteddine Palace—an architectural gem of the Ottoman era and a lasting symbol of Lebanon's cultural brilliance. Within its historic walls, two intricately crafted oriels have long embodied the elegance and mastery of traditional Lebanese woodwork and design.

Recognizing their cultural and historical significance, the Ministry of Culture prioritized their urgent restoration as part of a broader mission to safeguard the nation's heritage.

This restoration would not have been possible without the generous support of the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP), whose global commitment to protecting heritage is deeply appreciated. We are especially grateful to the National Heritage Foundation (NHF) for its critical role in overseeing and coordinating the project with professionalism, cultural sensitivity, and technical excellence. The Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) at the Ministry provided essential oversight throughout, ensuring that the highest standards of heritage conservation were upheld at every stage.

This project stands as a strong example of what can be achieved through meaningful collaboration—between national institutions and international partners—united by a shared commitment to cultural preservation. It exemplifies the spirit of cultural diplomacy and reflects the enduring strength of Lebanon's ties with the global heritage community.

More than a technical accomplishment, this publication is a tribute to the spirit of cooperation, resilience, and dedication that brought this effort to life.

As Minister of Culture, I extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed their time, expertise, and passion to this noble endeavor. May this achievement inspire continued efforts to protect and celebrate our shared heritage, and may the restored oriels continue to tell their story for generations to come.

*Lisa A. Johnson*  
U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon



Lebanon's rich cultural heritage stands as a testament to its enduring history, resilience, and artistic brilliance. Among the country's most treasured landmarks, Beiteddine Palace shines as a masterpiece, reflecting Lebanon's storied history and architectural splendor. Beiteddine Palace, a historical cultural heritage site and the summer residence of the President of the Republic, stands as a symbol of Lebanon's cultural identity. The Palace not only embodies the nation's cultural heritage but also serves as a vibrant center for the renowned Beiteddine Festivals, celebrating the arts and fostering cultural exchange.

Recognizing the urgent need to conserve this historical gem, the U.S. Embassy, through the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, is honored to support the "Urgent Rescue Mission of Beiteddine Palace." This initiative, made possible by a dedicated team of conservators, artisans, and students, embodies the shared commitment of the United States and Lebanon to safeguarding Lebanon's cultural heritage.

The restoration of the 'Ajami kiosques and the Hammam is not merely an act of preservation but an investment in the future. The meticulous work undertaken—whether in conserving the intricate 'Ajami decorations, stabilizing the Hammam's historic plasterwork, or recreating missing glass elements—ensures that Beiteddine Palace remains a beacon of Lebanese heritage for generations to come. Furthermore, by involving university students from Lebanon, the project nurtures the next generation of heritage professionals, passing down invaluable skills and expertise.

Cultural preservation is more than the restoration of physical structures; it is a reaffirmation of identity, history, and continuity. The United States is proud to stand alongside Lebanon in protecting its diverse heritage, reinforcing the values of cultural exchange, mutual respect, and enduring friendship. This publication serves as both a record of the exceptional work undertaken and a source of inspiration for future efforts to safeguard Lebanon's heritage.

May it encourage continued collaboration in preserving the treasures that define this remarkable country.



*Mouna Haraoui*  
President of the National Heritage Foundation



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For over three decades, the National Heritage Foundation (NHF) has stood as a beacon of cultural preservation in Lebanon. Uniting historians, archaeologists, and art enthusiasts, the NHF, with the support of the Ministry of Culture and contributions from both public and private sectors, has tirelessly championed the protection and promotion of Lebanon's rich heritage. The NHF also played a pivotal role in the renovation of the National Museum of Beirut after the civil war and has continued to preserve this cultural institution ever since.

On August 4, 2020, the city of Beirut was devastated by massive explosions at the port, leaving hundreds dead, thousands injured, and many more homeless. The catastrophe destroyed numerous neighborhoods, including heritage-rich areas and buildings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In response, the NHF, committed to preserving Lebanon's heritage, joined forces with leading experts in the field to launch the Beirut Heritage Initiative (BHI), an independent collective dedicated to the rehabilitation of Beirut's built heritage.

Nearly five years later, it is with immense pleasure that I introduce this publication, the culmination of dedicated work initiated under BHI. The magnificent 19th-century Beiteddine Palace, a treasure of Lebanese architectural heritage, was facing an escalating threat of decay. In 2022, Mrs. Nora Joumblatt, NHF member and president of the Beiteddine Festival, brought urgent attention to the alarming deterioration of the palace's oriels and hammam. Thanks to a generous grant from the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP), the NHF embarked on a crucial restoration project. A specialized team was assembled, and their expert guidance and knowledge led to the restoration of the oriels, reviving their original vibrant colors, while simultaneously training a new generation of conservators on-site.

This book offers a timely and invaluable glimpse into one of Lebanon's most significant monuments and its unique architectural feature: the oriels of Beiteddine Palace. It is my sincere hope that this research will serve as a catalyst for the preservation of these endangered architectural elements, not only in Lebanon but across the Middle East. Furthermore, we aspire for this work to contribute to the broader effort of conserving our unique identity and history — treasures that risk being lost forever.

*Sarkis El-Khoury*  
Director General of Antiquities, Lebanon



Beit eddine Palace, perched on a hillside overlooking the scenic valleys of the Shouf region, stands as a magnificent testament to Lebanon's rich cultural and architectural legacy. Built in the early 19th century by Emir Bashir al-Shihābī II, the palace is far more than a historic residence; it embodies national identity, artistic excellence, and political history.

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The Palace reflects the diverse cultural influences that have shaped Lebanon across centuries—where Arab craftsmanship, Ottoman grandeur, and Italian elegance converge in harmonious dialogue. This unique fusion of styles highlights the richness of each tradition while affirming Lebanon's longstanding role as a crossroads of cultures.

Within the palace, two historic wooden oriels, adorned with exquisite 'Ajamī decoration and intricate carvings, stand as rare examples of 19th-century regional craftsmanship. Over time, exposure to harsh environmental conditions and structural vulnerabilities led to significant deterioration of both their wooden structure and ornamental detail. Without timely and expert restoration, Lebanon faced the imminent loss of a vital element of its cultural heritage.

This urgent restoration was made possible through the generous support of the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP), whose longstanding partnership with the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) has been essential to the success of numerous preservation initiatives. The National Heritage Foundation (NHF), a dedicated and trusted partner, played a pivotal role in managing, coordinating, and implementing the project.

Crucially, the project brought together local and regional experts—woodworkers, artisans, and heritage professionals—ensuring each phase was conducted in accordance with international standards and ethical conservation practices. Emphasis was placed on knowledge transmission, allowing traditional skills to be passed down to a new generation of artisans and professionals.

By integrating archival research, historical analysis, conservation techniques, and traditional craftsmanship, this multidisciplinary approach offers a model for future restoration projects. It aligns closely with the Ministry of Culture / Directorate General of Antiquities' broader strategy to promote the valorization and sustainable development of Lebanon's national cultural heritage.



*Liban. Palais de Béteddine*







## Beiteddine Palace: Echoes of a Glorious Past

*Myriam Ziadé*

Archaeologist, Regional Director of Saida and Southern Mount Lebanon, Directorate General of Antiquities

# Beiteddine Palace: Echoes of a Glorious Past

*Beiteddine Palace, a majestic early 19th-century masterpiece nestled in the Shouf Mountains, is more than just a remarkable example of architectural ingenuity; it is a symbol of Lebanon's rich historical, political, and cultural heritage. Built by Emir Bashir al-Shihābī II (Prince Bashir II), the palace offers a glimpse into Lebanon's feudal period and its pivotal role during the Ottoman era. This article explores the palace's historical significance, architectural splendor, and its enduring legacy in Lebanese culture.*

## Political and Historical Importance

Emir Bashir al-Shihābī II, often called 'the Great', ruled over Mount Lebanon for more than half a century (1788-1840) (Fig. 1). A visionary and strategist, the Emir successfully established a centralized governance system despite the intense regional instability faced by the Ottoman Empire at the time. His reign brought a period of relative stability, expansion, and prosperity to Lebanon, as he prioritized the development of agriculture, commerce, and infrastructure. He managed to unify the region of Mount Lebanon, which was divided into sectarian districts, and played a critical role in balancing power between the various religious sects, including Christians, Druze and Muslims. Beyond his public works, Emir Bashir II was also renowned for his leadership and noble character.

The political scene during this time was shaped by internal Ottoman struggles and European interference. Despite these challenges, Emir Bashir II was able to obtain a considerable degree of autonomy, partly by forging strong alliances with powerful Ottoman officials and occasionally aligning himself with foreign authorities.

Driven by a desire to establish a seat of power and a symbol of his authority, Emir Bashir II envisioned a palace to rival the grandest constructions of the Ottoman Empire (Fig. 2). He moved the capital of Mount Lebanon from Dayr al-Qamar to Beiteddine, a village owned by his wife Sitt Shams, and built



Fig. 1

Fig. 1 Portrait of Emir Bashir al-Shihābī II  
Fig. 2 Beiteddine Palace. Aerial view



Fig. 2

his palace on a promontory overlooking the valleys. This palace became a political center and bore witness to key events in 19th-century Lebanon. When talking about the power and decisions of Emir Bashir II, people would often refer to it as the 'Will of Bteddine'. Concerned by his increasing power and growing influence in Lebanon, the Ottomans exiled him to Malta in 1840. Two years later, they suppressed the emirate, and the palace – once a symbol of Emir Bashir II's dominance – became an Ottoman government residence. Later, under the French Mandate following World War I, it was used for administrative purposes.

Restoration works in Beiteddine Palace began in 1926 by the Department of Antiquities. In 1930, the palace was declared a national historic monument and was later opened to the public. Since 1943, the year of Lebanon's independence, Beiteddine Palace has served as the official summer residence of the president of the Lebanese Republic.

Despite this decline in political influence, Beiteddine Palace remains an important historical site that reflects the legacy of Lebanon's feudal past. It serves as a reminder of the political power struggles that defined the region during the 19th century and how Lebanon's political landscape has evolved over time.



## An Architectural Marvel

Beiteddine Palace is known for its exceptional architectural design, which combines traditional Lebanese, Ottoman, and European influences. Maurice Chehab, Lebanon's first Director of Antiquities (1942-1982), described it as the 'Versailles of Lebanese history' <sup>1</sup>. The palace reflects the grandeur of Emir Bashir II's reign and his symbolic ambition and desire to project an image of wealth and power (Fig. 3). In keeping with Oriental architecture traditions, the palace's austere exterior contrasts with its richly decorated interiors. The palace's construction spanned several decades, with skilled artisans and architects meticulously crafting its exceptional details (Fig. 4).

<sup>1</sup> Chehab 1945-1950, p. 115

Fig. 3 Dār al-Wusta courtyard and Dār-al-Harīm façade



Fig. 3







Fig. 4



Fig. 5

The palace complex features multiple courtyards and structures, including reception halls, luxurious private quarters, ornamented arched doorways and adorned fountains (Fig. 5). The gardens are particularly noteworthy for their fastidious design, with a series of terraces embellished with fountains, flowing streams with multicolored fish, and a variety of trees and plants. To ensure a steady water supply for the palace and the gardens, Emir Bashir II mandated that every male subject contribute two days of unpaid labor to construct a channel drawing water from the Nabeh al-Safa springs. Completed in two years, this advanced engineering achievement brought fresh water to Beiteddine without depleting the public treasury. Sections of the aqueduct that supplied water to the palace remain visible in part of the gardens.

A defining feature of the palace is its use of vaulted ceilings, typical in Ottoman architecture, along with its carefully arranged courtyards that create an inviting, open atmosphere. The seamless integration of European influences, particularly Italian design elements, enhances the palace's distinctive character. The palace's rooms are ornamented with polychrome marble flooring and complex stone carvings, revealing the remarkable craftsmanship of the period. The wood paneling on the walls and ceilings is inspired by traditional Damascene techniques. Geometric patterns, floral motifs, and arabesques ornate the reception rooms, reflecting the Emir's refined taste and the artistic sensibilities of the era (Fig. 6).

Fig. 4 Upper Dār al-Harīm gallery

Fig. 5 Upper Dār al-Harīm marble mosaic fountain

Fig. 6 Dār al-Wusta ministers' salon





Fig. 6

## Exploring the Palace Complex

The palace covers an area of 30,000 m<sup>2</sup> surrounded by 60,000 m<sup>2</sup> of terraced gardens (Fig. 7). It is composed of six sections:

### Dār al-Barraniyeh (Outer Section)

The main entrance opens into a 107x45 meters courtyard, known as Al-Midān or jousting field, where equestrian exercises and competitions were held. This is where horsemen, courtiers, and visitors would meet for various gatherings. From here, the Emir would depart with his retinue and guards in solemn procession, whether for war or the hunt.

Along the right side of the Midān, is a two-story reception wing, Al-Madāfa, which was used to host passing guests. At the time, Lebanese tradition required nobles to offer travelers three days of hospitality without questioning their identity or purpose of their travel. After this period, the host would discreetly inquire about the visitor's identity and aim of his journey.

### Dār al-Wusta (Middle Section)

The central courtyard, with an elegant fountain at its center, is bordered by arcades on three of its sides, while the fourth side remains completely open, offering a view of the countryside. The luxurious rooms around the courtyard served as offices for the Emir's ministers and secretaries, as well as reception salons. The walls and ceilings of these rooms are covered with exceptional marquetry and marbled mosaics.

*Fig. 7 Beiteddine Palace.  
General view.*



Fig. 7



Fig. 8 Dār al-Ḥarīm main gate.

### Dār al-Ḥarīm (Private Quarters)

This section housed the Emir and his closest entourage. This part includes the personal living area, the kitchens, and the reception wing or ‘Salamlek’. This sector of the palace is adorned with a monumental façade and an intricately designed internal gate (Fig. 8, 9). The reception hall features a mosaic floor, with walls decorated in carved wood and marble, along with sculptures and inscriptions (Fig. 10, 11). At the end of the salon, Emir Bashir the Great would sit in the wooden oriel, a projecting bay window, to receive dignitaries. From this oriel, or kishk, he had a view of the surrounding gardens. Another oriel is situated in the Upper Dār al-Ḥarīm, overlooking the central courtyard. The function of these oriels and their diligent restoration will be explored in detail in the following contributions.





Fig. 9 Dār al-Ḥarīm main gate.



Fig. 10 The Salamlek



Fig. 11 *The Salamlek details.*





Fig. 12 The Hammām. Hot room

## The Hammām

The Hammām is a monumental private bath complex, following the traditional oriental style. This bath was not only for hygiene but also served as a space for rest and socializing. In line with the Roman tradition, the bath includes a cold room (frigidarium), which served as a cloakroom (mashlah in Arabic), and a space for relaxation and conviviality before and after the bath; a lukewarm room (tepidarium) dedicated to massages; and hot rooms (caldarium) where the bath took place, assisted by specialized personnel (Fig. 12). The Hammām floor is covered with multicolored marble mosaics forming geometric patterns, while its domes, once equipped with polychrome glass globes, filtered soft, ambient light (Fig 13). Painted coating and decorative stucco cover the walls and the domes.

## Dār al-Khaīl (Stables)

Dār al-Khaīl is located beneath both Dār al-Wusta and Dār al-Ḥarīm. Large halls with ribbed vaults once accommodated the Emir's guards, including 600 knights and their horses, along with 500 infantry soldiers. These men were fully devoted to the Emir and were feared throughout the country.

## The Gardens

The palace is surrounded by exquisite gardens that held special significance for Emir Bashir II. The gardens include a series of terraces displaying a spectacular array of plants. The Emir had the finest rosebushes and jasmine seedlings brought from distant lands. The cypress trees, some of which still stand today, were specifically mentioned in his will.





Fig. 13 The Hammām, Lukewarm room

## A Cultural Landmark

Emir Bashir al-Shihābī II resided in his luxurious palace, surrounded by a brilliant court of ministers, secretaries, and intellectuals. These figures played a crucial role in the region's political and cultural life, advising the Emir on governance, policy, and diplomacy.

Emir Bashir II, celebrated as a 'protector of literature and the arts'<sup>2</sup>, welcomed renowned writers to his palace, including Alphonse de Lamartine and his personal poet, Nicolas Turk. The intellectuals and thinkers within the Emir's circle were particularly influential in the literary Renaissance that emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in the Arab world. This period saw a revival and modernization of Arabic literature, arts, and culture. The scholars, progressive thinkers, and writers at Emir Bashir II's court were instrumental in introducing new ideas, literature, and philosophies, often drawing inspiration from the West while preserving and reinterpreting Arabic traditions.

Today, Beiteddine Palace continues to play a central role in Lebanon's cultural scene, hosting a range of cultural events and artistic exhibitions. With its historic architecture and lush gardens, the palace continues to symbolize the intellectual and cultural vibrancy cultivated during Emir Bashir II's reign. The Beiteddine Art Festival, which began in the 1980s, has become one of Lebanon's most prestigious cultural events, honoring the country's historical and cultural heritage while showcasing the talent and creativity of contemporary Lebanese and international artists.

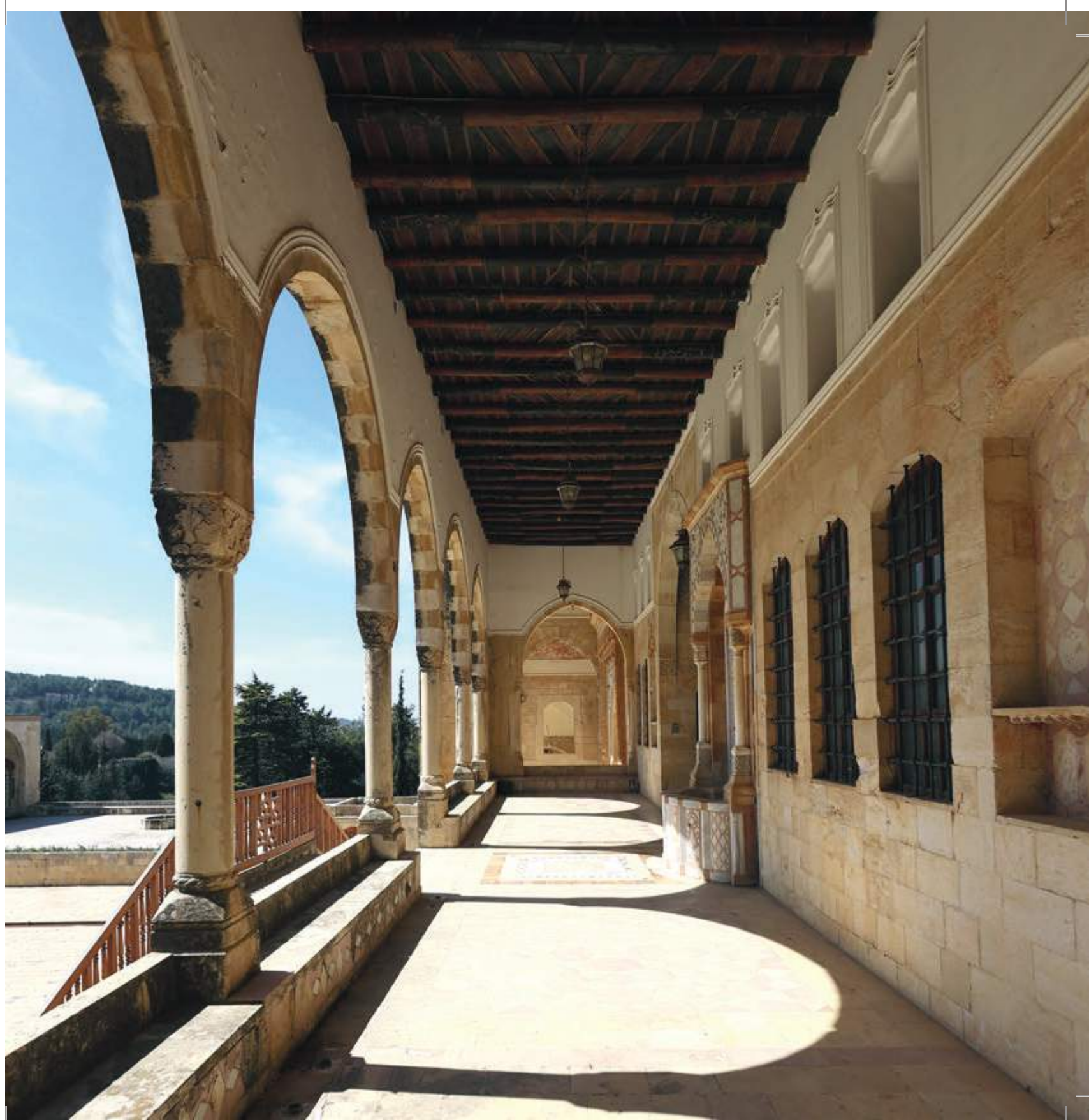
## Conclusion

Beiteddine Palace is not only an architectural masterpiece but also a living testament to Lebanon's complex political, historical, and cultural significance. From its role as the seat of political power under Emir Bashir al-Shihābī II to its current status as a national monument and a cultural hub, the palace remains a key symbol of Lebanon's identity. Ongoing conservation efforts ensure that future generations will continue to find inspiration in its beauty, history, and the legacy it represents.

<sup>2</sup> Chehab 1955, p. 57

Fig. 14 Upper Dār al-Harīm













# The Unveiling of the Historic Oriels of Beiteddine Palace

*Architectural Significance and Evolution*

*Nathalie Chabine, Architect Restorer*  
Consultant for the Beiteddine Palace Urgent Rescue Mission

## The Unveiling of the Historic Oriels of Beiteddine Palace

*The iconic photographs of the Beiteddine Palace capture the elegance of a wooden oriel suspended from the Dār al-Ḥarīm wall alongside another discreetly nestled within the palace's Salamlek. Common in 18th and 19th-century Mount Lebanon palaces, these architectural features provided elevated views of the courtyard, gardens, and valley. For centuries, they have witnessed battles, celebrations, the renowned Beiteddine Festival, and visits from millions of people.*

### Oriels in Mount Lebanon Palaces

Oriels, also known as projecting bay windows, Musharrabiyyāt, or Akshāk (the plural of Kishk), are common elements in traditional Levantine and broader regional architecture.

Prominent in Mount Lebanon's historical palaces and mansions, oriels represent a fusion of traditional Levantine design with European influences from the Ottoman era, shaped by cultural exchange and evolving aesthetic tastes.

Typically protruding outward from the palaces' stone masonry façades, oriels are supported by carved stone or wooden corbels, demonstrating both structural ingenuity and artistic craftsmanship. They are often enclosed with intricate wooden work, featuring rectangular or arched windows that allow for panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.

These oriels functioned as semi-private spaces, ideal for relaxation while providing access to sunlight and fresh air. They served a social purpose, particularly for the Emirs, as part of a reception room, or for women, offering a discreet vantage point to observe the activities in the courtyards or midān (central public square) while maintaining the privacy dictated by societal norms of the time.

The current state of these historic oriels in Lebanon reflects the broader challenges faced by Lebanon's architectural heritage. Primarily crafted from wood and plaster, oriels are highly susceptible to deterioration from weathering agents, the impacts of wars, and increasing urban pressures. Furthermore, inappropriate renovations, neglect, and a lack of resources for conservation have exacerbated the issue, resulting in the loss of many oriels across Mount Lebanon.

Today, only a few remain—most notably in Dayr al-Qamar, Beiteddine, and Mtayn—highlighting the urgent need for conservation (Figs. 1–5).

Two of the three oriels at Beiteddine Palace —the Dār al-Ḥarīm and Salamlek oriels—are undergoing urgent restoration from 2024 into 2025. This intervention is critical to address structural instability and restore the historical integrity of these architectural elements while improving their resilience against future challenges.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



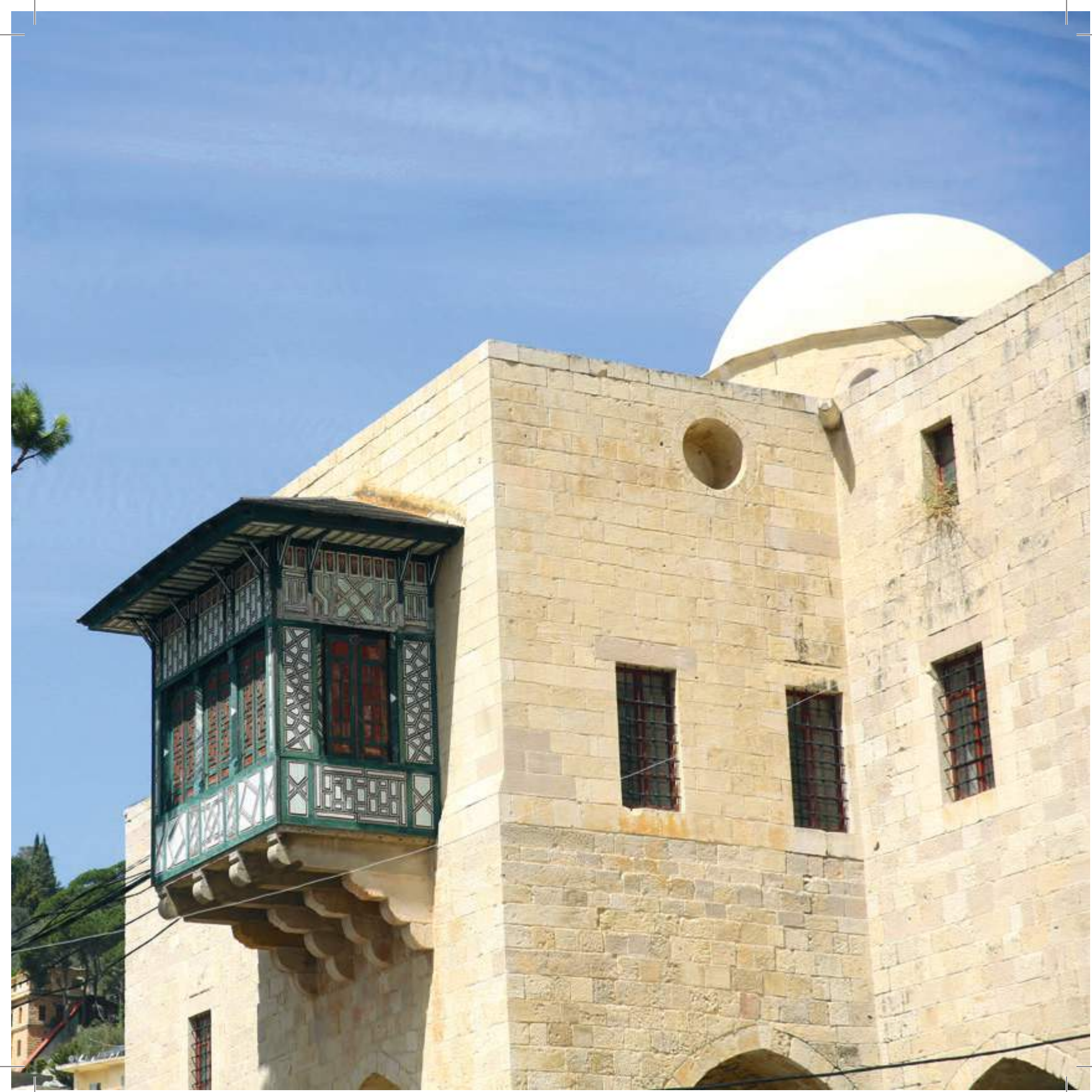
Fig. 4

Fig. 1 Abillama Palace, Mtein  
 Fig. 2 Hammam, Beiteddine Palace  
 Fig. 3 Mir Amin Palace, Beiteddine  
 Fig. 4 Mir Amin Palace, Beiteddine



*Fig. 5 Serail of Emir Yusuf Shihab, Deir el-Qamar*







## A Descriptive Exploration of the Two Oriels of Beiteddine Palace

The two oriels of Beiteddine Palace embody the stylistic values of their time, showcasing centuries of craftsmanship that reflect the rich cultural heritage and exchanges between Lebanon and Syria, as well as the historical narratives of the era.

The oriel in Dār al-Harīm, overlooking the courtyard, features a semi-hexagonal structure composed of six triangular wooden panels that taper downward. These panels cover the lower wooden framework, which supports the upper main part of the oriel, converging at a stone corbel decorated with a wooden ornament. The entire upper structure is similarly constructed and clad in wood, integrating six arched windows. The oriel is topped with boards attached to wooden beams and corbels. The slightly overhanging roof was originally covered with metal sheets but was later replaced with a concrete cover.

In contrast, the Salamlek oriel is semi-pentagonal, with five triangular wooden panels, concealing a modified structure of concrete, metal, and wood. A wooden band featuring stalactite-like elements encircles the lower part. The entire upper structure is constructed from wood, integrating five trilobed windows. The oriel is topped with a simple, slightly sloping roof that was originally covered with metal sheets but since has been replaced with a concrete cover.

The ornamentation of both oriels—including carved wood, painted floral motifs, and intricate interior •Ajamī panels—showcases the craftsmanship of local and regional artisans and the ingenuity of their builders.

## The Historical Journey of the Oriels through the Archives and the Site Findings

The rehabilitation project drew on public and private archives, as well as findings from the site. Among the few scientific publications available on Beiteddine, we discovered *le Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* and *Beit-ed-Dine*, both authored by Maurice Chehab, the first Director of Antiquities, between 1942 and 1982.

Fig. 6 Interior view of the Dār al-Harīm oriel prior to the installation of stained glass showing the original clear glazing







## Written Archives

There are no precise archival records indicating when the oriels were constructed. However, the documentation found in the DGA Archives, including the *Chronique II, Travaux de Restauration et de Conservation des Monuments*, and the *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth*, reveals that there were several restoration campaigns for the woodworks (*les boiseries*), without specifying the exact locations or their nature. It is likely that these woodworks included the wooden oriels, their exterior panels, as well as their interior ḥAjamī panels and ceilings, alongside other wooden ceilings and openings within the palace.

According to these archives, “woodworks” were renovated in 1940. Between 1944 and 1945, under the leadership of Sheikh Bechara al-Khoury, President of the Lebanese Republic, and Riad al-Solh, President of the Council, the Lebanese parliament granted significant funds for the restoration of the palace. It was during this time that the French architect Lucien Cavro, known for his prior work on the ḥAzim Palace in Damascus, installed new woodwork in Beiteddine. The archives state the following:

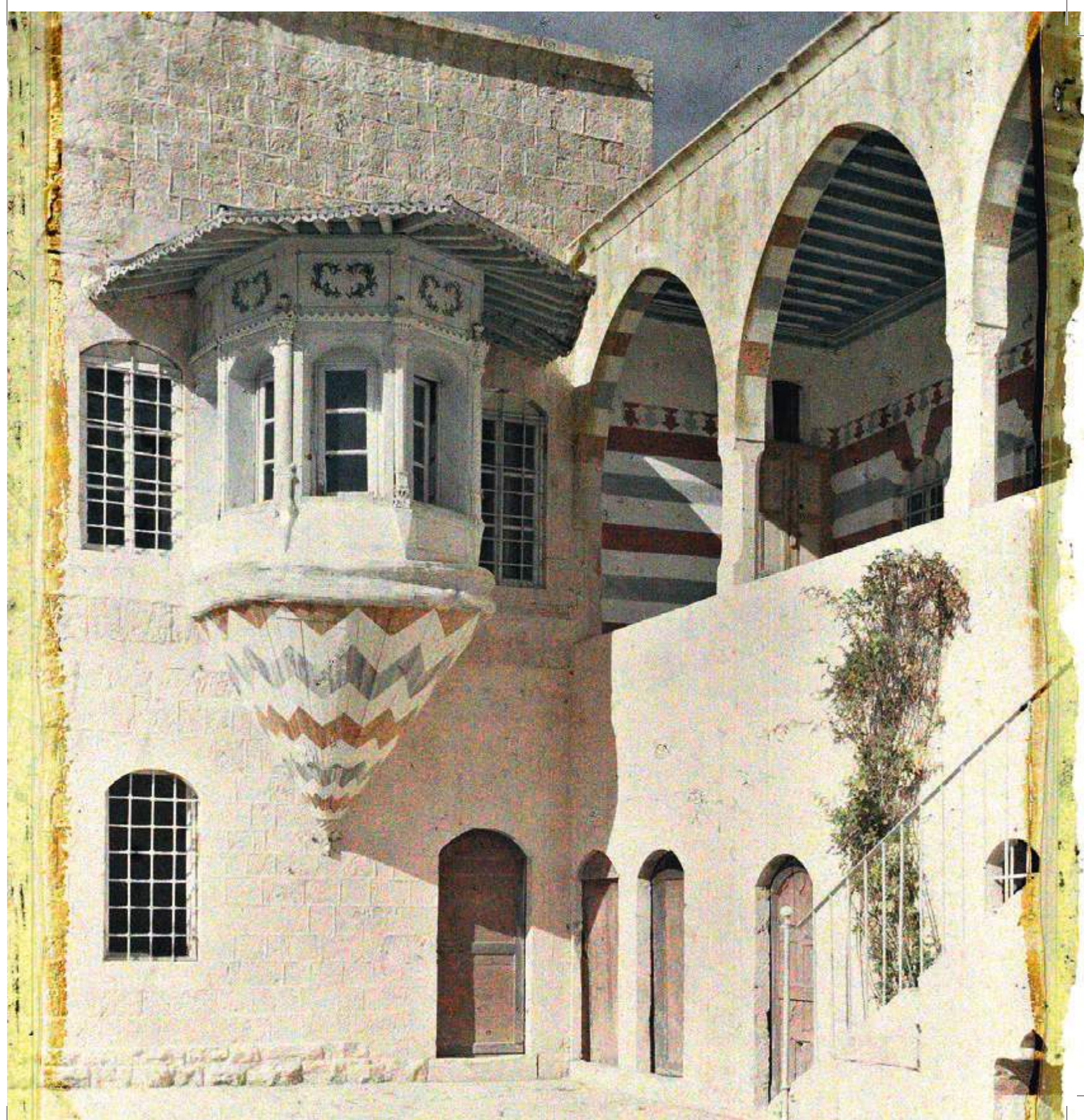
***“ Exquisite woodwork from the palace’s era was acquired and meticulously installed...  
Damascene woodwork was acquired and entrusted to the Damascene craftsman  
Abū Sulaimān, whose family is currently the sole repository of the traditions and  
techniques of local polychrome woodwork (ḥAjamī) . ”***

*Fig. 7 Dār al-Ḥarīm Oriel  
(Logette sur-le-pan de la façade  
du palais de l’Emir Bachir  
Chihab), October 20, 1921*

The archives mention maintenance work in 1955 but without specifying the nature or location of these interventions.









In his book "Beit ed-Din," Maurice Chehab revives the historical scenes that used to take place in Dār al-Ḥarīm and Salamlek Oriels:

***“...la chambre à laquelle aboutit ce portique se prolonge par une échauguette en boiserie, élégante et côtelée, qui domine la cour. L'Émir Béchir, qui était très matinal, s'installait dans cette échauguette d'où il assistait au réveil de l'ensemble du palais, fumant son chibouk (longue pipe) ou son narguilé. ”***

***“...L'Émir se tenait dans cette abside avec son visiteur au cas où il recevait de hauts personnages tel qu'Ibrahim pacha, fils de Mehmet Ali, ou Soleiman pacha (ancien colonel Sève qui avait pris part à la campagne de Bonaparte en Egypte). Dans ce grand salon furent reçus Lamartine, Lady Esther Stanhope et bien d'autres personnalités. ”***

Which can be translated into the following:

*The room that this portico leads to is complemented by an elegant, ribbed wooden oriel overlooking the courtyard. Emir Bashir, an early riser, often sat in this oriel, watching the entire palace come to life while smoking his chibouk (long pipe) or hookah.*

*In this apse, the Emir hosted high-ranking visitors, such as Ibrahim Pasha, the son of Mehmet Ali, and Soleiman Pasha, (former Colonel Sève who had participated in Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt). Notable figures like Lamartine, Lady Esther Stanhope, and many other distinguished personalities were also received in this spacious room.*

## Iconographic Archives

Photos of the two oriels, found in private archives and the DGA Archives, suggest that the Dār al-Ḥarīm Oriel has undergone more extensive modifications than the Salamlek Oriel. One of the most remarkable documents is a 1921 photograph that shows a different geometry of the Dār al-Ḥarīm Oriel, raising questions about its "authenticity" and "original" colors (Figs 7, 21). The Oriel in the photograph appears to follow the same current dimensions, layout, and location but features a different conical lower shape, which intersects with the vertical section via a cornice, likely made from a plastered wood lattice band. Furthermore, the windows in the image display a different guillotine system, and the overall color scheme contrasts significantly with what is seen today. The Oriel was predominantly white, with orange and blue zigzag bands along the lower part. This color scheme appears to be consistently applied throughout the palace's outer walls. A decorative band, possibly made of zinc or iron, defines the upper wooden canopy, which differs structurally from the one we see today.

A photograph captured by Swiss photographer Schwarzenbach in 1935 (Fig.21), reveals a transformation in the shape of Dār al-Ḥarīm Oriel, indicating significant renovation works between 1921 and 1935. These works were captured in a photograph from the DGA Archives showing a scaffolding around the same Oriel (Fig.8). Another important document that guided the rehabilitation intervention came from two black-and-white photographs, probably dating back to the 1960s or early 1970s, sourced from the DGA Archives.

Fig. 8 Archival image capturing restoration work on the lower section of the Dār al-Ḥarīm Oriel, with scaffolding in place



Fig. 8

These images show the oriel with slight architectural variations compared to their condition in 2023. For the Dār al- Ḥarīm Oriel, discrepancies include roof details, the absence of floral motifs on the lower rectangular panels, and the painted motifs on the upper panel above the windows (Fig. 9).

For the Salamlek Oriel, the differences are minimal, and the motifs painted on the lower and upper parts of the windows aren't distinct enough for a clear comparison (Fig. 10).

An undated image by Architect G. Kaikati from the DGA Archives shows the Dār al- Ḥarīm Oriel within its context, highlighting the floral motifs present in its lower section (Fig. 11).

Additionally, one of the undated postcards from Houda Kassatly's private collection displays the same Oriel, featuring a brick-colored frame, light-colored triangular panels, and painted floral designs on the rectangular panels. (Fig. 12)

Another picture from 1993 (Fig.13), a postcard from the same collection (Fig. 14), and various pictures from 2000 until the 2023 intervention show significant changes in colors that do not align with the traditional Ottoman palette. Minor modifications to the awning details and additions and alterations to the floral designs in both oriel are also evident (Figs. 15–18).



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

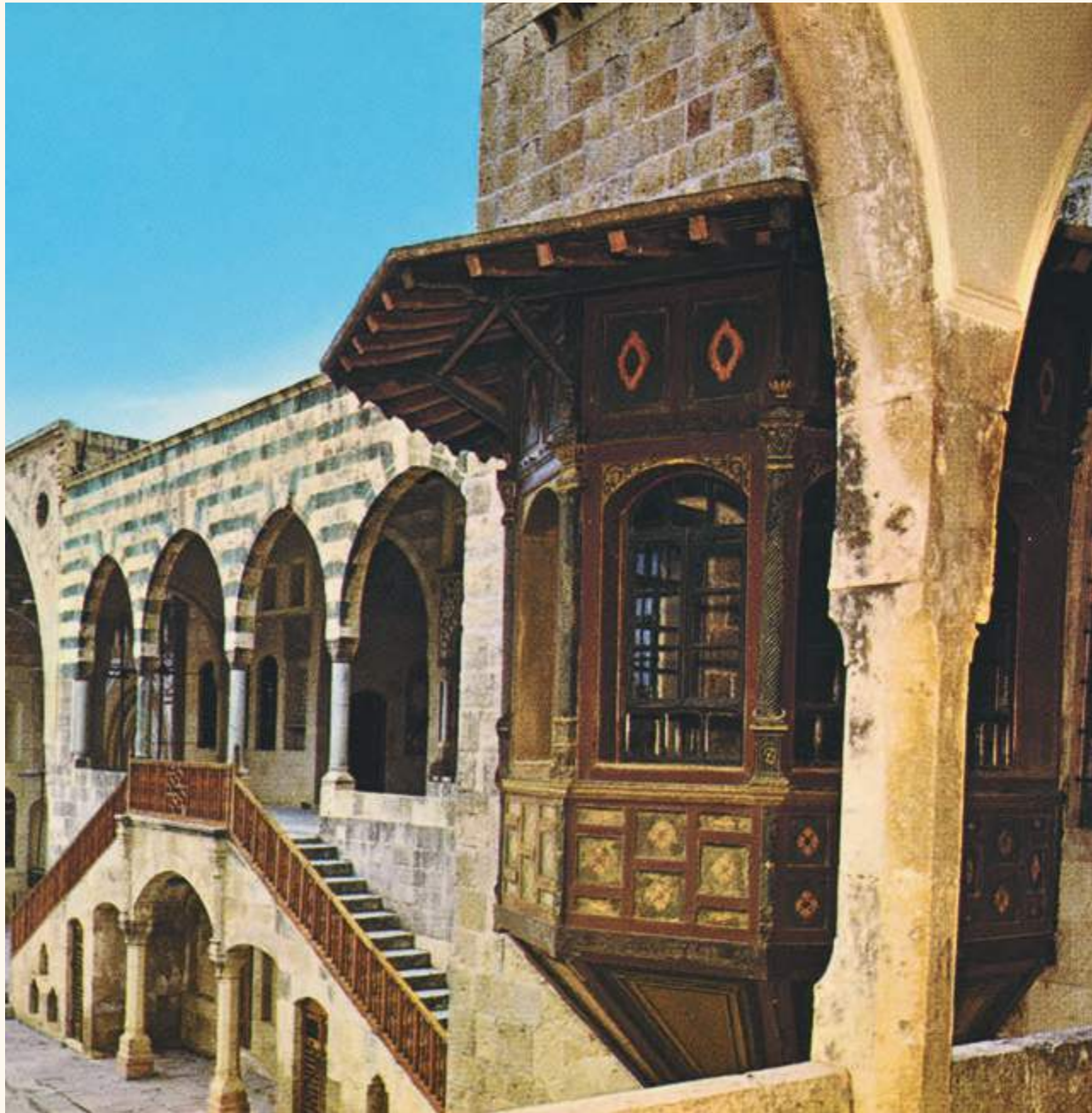


Fig. 12





Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



### Site Findings

The findings from the project interventions have significantly expanded our understanding of the oriel's history and the phases of their modifications. Upon examining the site and uncovering the lower portion of the Dār al-Ḥarīm Oriel, it became clear that it was originally designed for its current location. In contrast, the Salamlek Oriel appears to be a later addition to the facade. This conclusion was drawn after exposing its lower section, which revealed evidence suggesting that the area was originally intended for a balcony or Mandalūn, supported by stone corbels. The Salamlek Oriel was likely added during the renovation of the reception room in 1900, as indicated by an inscription found within the space (Fig. 19). This supports the notion that the Dār al-Ḥarīm Oriel predates the Salamlek Oriel. Moreover, the Salamlek Oriel's lower structure showed metal and concrete modifications, indicating changes made after the 1940s.

Investigations into the decorative elements yielded intriguing findings. One remaining floral motif in the lower part of Dār al-Ḥarīm Oriel, identified in the black-and-white photograph in (Fig. 11), was found beneath modern wood motifs. Additionally, floral designs visible in the photo from the DGA Archives (Fig. 9) on the upper part of the same oriel were discovered beneath a later painting.

The Salamlek Oriel has undergone multiple renovation phases, which included the addition of floral motif panels to its lower section. Two overlapping panels were found, but these motifs appear to have been added after the 1990s as they do not align with the traditional Ottoman style and instead reflect a modern appearance.

Investigations into the upper part of the Salamlek Oriel revealed at least three different interventions for the floral motif. The analysis of the paint palettes from both oriels uncovered more than eight overlapping colors, representing various phases, tastes, and techniques. By synthesizing the different documentation and findings, we were able to create a hypothetical mapping of the various phases, shapes, colors, and the historical journey that both oriels underwent.





Fig. 19

Fig. 19 Inscription commemorating the 1900 renovation of the Salamlek by the Ottoman Mutasarrıfs, 2025



Fig. 20

## State of Conservation and Insights on the Intervention Decisions

Beiteddine Palace has undergone several rehabilitation efforts over the years, yet many of its structures remain at risk. As of 2022, the two deteriorating wooden oriels were among the most endangered items. Key issues identified included structural detachment from the stone masonry wall, likely due to aging, the weight of the cement screed above, and water infiltration through the wooden structure. Furthermore, elements were lost, and *ʿAjami* and wood paintings were detached and discolored as a result of humidity, condensation, aging, and damaging interventions in recent years. Urgent restoration was necessary to preserve the structural integrity of the oriels, protect the intricate interior *ʿAjami* panels, and safeguard the weathered outer painted surfaces.

One of the most challenging aspects of the restoration was selecting an appropriate color palette for the exterior panels. This decision was crucial as it would significantly impact how visitors perceive the oriels. Several factors guided this choice: first, the goal was to restore a color palette that harmonized with the surrounding context; second, inspiration was drawn from traditional Ottoman colors; and third, the team relied on documentation and site investigation data. The final outcome enhanced the understanding of the oriels while maintaining their integrity, providing insights into the palace's design, construction methods, and historical context, and aiding in restoring their stylistic and artistic significance.

Fig. 20 Dār al-Harīm Oriel, 1921  
Fig. 21 Dār al-Harīm Oriel, 1935  
Fig. 22 Dār al-Harīm Oriel, 2025



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



### **The Project as a Model of Participatory and Inclusive Preservation**

This project aimed not only to preserve a rare regional heritage but also to engage young conservation practitioners and revitalize the endangered ‘Ajamī technique. The project focused on both the physical environment and the local community, with the primary objective of creating jobs and imparting knowledge of traditional building techniques. This initiative aimed to cultivate a larger pool of experts and craftsmen in the future, turning cultural heritage into a tool for economic and cultural development. Two recent Fine Arts graduates from Dayr al-Qamar Lebanese University, along with an employee from the DGA team responsible for the palace, completed approximately 50 days of training, totaling 400 hours. During this time, they learned the ‘Ajamī technique, its application, phases, pigments, and various styles, while assisting conservator Shadi Khalil throughout the rehabilitation process (Figs. 23–25).

The restoration mission was not only an end in itself but also served as an educational tool, providing training opportunities, promoting professional integration, and encouraging youth involvement in community projects. Additionally, it represented a renewed commitment to preserving Lebanon's rich cultural heritage.



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25





# The Restoration Process of the Two Historic Oriels of Beiteddine Palace

*Stages, methodologies, discoveries, challenges, and solutions*

*Hadi Awaida, Roland Haddad and Yasmine El Majzoub*  
Contractors' team for Beiteddine Palace Urgent Rescue Mission

# The Restoration Process of the Two Historic Oriels of Beiteddine Palace

*Over the years, Beiteddine Palace, a 19th-century monumental structure in the Shouf district of Mount Lebanon, has undergone several restoration campaigns across different sections of its premises. However, significant restoration work remains as many sections face threats from aging, weathering, and climate change. The palace's two wooden oriels, in particular, were at risk. The restoration work carried out in 2024-2025 focused on the intricate structural rehabilitation, surface conservation, and cultural preservation of the Dār al-Harīm (Fig. 1) and Salamlek Oriels (Fig. 2).*

## Project Objective and Cultural Significance

The first oriel is located at the northeast corner of Dār al-Harīm, overlooking the palace's courtyard, while the second oriel is on the western elevation of the Salamlek, overlooking the palace garden. These two oriels are among the few remaining of their kind in Lebanon.

A meticulous, well-coordinated approach was essential to address the structural issues and visible deterioration developed over time. During the restoration, traditional techniques, characterized by a high level of craftsmanship, were used, occasionally combined with contemporary methods of damage assessment and rehabilitation, with a focus on compatibility with the original materials and techniques.

## Scope, Methodology, and Guidelines

The restoration works included structural rehabilitation to ensure the safety and stability of the oriels. Architectural conservation efforts also focused on restoring and reinstalling the oriels' traditional decorative woodworks and panels. To ensure the highest quality, continuous quality control measures were implemented throughout the restoration process. Detailed method statements were prepared for approval by the consultant and primary stakeholders before executing any critical tasks.

A skilled workforce was recruited for its experience and expertise in handling such projects. Regular site supervision was conducted to ensure compliance with the consultant's instructions and requirements. The intervention adhered to international restoration standards and guidelines, using traditional techniques and materials such as lime, wood, and natural pigments. Traditional assembly and construction techniques were documented for reapplication where possible. Where this wasn't feasible, similar techniques using materials such as stainless steel, zinc, and waterproofing treatments were adopted, ensuring compatibility with existing structures and materials.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

### Site Preparation & Safety Measures

Site preparation and safety measures for all personnel on-site were vital to ensure the restoration process proceeded smoothly. Temporary sheltering was established to protect the site's valuable assets before and during the execution of the restoration work, ensuring that the oriels were protected from potential damage caused by debris, rain, or other environmental elements.

A designated workspace for carpenters was set up within the palace to ensure efficient and precise work. Dismantled and sorted materials were stored in covered areas to prevent damage or loss. Regular cleaning and debris removal kept the site well-maintained and hazard-free.

### Facilitating Workspace for Artisans

Supporting the artisans and craftspeople involved in the restoration of the Ajami and painted decorations in the oriels was essential to preserving cultural heritage and ensuring the continuation of traditional craftsmanship. Several measures were implemented to provide them with the necessary resources, materials, tools, and workspaces to complete their work effectively. Scaffolding was assembled where needed, allowing artisans to work comfortably and safely on ceilings and high walls. Additionally, proper accommodation was arranged in a nearby housing unit to ensure easy access and mobility to the site.



### Survey, Documentation, and Assessment

Throughout the assessment and restoration phases, extensive documentation of the oriels was carried out using photography, drawings, and regular reports. An important aspect of the assessment phase involved a detailed survey using 3D laser scanning technology conducted by XYZ Lebanon (Fig. 3-5). This non-invasive technique, supplemented by precise on-site measurements taken by architectural restorers, enabled the production of highly accurate drawings, 3D models, and damage mapping. This approach facilitated well-planned, targeted interventions using both traditional and contemporary surveying methods.

A thorough assessment of the oriels revealed that their primary structural issue was separation from the stone masonry walls, likely due to aging and inappropriate past restoration interventions. Notably, both the Dār al-Ḥarīm and Salamlek Oriels had been subjected to additional weight from cement slabs cast atop their original roof structures. This added load worsened detachment and deterioration. Water infiltration was another significant factor contributing to the decay of essential wooden elements, as well as the loss, detachment, and discoloration of Ḥajamī decorations and external wood paintings due to humidity. Window frames had also been detached from the wooden panels, and in the case of the Salamlek Oriel, some glass elements were broken or missing. Without timely and proper intervention, the oriel's structural integrity could have failed, leading to the irreversible loss of their intricately decorated surfaces.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

## Dār al-Ḥarīm Oriel

The restoration process began with the installation of scaffolding and propping systems to ensure safe and comprehensive access to the structure from all sides (Fig. 6). Once the wooden panels from the lower section were removed, the underlying structure was revealed, showcasing the craftsmanship of local materials and traditional construction techniques of the time (Fig. 7).



Fig. 6

The lower part of the oriel was built using large horizontal beams (35 x 22 cm) embedded into the stone masonry wall (Fig. 8). Some of the wood was likely reclaimed from dismantled ceilings. Secondary beams, positioned at an incline, formed triangles that converged at the base of the oriel, resting on a cantilevered stone embedded in the wall. These triangulated beams were connected to a wooden ring beam, which in turn supported vertical posts. The structural arrangement at the base was mirrored at the ceiling level, where triangulated beams formed the conical roof. However, a concrete slab had been cast over the roof, adding excessive weight and compromising the structure's stability.

With the oriel propped and secured, the dismantling and documentation of wooden panels and decorative elements commenced (Fig. 9, 10). Each dismantled component was numbered, sorted, and stored for reinstallation after

the structural restoration was complete. Water infiltration had caused decay in some wooden beams, necessitating full replacement, with the same type of wood (qotrani) and matching dimensions. Other beams were partially restored using similar wood and traditional assembly techniques (Fig. 11). All wooden components were treated with teak oil (Fig. 12). For the ceiling and roof, once the damaged wooden beams were repaired, new wooden planks were installed following the original construction methods and using the same type of wood (qotrani) (Fig. 13). To further protect the structure, zinc sheets were placed over the wooden planks to prevent water infiltration. These sheets were embedded into the wall's grout on one end and wrapped around the wooden planks on the other. Zinc was chosen for its compatibility with both wood and stone (Fig. 26 a). Additional zinc sheets were installed on the windowsills to redirect water away from the structure. All interventions were designed with reversibility in mind.

The existing window frames with colored glass were documented and dismantled for treatment and repair (Fig. 14). During the restoration of the wooden decorative panels and window frames, traces of earlier colors were uncovered. Based on these findings, color and patina samples were prepared and applied to the oriel's interior and exterior, allowing stakeholders to select the final finish. For the glass, it was decided to reinstall clear glass instead of the previously added colored panes. This choice aimed to highlight the craftsmanship of the Ḥajamī and reveal its authentic colors. Additionally, historical photographs confirmed that the oriel featured clear glass before the later introduction of colored glass.





*Fig. 7 Removal of the wooden panels at the lower section of the Dār al-Harim Oriel to reveal its structure*

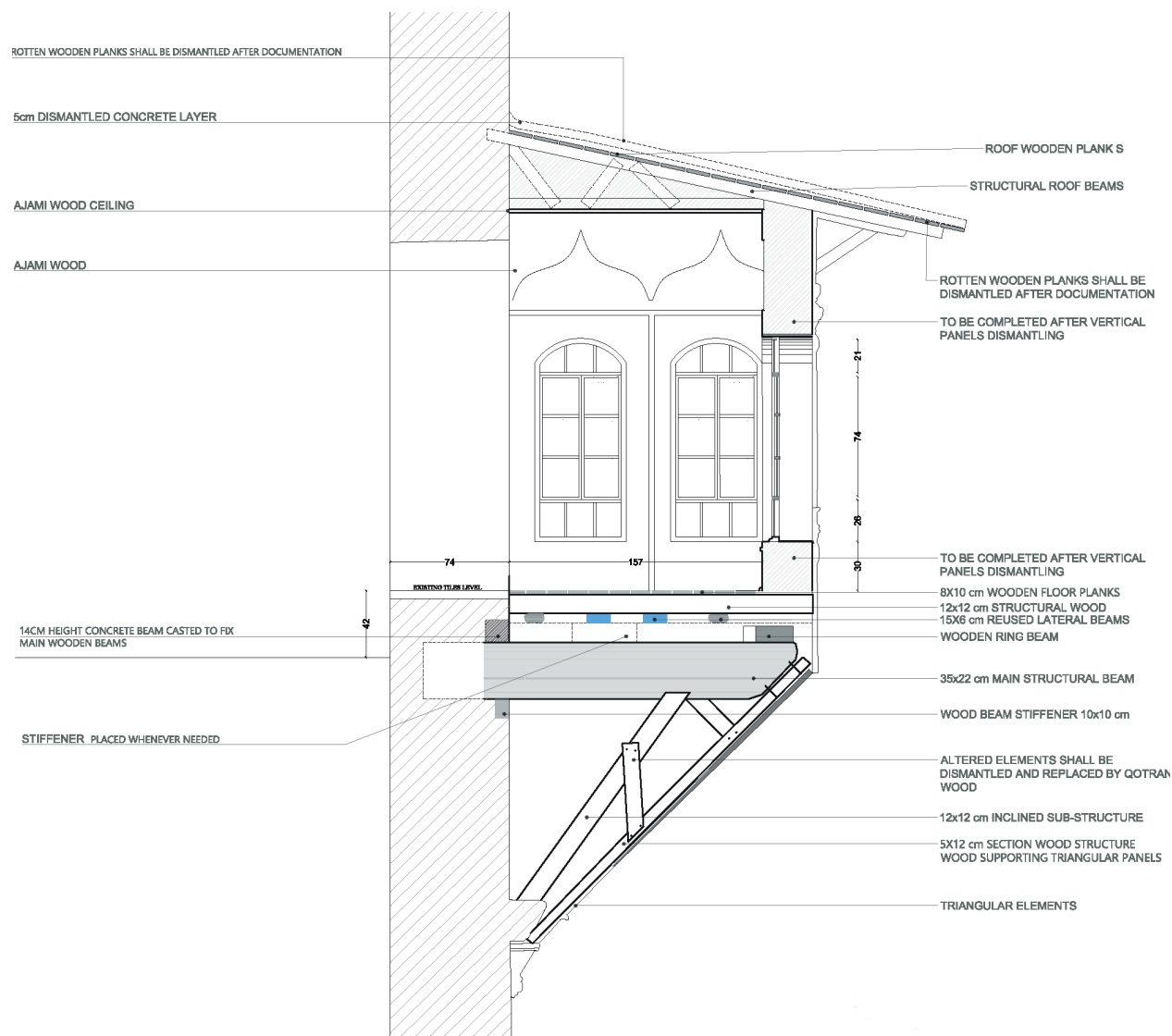


Fig. 8 Dār al-Harīm Oriiel -  
Section drawing illustrating the  
oriel's structural composition



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



## The Salamlek Oriel

The restoration of the Salamlek Oriel followed a similar sequence to that of the Dār al-Ḥarīm, with some variations. The process began with the installation of scaffolding and the propping of the structure (Fig. 15). The triangular wooden panels at the base of the oriel were documented and dismantled to assess the structural condition further.

After removing the decorative wooden panels and displaced tiles inside the oriel for further inspection of the wooden posts from both sides, it was discovered that a previous restoration had replaced the original horizontal wooden beams with a concrete slab (Fig. 16). To reinforce the vertical wooden posts, this slab had been secured with a metallic tie beam, which had since deteriorated completely. The assembly techniques of this system suggested that the oriel had been temporarily consolidated and propped at some point to allow for the removal of its original wooden structural elements, which were then replaced by the concrete slab. Retaining these structural inconsistencies was not ideal, so an improved, more compatible system was introduced. This involved securing the vertical wooden posts to the repaired concrete slab using stainless steel pads bolted to the slab, providing additional support (Fig. 17).

The removal of the panels also revealed traces of altered large stone corbels beneath the concrete slab. Additionally, diagonal wooden beams formed a triangulated structure above a cantilevered stone below (Fig. 18). The corbels likely supported a balcony before it was replaced by the oriel.



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

Further structural investigations revealed a 6 cm displacement between the stone masonry wall and the upper section of the oriel. To correct this, the oriel was carefully pulled back into alignment using temporary tie rods and ropes (Fig. 19, 20). As with the Dār al-Harīm Oriel, a concrete layer had been cast over the conical roof and was removed (Fig. 21). The damaged wooden planks, beams, and posts were either replaced with the same type and dimensions of the original wood or partially restored (Fig. 22, 23). All wooden elements were treated with teak oil. Finally, zinc sheets were installed over the roof to provide additional protection against water infiltration (Fig. 26 b).

Investigations into the painted wooden panels of the oriels revealed its original color palette. Several samples were created to replicate the original color grading and composition. These tests combined findings from on-site investigations—after successive layers of recent paint were removed—with photographic documentation from archives covering different historical periods. The evidence confirmed that the colors and form of the oriel had changed over time. Preserving as much historical detail as possible without compromising the oriel's overall aesthetic proved challenging. Multiple site meetings and discussions were held before a final decision by specialized partners was made and executed.



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

For the oriel's sliding windows, the damaged lower sections were carefully dismantled for repair, treated with teak oil, and repainted. The fixed window frames, which had damaged colored glass, were numbered and removed for restoration (Fig. 24, 25) before being repaired and reinstalled (Fig. 31). Missing or damaged glass pieces were replaced to follow a harmonious pattern (P. 70), using either newly fabricated pieces from a local supplier or reclaimed glass from the Dar al-Harim Oriel, following traditional techniques.

A significant decorative feature of the Salamlek Oriel that required restoration was the carved wooden belt with stalactite-like motifs around its lower section (Fig. 27, 28, 29). These elements were carefully dismantled and assessed. Severely damaged pieces were replaced using identical materials and traditional fabrication techniques, while those with minor damage were repaired and treated.

Once all structural elements were restored, the removed tiles and decorative wooden panels were reinstalled. Finally, the refurbished window frames and shutters were painted and placed back in their original positions.





Fig. 24



Fig. 25

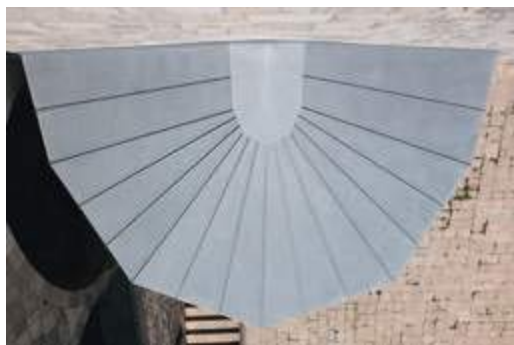
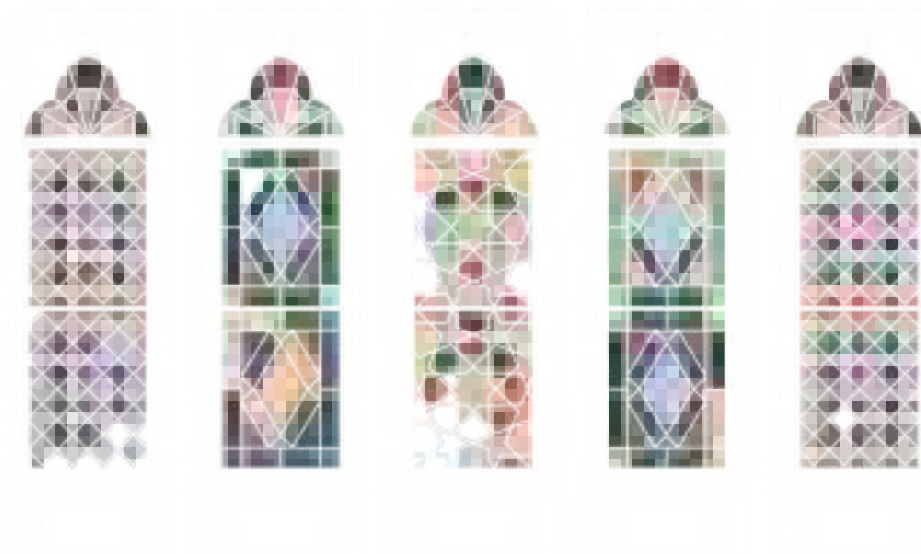


Fig. 26 a

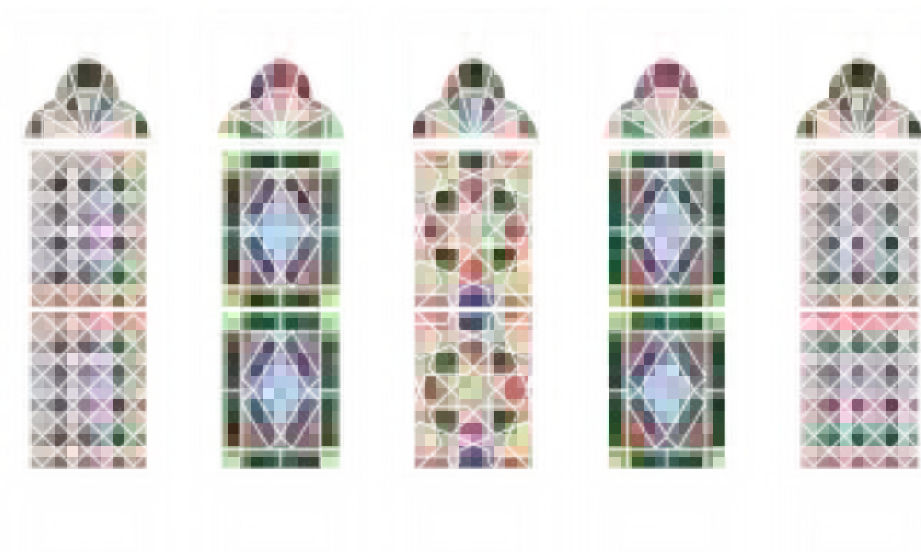


Fig. 26 b



Previous state of the colored glass window panes

70



The colored glass window panes after restoration



Fig. 27



Fig. 28

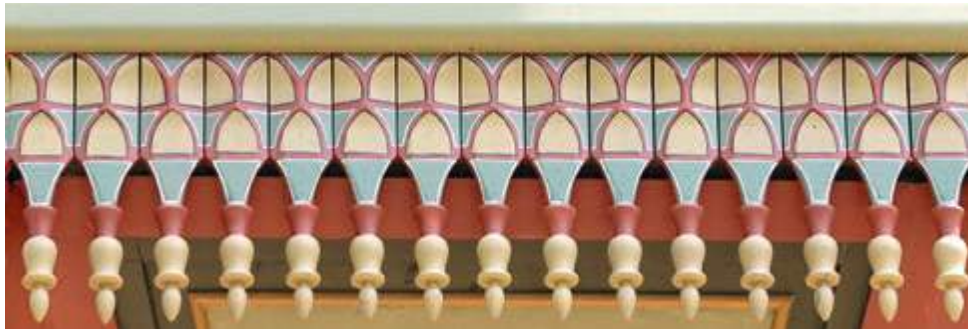


Fig. 29

## Lessons Learned

One of the most valuable insights from this restoration project was a deeper understanding of the oriels' structural system. The complete dismantling of the decorated wooden panels provided a rare opportunity to examine the underlying wooden framework, offering crucial knowledge about its construction methods. This not only allowed for thorough documentation of traditional building techniques but also provided critical guidance for future restoration efforts on similar structures.

Beyond the immediate restoration, the project highlighted the importance of long-term conservation planning for built heritage. Continuous maintenance is essential, and restoration proposals should allocate dedicated funds for ongoing upkeep and timely interventions. Additionally, adaptability during both planning and execution is crucial to accommodate unforeseen conditions or unexpected discoveries that may impact the project's timeline and budget.

The urgent restoration of the Beiteddine Palace's Dār al-Harīm and Salamlek Oriels highlighted the interdisciplinary collaboration necessary for preserving cultural heritage. By integrating traditional craftsmanship, historical knowledge, and contemporary intervention techniques, the project achieved both structural reinforcement and aesthetic preservation, demonstrating a holistic approach to heritage conservation.





Fig. 30









Fig. 31





Fig. 32



# The ʿAjamī Decoration of the Oriels in Beiteddine Palace

*Historical Context, Conservation, and Restoration*

*Shadi Khalil*

Conservator and specialist in the conservation and restoration of ʿAjamī interiors, Damascus



## The Ajamī Decoration of the Oriels in Beiteddine Palace

*Polychrome wooden wall and ceiling paneling were key features of interior decoration in urban architecture across Syria and Lebanon (Bilād al-Shām) from the 17th to the mid-19th century. The surviving residences from this period provide a rare glimpse into the rich variety of wooden interior decorations, offering invaluable insight into a past that has largely been erased in many West Asian cities due to economic and political developments over the last 150 years.*

### The Splendid Wooden Interiors of Ajamī Rooms in Syria and Lebanon from the 17th to the mid-19th century (Bilād al-Shām)

Most of the decorative wooden elements in these interiors were adorned with relief gesso ornaments, giving the rooms and panels their name: al-Ajamī. This term refers both to the production technique and the relief ornaments it creates, but it is also used to denote the interior style itself <sup>1</sup>. The word Ajamī, meaning “Persian” or “non-Arabic”, was historically associated with exotic luxury goods from the East, which served as inspiration for many of the painted patterns adorning wooden walls and ceilings in the 17th and 18th centuries.

While some motifs and styles remained in fashion for decades, others were fleeting, quickly replaced by new trends. The painted motifs reflected the personal tastes of the owner-builders—some adhered to traditional design languages, while others embraced contemporary influences. This is evident in Beiteddine Palace, where multiple phases of structural and design modifications can be traced, including the incorporation of wood paneling from other origins, such as Damascus.

However, the application of natural-resin varnishes beginning in the late 19th century, intended to enhance and preserve the colors, instead caused the rooms to darken over time to shades of yellow and brown, obscuring their original vibrancy. Additionally, many interiors have undergone partial or large-scale overpainting, as well as the replacements of entire panels <sup>2</sup>.

*Fig. 1 Bayt al-Hawrāniya, Damascus. Detail of a panel in the room east of the iwan in the main courtyard (juwwani), dated 1204/1789–90. 2022*

*Fig. 2 Dār al-Fanoun, Damascus. Ceiling of the tazar in the qa'a of the north wing. The mural decoration bears the date 1231/1816–1817. 2009*

Over the past two decades, scientific research and restoration projects have sought to uncover the largely forgotten original appearance of these rooms, offering new insights into their former color and opulence. Only a few have survived with their original surface decoration intact, still showcasing the intended contrast between matte and glossy details—such as some interiors in Bayt al-Hawrāniya in Damascus.

<sup>1</sup> The information in this article on the *ʿAjami* interiors, the materials used, the historic production and painting techniques, and the architectural context is based on research by Anke Scharrahs. Expert Scharrahs published widely on this subject; see, for example, Anke Scharrahs, *Damascene ʿAjami rooms: Forgotten Jewels of Interior Design*, London: Archetype Publications, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See on this practice of adapting and varnishing Damascus paneling: Anke Scharrahs, “Two Layers of Authenticity: The Damascus Room at Shangri La,” *Shangri La Working Papers in Islamic Art*, no. 8 (November 2014), 1–25, <[https://shangri lahawaii.cdn.prismic.io/shangri lahawaii/5eefcd6-75fd-4b42-93d5-6d4a80747da7\\_anke-scharrahs-no-8-nov-2014.pdf](https://shangri lahawaii.cdn.prismic.io/shangri lahawaii/5eefcd6-75fd-4b42-93d5-6d4a80747da7_anke-scharrahs-no-8-nov-2014.pdf)> (accessed 25 June 2024). The retrofitting of Damascene paneling for the guest room in Doris Duke’s residence Shangri La in Honolulu had been carried out by Abū Sulaimān (Muhammad ʿAlī al-Khayyat) and his workshop, the same team that installed the Damascene *ʿAjami* paneling and ceilings to Beiteddine Palace few years earlier, in the late 1940s (see contribution by Nathalie Chahine in this volume).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Figs. 3–5 Beit eddine Palace,  
Dār al-Wuṣṭā (middle courtyard).  
2024





Fig. 5

## The Ajamī Technique

### Paneling, Colors, Patterns, and Materials

The wall paneling follows a consistent construction principle, comprising a framework to which panels and frames for windows, doors, wall closets and niches are fixed. Above these elements, horizontal panels adorned with calligraphic inscriptions further enrich the decoration. The upper edge of the paneling is crowned on all walls by a protruding cornice of varying depth. By 1670, the practice of covering the architectural and decorative surfaces entirely with relief Ajamī ornaments and calligraphy—while skillfully contrasting glossy, reflective, and matte materials—had reached full maturity.

The exuberant and vibrant decoration was achieved through a sophisticated painting technique that created subtle contrasts: bright colors with matte and satin finishes contrast against reflective copper or gold leaf details, along with glossy, transparent tinted glazes layered over silvery tin foil. As guests moved through the space, the interplay of light across these surfaces was designed to be a sensory spectacle—an immersive and dazzling experience. However, this effect has largely faded due to shifts in lifestyle and the evolving function of these historic interiors.

## The Two Oriels in Beiteddine Palace

### Condition Before the Conservation Campaign

In Lebanon, only a few Ajamī interiors have survived in their original locations. The two oriel at Beiteddine Palace are rare examples of this decorative tradition. Despite undergoing changes and renovations over their 200-year history, significant elements have been preserved, offering valuable insight into this artistic form. Recent conservation and restoration efforts have revealed the original shapes and colors, providing a glimpse into the early 19th century.

Over the past two centuries, the oriel have undergone multiple modifications. However, some elements have retained their original surface decoration, while others remain concealed beneath layers of later paint and varnish. The differing condition of the two oriel and their components reflects their complex history.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9





Fig. 10 Dār al-Harīm oriel prior to conservation. 2024



Fig. 11 Dār al-Ḥarīm oriel after conservation, 2024

### Dār al-Ḥarīm Oriel

Most of the painted wooden panels are original, including their surface decoration. While some details remain visible, many are obscured by darkened varnish layers or later paint applications. In certain areas, flaking paint requires consolidation.

The wood carvings seem to have been crafted by different workshops or carvers across various periods, all predating the mid-19th century, as the metal leaf technique used in these pieces fell out of practice after the 1850s. Variations in the application of the copper alloy leaf have resulted in differing states of preservation. Three distinct types of metal leaf degradation are visible: two in the ceiling and a third in the serwāls. The severely damaged ceiling carvings have been painted over with a bronze color.

Some wooden panels of the wall paneling have been replaced due to water damage caused by direct contact with walls. In certain areas, the original paint layers can be seen through the later varnish, while in others, they are completely concealed beneath subsequent paint layers. The original paint on the windows was heavily damaged, but small traces of green paint suggest they were originally painted that color.



Fig. 12 Dār al-Ḥarīm oriel. Ceiling and modern coloured windows, prior to conservation. 2024



Fig. 13





Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

*Figs. 15–16 Dār al-Ḥarīm oriel.  
Details of panels during the  
removal of later darkened  
varnish layers. 2024*



Fig. 17 Dār al-Ḥarīm oriel. Detail of a serwāl prior to conservation, 2024



Fig. 18. Dār al-Ḥarīm oriel. Detail of a serwāl after conservation and restoration. 2024



## Salamlek Oriel

In the Salamlek Oriel, most of the wooden elements were replaced at various times and feature surface decoration from different periods. Only a few sections with original paint layers remain, including some relief Ḥajamī ornaments.

In 1900, significant alterations were made to the wall and the opening between the oriel and the qā'a, as indicated by the inscription bearing this date, which faces the qā'a. During this period, the wall and openings were covered with wooden panels, muqarnas, and decorated with three arches. Many of the older Ḥajamī panels inside the oriel were renovated or replaced at the same time, as evidenced by the renewed Ḥajamī motifs, created with the same paste as the panels from 1900. These panels were then entirely repainted and covered with a thick varnish. Over time, additional varnish layers caused tension, leading to the loss of some Ḥajamī motifs, which were later retouched.

At a later stage, some wooden panels were replaced with composite wood, such as the panels below the windows, which were also repainted. The geometric grilles of the windows are painted with a thick, light beige paint, applied recently.

The surface decoration of the wooden elements has been heavily damaged by water leaks, as evidenced by the significant flaking of Ḥajamī paste in the relief ornaments and peeling paint layers.



Fig. 19 Salamlek oriel. Ceiling prior to conservation. 2024



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

*Figs. 20–23 Salamlek oniel.  
Details of the wall paneling  
before and after conservation.  
2024*

## The Aim of the Conservation and Restoration Campaign

The conservation and restoration campaign had two primary goals: stabilizing and strengthening weakened or displaced wooden joints, and conserving the original surface decoration. The original paint layers were at risk due to later varnishes, which, over time, developed tensions and caused the paint to flake. These thick brown varnishes had to be removed as much as possible. In some areas, later paint and bronze layers, which had been applied over the original paint, were also removed. The collective restoration efforts aimed to restore the delicate balance between vibrant colors, patterns, and surface gloss, as originally intended by the artisans when creating these architectural masterpieces.

## Conservation Mission: Concept and Approach

### Dār al-Harīm Oriel – Interior Decoration

The first step in the conservation process was to consolidate the flaking paint layers and reattach them to the wooden surface. Fragile wooden pieces also required reattachment to the ceiling construction. One section of the cornice had been dismantled, stabilized, and reinstalled because it had partially detached from the ceiling. After reinforcing and adjusting it to the adjacent cornice sections, the piece now supports the entire ceiling structure.

Thick layers of varnish were removed from the surface decoration of the wall panels, revealing the vibrant original colors and glossy metal leaf, particularly the copper alloy leaf. The intended contrast and play of light between matte, satiny, and glossy details of the design are once again visible. The ceiling carvings were cleaned by removing thick varnish layers and later-applied bronze paint. The well-preserved original copper alloy leaf on the carvings of the *serwāls* (corner squinches) was uncovered, along with the lighter and more vibrant colors of the original paint layers, which had been partially covered by later paint. The delicate original design was restored.

After the removal of the bronze paint from the ceiling carvings, only a few remaining areas of the original copper alloy leaf were visible. The original surface appearance was reconstructed using a specific metal powder paste that mimics aged copper alloy leaf. This was a crucial step in recreating the balance between matte and glossy details throughout the space, which is a distinctive feature of the Ḍajamī interiors.

Losses in the paint layers were inpainted using professional acrylic and watercolor pigments, restoring the original design and enhancing its clarity. Later paint layers were also removed from the window frames. Underneath, a few patches of the original paint were found, which guided the reconstruction of the lost appearance. A new green shade was applied to match the aged color scheme in the interior. The colored glass panes of the windows were replaced with transparent glass based on historical photographs. This change allows the neutral light to better highlight the interior fittings.

The brass lamp, added at a later date, was dismantled along with the numerous electrical cables and nails used for its attachment. This step was taken to protect against fire risks and preserve the fragile ceiling, as the weight of the lamp had caused sagging in the center of the ceiling.

Fig. 24 Dār al-Harīm oriel.  
The conservator during the  
inpainting of losses in the ceiling.  
2024







Fig. 25

### Salamlek Oriel–Interior Decoration

The largely flaking paint layers, as well as loose ʿAjamī paste motifs, were consolidated to preserve them for future generations. The ʿAjamī ornaments, which were added later, also required consolidation due to their weakened substance and internal cohesion. Most of these areas with flaking layers were covered by thick varnish, which had to be preserved during the consolidation, as removing the varnish would have caused the loss of the flaking layers.

The painted areas with bleached varnish were cleaned by removing the brittle layers. The later-added panels were gently cleaned, but their color scheme remained darker than the original, as these areas were painted with darker shades of the chosen colors. The cleaning treatment was carried out with varying degrees of intensity depending on the panels or areas, ensuring the overall impression remained homogeneous, with colors and surface effects balancing each other.

The recently applied beige paint on the window frames was removed. Some panels, added in the recent past, were removed because they did not harmonize with the original fittings in terms of materiality and design. The panels below the windows were replaced with more suitable ones.

The ceiling had been equipped with recently mounted plain wooden strips to hold curtains, which were removed during the restoration. Open joints between historic wooden elements were filled with hemp fibers soaked in animal glue—a traditional technique used in historic Damascus interiors to stabilize long joints while allowing for flexibility in response to climate changes.

Finally, areas of color loss, visible as white patches, underwent extensive retouching. Areas missing ʿAjamī paste ornaments were also inpainted to restore the overall design of the surface decoration.

Fig. 25 Salamlek oriel. Details of the arch to the oriel during conservation. 2024

Fig. 26 Salamlek oriel. The conservator working on the conservation of the arch. 2024

Fig. 27 Salamlek Oriel. Detail of the ceiling. 2024





Fig. 26



Fig. 27



### Dār al-Ḥarīm Oriel and Salamlek Oriel–Exterior Decoration

The outer façade of the oriels has undergone several renovations over time, with the paintwork being renewed or even partially covered with painted wooden cartouches. During the restoration, multiple layers of color and surface design versions were uncovered, with additional evidence discovered in a historical photograph. Removing the later layers revealed vine paintings and colors that had been hidden beneath several reworkings. As some of these paint layers had already been largely lost, they were reconstructed based on the findings.



Fig. 28



Fig. 29

*Figs. 28, 29 Salamlek oriel. Detail of the same panel before and after removing later paint layers, revealing an older design. 2024*

*Figs. 30–32 Dār al-Ḥarīm oriel. Detail of the same panel before, during, and after the removal of later paint layers, revealing an older design and reconstructing the original color scheme. 2024*

*Fig. 33 Salamlek oriel. The conservator removing later paint layers and revealing the older design. 2024*

*Fig. 34 Dār al-Ḥarīm oriel. Detail of the exterior during the reconstruction of missing paint layers. 2024*



Fig. 30



Fig. 31



Fig. 32



Fig. 33



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36

## Conserving through Training

In a course for young Fine Arts graduates and an employee from the Directorate Generale of Antiquities team responsible for the palace, the «Ajamī» technique was taught, and the historical materials and work steps were explained and practiced. To begin, the motifs were copied onto paper to understand the complexity of the design. Next, a stencil was created by perforating holes in cardboard along the drawn lines of the motifs. The pattern was then transferred to the primed wood using a small bag filled with charcoal powder, creating fine dotted lines on the panels. Finally, a thick, flowing paste made from unburnt gypsum and animal glue was applied to form the relief ornaments.

To understand the aging phenomena and the associated changes in the original colors, color studies were conducted. This allowed for the reconstruction of the original appearance and provided a deeper understanding of this decorative technique.

The completed study sheets and individual work steps were used as presentation materials to explain the historical production technique and foster an understanding of this painting method. The visitors showed great interest, and the artists who participated in the course found the experience deeply rewarding.

## Conclusion

The research conducted into the original appearance of the oriels, along with the conservation and restoration based on these findings, has contributed to a better understanding of the historical appearance of these rare monuments. As only a few of these wooden objects with «Ajamī» decoration have survived in Lebanon, and the knowledge of historical production techniques has been lost since the mid-19th century, this project has significantly enhanced our understanding of these architectural elements.

*Figs. 35, 36 Dār al-Ḥarīm oriel.  
Copies of the original paneling  
from the ceiling, made by the  
trainees. 2024*

*Figs. 37–39 Dār al-Ḥarīm oriel.  
The trainees during their work  
on the polychrome wooden  
panelling. 2024*





Fig. 37



Fig. 38



Fig. 39



Fig. 40



Fig. 41





Fig. 42



Fig. 43



Fig. 44



Fig. 45



Fig. 46

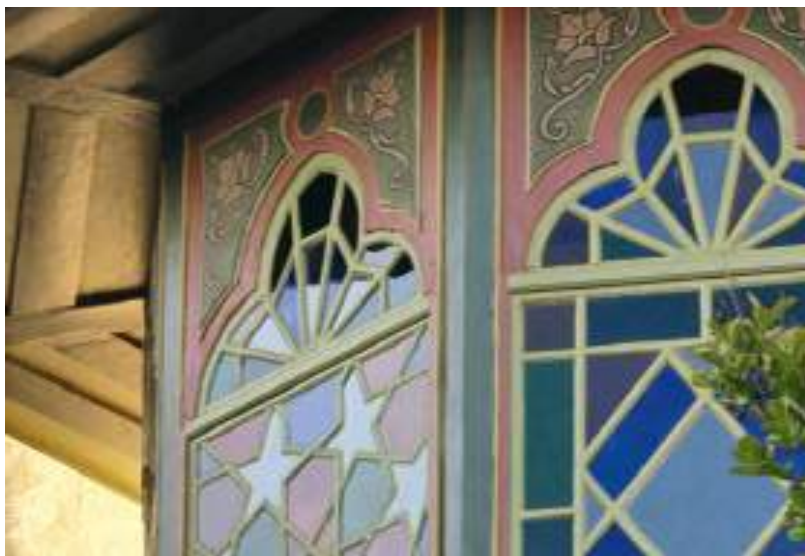


Fig. 47



Fig. 48



Fig. 49



Fig. 50



Fig. 51



Fig. 52



Fig. 53





Fig. 54



Fig. 55

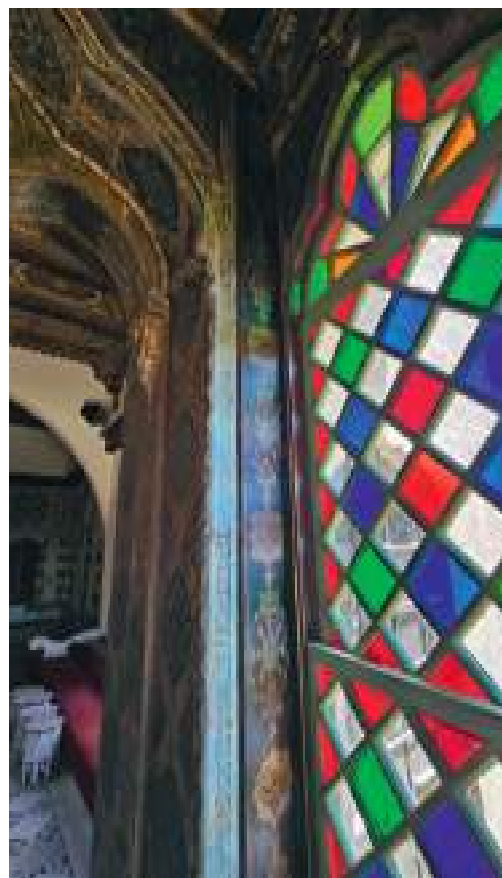


Fig. 56

## Authors

### Hadi Awaida

Hadi Awaida is a dedicated contractor with extensive experience in construction, restoration, and project management. As the Principal Shareholder of ACE, he has led numerous projects, including civil works, structural rehabilitation, and interior fit-outs. His expertise extends to working with international organizations, managing high-profile renovations and adaptive reuse projects. Hadi has also been deeply involved in heritage restoration, notably contributing to emergency interventions following the Beirut blast on August 4, 2020. His collaboration with several local NGOs highlights his commitment to preserving historical buildings. Hadi continues to manage complex construction projects with a focus on technical precision, financial management, and sustainable building practices, adapting to the evolving challenges of the industry.

### Nathalie Chahine

Nathalie Chahine is an architect restorer who has been involved in research and conservation projects in Ottoman cities in collaboration with the German Orient Institute. Since 2003, she has led and participated in the rehabilitation of historic sites and monuments in both the private and public sectors. Her expertise spans documentation, assessment, supervision, and execution of projects at varying scales. Her recent collaborations include work with the German Archaeological Institute to educate Arab architects on restoration principles and techniques in preparation for post-conflict reconstruction, as well as various on-the-job training programs aimed at cultivating skilled heritage craftsmanship. As a member of the BBHR (Beirut Built Heritage Rescue), established after the August 4th explosion to salvage Beirut's historic houses, she contributed to the Beirut Heritage Initiative's rehabilitation manual for historic houses and co-authored a book on lime techniques.

### Roland Haddad

Roland Haddad is an architect and restorer with 25 years of experience in architecture and heritage conservation. He has contributed to significant restoration projects, collaborating with multidisciplinary teams in Lebanon and abroad. Since 2012, he has been managing RH-Architects, specializing in Design & Build restoration projects. Roland has taught architecture and heritage conservation at USEK, NDU, and ESAR since 2008. He served as the Site Manager of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Kadisha Valley (2016–2021), and is currently a consultant for the Directorate General of Antiquities at UNESCO Beirut, as well as various local and international organizations. Following the August 4, 2020, Beirut Port blast, he became deeply involved in the extensive emergency rescue efforts as a member of BBHR and continues to actively restore historic neighborhoods affected by the explosion.

### **Shadi Khalil**

Shadi Khalil is a restorer with 20 years of experience in examining, conserving, and restoring ‘Ajami interiors. After studying landscape design and planning in Damascus, he became a professional restorer through his collaboration with German conservation specialist Dr. Anke Scharrahs on several ‘Ajami room restoration projects in the city. In 2010, he completed an internship at several museums in Germany through an IFA (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) scholarship. Since 2006, he has led examination and restoration projects for ‘Ajami rooms in significant historic houses in Damascus, as well as the al-‘Azm Palace in Hama. In 2011, he lectured at ICCROM’s ATHAR program and published an article in the IIC newsletter. From 2010 to 2023, he led the restoration team for the rehabilitation of three notable houses in Damascus—Bait Nizam, Bait Salim al-Quwatli, and Bait al-Sibai—under the management of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

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### **Yasmine El-Majzoub**

Yasmine El-Majzoub holds a Bachelor’s degree in Architecture from the American University of Beirut (AUB). Her passion for built heritage and vernacular architecture led her to participate in restoration and conservation training workshops in Lebanon, Italy, and Morocco, and to contribute to restoration projects in Lebanon. Following the devastating August 4, 2020, port explosion in Beirut, Yasmine joined the Beirut Heritage Initiative, a collective dedicated to safeguarding and restoring heritage buildings affected by the blast. As Field Operations Manager, she coordinated various stakeholders involved in the restoration projects. In addition to restoration, Yasmine is engaged in research focused on the revival of traditional architecture, urbanism, and craftsmanship, emphasizing their relevance in contemporary sustainable design.

### **Myriam Ziadé**

Myriam Ziadé has been an archaeologist at the Directorate General of Antiquities of Lebanon since 2006. As the regional director of Saida and southern Mount Lebanon, she is responsible for the management and conservation of heritage sites. She oversees planned and rescue excavations led by both foreign and Lebanese archaeological teams and supervises development projects in areas of potential archaeological interest. Additionally, she leads the mosaics conservation unit, overseeing the preservation and restoration of these significant artifacts. Myriam is also dedicated to raising awareness about cultural heritage, particularly among youth, through an interactive program that incorporates educational activities and games.



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