

# SEARCH FOR CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE TRADITION OF FORTIFIED STRUCTURES

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The country's fast growth in Qatar has recently opened the door to questioning future development directions. The country's need to enhance local identity has promoted many campaigns for conserving local tradition and preserving national heritage, following an opposite direction compared to the recent construction boom in contemporary architecture. Heritage restoration and reuse can be a sustainable strategy to enhance the local tourism offer and improve country identity values with the involvement of local communities. The historical origins of the country are embedded in the defensive functions of many heritage buildings currently undergoing a series of interventions financed by governmental institutions to promote the valorization of national resources and culture. The paper illustrates the conducted analyses and shows how the defensive structures are located in the Qatar territory into three main areas to defend from the invasions from the North-West and the East sides of the country. The results show three main categories of buildings based on their traditional defensive function and location: traditional forts, fortified residential buildings to protect the population and watch towers to provide surveillance. The research highlights how heritage sites still need to be valorized and how the conservation practice can promote sustainable growth and development of the country in the post-oil area.

*Keywords:* Defensive buildings, Archaeology, Restoration, Architectural heritage, Reuse.

## 1 INTRODUCTION: PRESERVATION OF DEFENSIVE STRUCTURES IN QATAR

The recent country's fast growth has opened a discussion about the future development directions. Many campaigns for conserving local tradition and preserving national heritage have been promoted, following an opposite direction compared to the recent construction boom in contemporary architecture.

This research has analyzed the history and tradition linked with Qatar's defensive and fortified structures. The aim is to classify, compare and understand the status of conservation and the possible reuse and restoration projects carried out or still ongoing under the supervision of Governmental or private institutions; as possible proposals for reuse.

Unfortunately, nowadays, many ancient structures are partially collapsed and covered by desert sand; many were abandoned and collapsed under the weight of the time with partial and total loss of originality. Many others have been restored during the past years and are currently reused as museums, enhancing the values of local traditions.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW: REGULATIONS FOR SAFEGUARDING THE QATARI HERITAGE

Qatari administrations have spent much effort promoting the safeguarding and conservation of national heritage (Carter 2012), especially due to the absence of regulations that, starting in 1980, have caused indent demolition and abandonment of numerous historic buildings. Recently, several archaeological excavations and rehabilitation projects have been carried out both in the city center of Doha, the capital of Qatar and in the surroundings peripheries, such as the restoration of the Souq Waqif, completed in 2008 (Mazzetto and Petruccioli 2018) and the archaeological excavations in Al Zubarah village discovered in 1973 by the archaeological campaign of the British archaeologist Beatrice de Cardi (de Cardi 1978, Vine and Casey 1992, Nayeem 1998). All the discovered artifacts were exhibited in the new Qatari National Museum to catalog and spread knowledge about the country's heritage and history.

Many authors have published new research about the culture, traditions, and preservation of Qatari heritage (Salama and Wiedmann 2013, Cuttler *et al.* 2013, Mazzetto 2018, Mazzetto 2022), promoting their preservation and cataloging the archaeological remains, ancient settlements, fortifications, mosques, and palaces.

In the last decades, new Governmental institutions such as the Private Engineering Office (PEO) in 2004 and Qatar Museum Authority (QMA) in 2005 have been assigned to supervise the heritage preservation of the country and the safeguarding of ancient culture and traditions.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

The paper illustrates the research analyses comparing the Qatari fortified structures in three main areas to defend the territory from the country's invasions from the North-West, West, and East sides. The research aims to improve and spread the knowledge of the fortified structures and systems preservation to promote the valorization of the Qatari national identity by discovering the traditions of the ancient defensive forts and buildings.

The analyses were conducted on investigating the literature on the fortified structures, typologies of the buildings, site visits, analyses on materials, and techniques of construction have been collected together with the metric and photographic surveys, condition on-site, investigations on historical, physical, and environmental conditions of the building, hypothesis on years of construction and possible causes of their abandonment and deterioration.

The data were assembled and compared to give a general overview of the main characteristics and state of preservation of Qatari fortified structures and reflect upon the ways to inspire new visions for reusing them and transmitting their heritage values to future generations.

## 4 DISCOVERING THE ORIGIN OF THE FORTIFIED STRUCTURES IN QATAR

Qatar's territory is mostly flat and has an arid climate with very high temperatures. The total absence of surface water created difficult conditions for the occupation of the territory (Gillespie and Al-Naimi 2013).

Freshwater is still nowadays a very limited resource in Qatar's desert landscape. In the past, drinkable water was mainly obtained from the well system. The quality and quantity of the drinkable groundwater generated the different territory's occupation of inhabitants in between the northern regions, where there were many wells and sources, and the south sides of the country, where the water was mainly saline, which affected the distribution of ancient settlements and the fortified structures. In fact, many of the oldest settlements were located almost in the northwest, as documented by the archaeologist de Cardi during her campaign of archaeological excavations in the 70s (de Cardi 1978). In the south, the rare presence of drinkable underground water limited

human occupation only to nomadic visits during the rainy seasons. The history of the country guided the research in discovering the history of the fortified structures in Qatar. The research has subdivided three main groups of building related to three diverse geographical areas with diverse traditions and cultures due to the characteristics of the site that have brought similar light typologies, materials, and characteristics: Al Zubarah area located in the northwest, Al Zikreet area, in the West side of the country and the surrounding areas of Doha in the East. The North-West area of Zubarah has been occupied by ancient civilizations and presents the remains of many fortified structures, recently brought to light thanks to the archaeological campaign of excavations (Carter 2012). The West side of the country and the surrounding areas of Zikreet have many traces of ancient tribal populations and the presence of some fortified structures. In the East, where Doha, the capital, is located, many examples of fortified structures and watchtowers defend the city from foreign attacks and provide surveillance (Nayeem 1998). Similarly, many other defensive structures and fortified buildings were constructed around the peninsula, and many are still standing up, mainly in the country's northern areas.

#### **4.1 Northwest: Al-Zubarah Area and Fortified Structures**

The Al Zubarah archaeological site is located on the northwest coast of Qatar, about 100 km from the city of Doha. Al Zubarah city was probably founded in the XIII century. However, only in the second half of the XVIII century the area grew up rapidly because of the move of merchants from Kuwait. Later on, Al Zubarah city was subjected to frequent foreign attacks, so the local population started to build up new defensive structures not only in the city center but also in the surrounding area, where the frequent attacks, mainly from Bahrain, caused the construction of the new al Zubarah fort in 1938. Inside the city center of Al Zubarah still are visible the two rings of defensive walls, and in the northern area of the town is located the fort, an additional defensive structure to protect the local population in case of extreme attacks. Outside the Al Zubarah archaeological site are located the Al Murair fort and the Freihah fort, constructed 5 km north of Zubarah in the locality of Madinat ash Shamal, used as defensive structures during the disputes between different tribes, both discovered in 1974 during the archaeological excavations (de Cardi 1978). Other traces of fortified structures were discovered close to the ancient commercial center of Ruwaidah, probably dating back to the XII century. In the northwest region, particularly, two forts are still in good condition of preservation, the Al Thagab Fort, approximately 10 km from the Al Zubarah site, and Al Rakayat Fort, located about 3 km to the south of Al Thagab. The Murwab archaeological site is located on the north side of Qatar, 12.5 kilometers south of Zubarah. It was an ancient settlement that dates back to the IX-XI centuries and was discovered by archaeological excavations in 1959. The excavations have also revealed a certain number of tombs located close to the houses. On this site is the Murwab Fort, one of the most ancient forts discovered in Qatar, where the foundations reveal many layers of many rebuilt fortified structures. Umm Al Maa is another archaeological site in northwest Qatar. Many archaeological excavations (Nayeem 1998) have brought to light many prehistoric remains of cemeteries and burial sites, together with some fortified remains of Umm Al Ma fort, which is in critical condition of preservation due to the abandonment.

#### **4.2 West: Zikreet Area and Fortified Structures**

The Zikreet peninsula, located on the country's west coast about 90 km northwest of the capital of Qatar, Doha, has never been permanently inhabited. In 1974 the first archaeological excavations in the area (Lorimer 1970) and the archaeological survey conducted by Beatrice de Cardi (1978) revealed a structural defensive ring dating back to one of the most important Neolithic sites in

Qatar (Nayeem 1998, Gillespie and Al-Naimi 2013), and the fort Al Zikreet, a unique testimony of forts located in the southwest. The fort was probably reconstructed and restored at the end of the XVIII-XIX centuries, and it was very similar to the Al Zubarah fort plan in form and function.

### 4.3 East: Doha and Surrounding Defensive Buildings

Doha, the capital of Qatar, is currently the economic center of the country, located on the Eastern coast. Doha's geographical location was the reason for many disputes between tribes that happened in the past, which contributed to the construction of many forts and defensive structures, both in the center as well in the surrounding areas (Rahman 2005). In the past, in the same site, there were two separate villages Bidda, which was probably founded in 1681, and close to Doha; later on, they merged. With the villages, there were two independent forts and a watch tower as part of the defensive structures due to the frequent attacks by pirates (Lorimer 1970).

Al Kuwt Fort, also known as Doha Fort, is a Turkish fort located in the city center of Doha, near the Corniche; it was originally built in 1880 by the Ottomans, probably over the ruins of a previous fort. Al Rayyan Fort is located in the suburb of Al Rayyan and was probably rebuilt over other ancient ruins at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Currently, the fort includes some elements of the oldest watchtowers on its defensive walls. Al Wajba Fort has located on the west side of Doha, about 15 Km from the capital. It is mentioned to be one of the oldest forts used to defend from the Ottoman forces, probably built at the beginning of the XIX century. Another fort close to the last two is Rumaillah constructed similarly to Al Rayyan fort in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Al Wakrah Fort lies in the municipality of Al Wakrah, south of Doha. It was built in the early XX century on an earlier ruined fort site but was probably rebuilt in a different form (Rahman 2005). As part of the fortified systems is the residential development at Umm Salal Muhammad Settlement, an important example of a residential complex fortified to defend the domestic buildings. Its strategic position, approximately in the center of the peninsula, is located near many important settlements developed around the drinkable water wells in the central part of the peninsula. Many buildings were rebuilt over the original structures at the beginning of the XX century.

On the East Coast, many fortified watchtowers are constructed to defend the capital from foreign attacks from the sea. The Barzan Towers are located in the area of Umm Salal Mohammed, in the north of Doha, and were connected with the Waqif watchtower, located in the city center of Doha. They were built at the beginning of the XX century to protect the natural valley where rainwater was usually channeled and collected. The towers are positioned along the southern side of the defensive system of the city of Doha. They are connected, in the direction of the cardinal points, to other military facilities that formed parts of the historical system of defense against any advance by the Ottoman army in combination with Al Bida tower, Al Markhiyah tower, and Al Khor Towers. They are situated in the municipality of Al Khor on the northern side of Doha and were also built at the beginning of the XX century, guarding the town's harbor and watching out for pirates. They also protected the access to the well of drinkable water on which the west tower is situated.

## 5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

We have analyzed and described 19 old fortified structures, which have been divided into three main categories: traditional forts were constructed specifically as fortified structures, usually within the colonial period, to defend the site from foreign attacks; residential fortified buildings that developed a fortified character for the protection of residents and inhabitants from sieges and incursions; and watch towers, to overview and provide surveillance on the exposed areas of

invasions. A comparison between structures, area of construction, and functions has been summarized in Table 1 to provide an overview of the complexity and classification of the fortified structures in Qatar.

The results show three main categories of buildings based on their traditional defensive function and location: traditional forts, fortified residential buildings, and watch towers to provide surveillance. The research highlights how some heritage sites still need to be valorized and how the national heritage conservation practice can promote sustainable growth and development of the country in the post-oil area. Heritage restoration and reuse can be a sustainable strategy to enhance the local tourism offer and improve country identity values with the involvement of local communities.

Table 1. Subdivision of the three main areas and the typologies of fortified structures in Qatar.

Area	Fortified structure	Typology
North-West: Al-Zubarah area	Al Zubarah	Traditional forts
	Al Murray	Traditional forts
	Al Freihah	Traditional forts
	Al Ruwaidah	Traditional forts
	Al Thaqab	Traditional forts
	Al Rakyat	Traditional forts
	Al Murwab	Traditional forts
West: Zikreet area	Al Umm Al Ma	Traditional forts
	Al Zikreet	Traditional forts
East: Doha area	Al Kuwait fort	Traditional forts
	Al Rayyan fort	Traditional forts
	Al Wajba fort	Traditional forts
	Al Wakrah fort	Traditional forts
	Al Umm Salal Mohammad	Fortified residential buildings
	Barzan	Watch towers
	Waqif	Watch towers
	Al Bida	Watch towers
	Al Markhiyah	Watch towers
Al Khor	Watch towers	

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the research that is still ongoing aims to catalog, analyze and compare the status of Qatari fortified structures to investigate the status of preservation better and promote public knowledge in this field. The main objective of the research is to improve Qatar's standards in preserving the architectural heritage, reflecting on the current conditions of the historical remains and the future interventions and reuse of the fortified structures. Heritage preservation should be more integrated with the urban strategies currently under development in Qatar. Conserving the national heritage is the first step to promoting the research of the cultural identity of the Gulf States, which are currently struggling between the preservation of the old heritage and the construction of modern identity for their countries.

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