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# Chapter 16

# Transforming Historic Sites: the Alteration of Three Landmarks in Tripoli's Old City

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## Introduction

The old city of Tripoli, Libya, serves as a testament to the city's rich and dynamic history, showcasing intricate architecture that embodies its multicultural heritage. As one of the country's most iconic historical sites, it reflects Tripoli's deep-rooted past, dating back to the Phoenician era in the 7th century BC. The old city thrived as a vital trading hub along the Mediterranean coast, witnessing the influence of civilizations such as the Romans, Spanish, Byzantines, and Arabs, each leaving their cultural legacy on its landscape. The city's layout and network of streets demonstrate the Romans' early urban planning. At the same time, its architecture and courtyard buildings mirror Islamic influences and the conservative social fabric shaped by religious and cultural norms. The variety of building styles highlights the diverse ethnicities that have inhabited the area over the centuries. Unlike other ancient Libyan cities like Leptis Magna and Sabratha, Tripoli's old city (called Uaiat by the Phoenicians, later known as Oea by the Romans, and finally renamed Tripoli, or Tarabulus, by the Arabs (Mattingly, 1994; Talamona, 1992) has remained a living city, known for its rich and diverse heritage and providing a glimpse into its illustrious past. Recognized as part of Tripoli's historic center and a unique historic site, the old city is cherished for its historical significance, cultural heritage, and role in shaping modern-day Tripoli's urban identity.

The historic value and significance of Tripoli's old city stem from its status as a long-standing ancient site, with its unique historic urban fabric reflecting the city's deep-rooted past. Its architecture features distinctive elements and details reflecting old living techniques and connections to various historical events. Despite its importance as a vibrant ancient city, Tripoli's old city faces neglect, modernization, and inadequate preservation efforts. The main threats to the city's stability include years of neglect, leading to severe deterioration of its structures (buildings, streets, open spaces) and a lack of comprehensive preservation plans and strategies (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Plans of Tripoli's old city show the gradual extinction of the city's urban fabric and the appearance of empty spaces due to deterioration, neglect, and inappropriate interventions. Source: Micara (2014).

This neglect has caused the decay and collapse of many buildings over time. Throughout the Italian colonial period (1911-1943), the focus was on developing the new modern Tripoli; the old city of Tripoli lacked preservation efforts.

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According to Slyomovics (2013), "the Italians pursued a general non-interventionist policy of enjoying the picturesque medina" (p. 6). This description of Fuller's (2000) opinion about the Italian approach to the walled city also exemplifies a poor preservation policy despite its focus on enhancing the city's water and sewage systems as part of an urgent rehabilitation plan. In addition, regarding the old city's ancient streets, Fuller stated that "Far from drastically altering old streets, the Italian municipality restored and maintained their original surfaces, whether these were paved with stones or macadamised" (p.129). This observation explains the evidence of infrastructure on the old city's streets. In addition, Fuller asserted that "the most sizeable and pressing order of business early on was to clear the area around the Roman-era Arch of Marcus Aurelius, and return it to good condition" (p. 130). Moreover, Fuller's study revealed a significant loss in the city's ancient walls. It asserted that they were mostly obliterated and demolished, stating that "the old core of Tripoli can hardly be called a 'a walled city' any longer" (p. 130).

Later, after Libya's independence in 1951, the departure of local citizens, who moved to newer neighborhoods following colonial withdrawal, also contributed to the old city's decline (Rghei & Nelson, 1994). On the other hand, Libya's modest historic preservation efforts were guided by its commitment to international cultural preservation standards, while on the local scale, it lacked preservation entities. A member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) since 1953, Libya ratified the 1972 World Heritage Convention in 1978, prioritizing the protection of the Libyan cultural heritage. In January 1983, under Resolution No. 58 of 1983, the Libyan government established a preservation administration entity to protect Tripoli's old city (Lawsociety.Ly website). The new agency was named The Technical Agency for Organizing and Managing the Old City of Tripoli (TAOMOCT), and it served from 1883 to 2017. In 1995, Libya enacted the Historic Preservation Law No. 3 regarding the Protection of Antiquities, Museums, Ancient Cities and Historical Buildings. In 2018, the TAOMOCT was altered by a new agency named the Old City of Tripoli Administration Board (OCTAB).

However, both entities have struggled with effective preservation practices, leading to alterations that have compromised many landmarks' historic integrity. In an interview on August 17, 2023, Libyan journalist Najah Mosadq spoke with an OCTAB administration member. The interview revealed a lack of specialized knowledge in preservation and restoration and a shortage of skilled preservation specialists and efforts in the OCTAB. Whereas Libya lacks professional preservation entities able to safeguard its historical evidence, globally, historic preservation "has become an independent discipline, with institutional structures and an established knowledge-base supported through international charters and doctrines" (Orbaşli & Whitbourn, 2002, p.62). Thus, a notable lack of historic preservation knowledge and awareness can lead to the eradication of a country's cultural heritage. This serious situation highlights the need to dig in and discover the main reason for this problem in Libya and find solutions to mitigate its effects.

The scarcity of specialized knowledge and awareness in Libya can be attributed to several reasons. First, there is an absence of historical preservation education in Libyan institutions and a lack of any preservation curriculum in Libyan universities. Second, the country's political instability has affected the development of competent preservation entities based on selected qualifications. Third, the shortage of competent entities led to producing unbalanced decisions and uninformed interventions, including replacing original materials and altering city components rapidly. These hasty decisions were supported by the financial and decision-making autonomy given to the OCTAB in preservation efforts in a lack of specialists in which skilled individuals are selected. This approach endangers the integrity and authenticity of Tripoli's old city's heritage. These decisions violate local and international principles of historic preservation, which encompass rules (regulations and standards), scientific practices (approaches and techniques), and informed practices (knowledge and understanding). The neglect of enforcing Libya's 1995 preservation law has also contributed to the issue. Despite the legal frameworks, there is a gap in applying historic preservation principles in dealing with Tripoli's old city due to a lack of expertise.

## Background

Historic preservation seeks to protect significant historic buildings, structures, sites, districts, and things by applying preservation processes considering the original form, shape, and materials (Murtagh, 2006). It connects the beauty of past architecture and design with history and stories from the past, offering a tangible link to cultural heritage and aiding in the appreciation of embedded historical and cultural narratives. However, economic changes have expanded the scope of urban growth in recent decades, threatening historic sites that hinder economic activities. According to Barnett (1982), "In a period in which we are aware that our resources are limited, and have begun to see the consequences of scarcity, preservation has become an ethical question" (p. 52). Preserving a city's physical elements enhances its public image and urban identity (Lynch, 1996) while promoting spatial inter-relations and a relationship between socio-environmental values and a sense of space (Cheshmehzangi & Heat, 2012).

Since the mid-nineteenth century, historic preservation principles have been closely linked with urban development plans, fostering the evolution of international preservation strategies. This integration aligns preservation efforts with sustainable development and community needs. Global events such as the 1931 Athens

Congress, the 1957 Paris Congress, and the 1964 Venice Charter established guidelines for conserving historic sites and monuments. Initiatives like the 1967 UNESCO definition of 'historic and architectural areas' were emphasized by the 2005 Vienna Memorandum, which defined historic urban landscapes and underscored the challenges of balancing modern development with heritage preservation. Organizations like the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and UNESCO offer guidelines and frameworks for classifying different preservation approaches, promoting a consistent understanding of preservation practices across the international community. The ICOMOS Charter on Principles for the Analysis, Conservation, and Structural Restoration of Architectural Heritage (2003) outlines critical guidelines for preserving heritage structures. It emphasizes a multidisciplinary approach and the importance of considering the cultural context of heritage. The charter defines principles for the diagnosis and remedial measures in conservation, including maintaining authenticity and integrity, preventing damage, and using reversible and compatible materials. The guidelines stress minimal intervention, careful safety evaluation, and the necessity of documenting all interventions and monitoring the outcomes for the longevity and protection of architectural heritage (International Council on Monuments and Sites, 2003).

Criticizing uninformed approaches to dealing with historical places, based on national and international legislations, can very likely raise awareness among the public and authorities about the importance of safeguarding Libya's cultural legacy. According to Jokilehto (1998), the Venice Charter promotes a critical approach to restoring historic properties, emphasizing the need for careful, scholarly methods. Similarly, Jonathan (1982) noted that historic preservation is akin to architectural criticism, born from the distress caused by the destruction of beloved buildings. In the same manner, Steinberg (1996) asserted that the urban heritage of cities of the developing world (became known, the Global South), has lacked attention in urban development plans.

This paper aims to document questionable urban interventions and raise awareness about the risks threatening one of Libya's outstanding historic sites, the old city of Tripoli. It highlights dismissive attitudes toward preservation and calls for urgent action to protect the country's invaluable heritage for future generations. A visual assessment analysis was conducted to illustrate the effects of inappropriate interventions. This assessment examined the impacts on three altered landmarks in the city: Galleria Marriotti's dome, Al Nakah Mosque's Maidaa (a water source used for Wudu, a cleansing process before prayer), and the street network's pavement pattern. Figure 2 illustrates the locations of these landmarks within Tripoli's old city. The analysis focuses on the replacement of original materials and the impacts of altering these three landmarks on their cultural authenticity and the historic identity of Tripoli's old city.

While limited to examining three cases, this study exemplifies the uninformed approach to managing the city's fragile structures and components. Documenting these violations through academic research aims to draw Libyan authorities' attention to the importance of prioritizing safeguarding the old city of Tripoli using informed methods of heritage preservation.

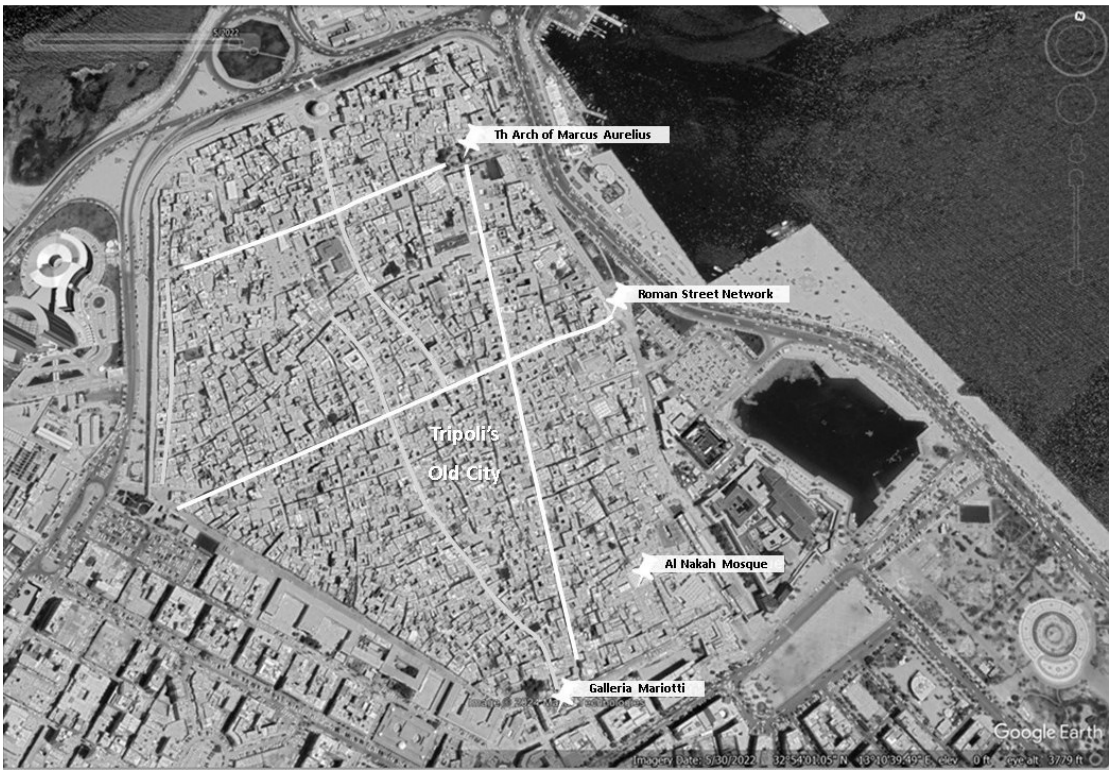


**Figure 2.** Locations of the studied areas (the affected streets by the Pathways project) within Tripoli's old city. Source: the author created the underscored map via Google Earth (Captured on 04.15.2024).

## Material and Methods

An integral aspect of this study's methodology was virtual observation and visual assessment analysis. Pictures before and after the changes were compared to assess the impact of interventions on the historic significance and integrity of the three selected landmarks. The first is Galleria Marriotti's dome, whose old glass was removed and replaced by colored pieces of plastic. The second is Al-Nakah mosque's Maidaa. The word' Maidaa' in Arabic refers to a sort of water source (that could be a fountain, water taps, bowls to fill with water, or others) used for Wudu, which is the Islamic process of cleaning body parts (including hands, head, face, arms, and feet) to prepare for praying. Al Nakah mosque's Maidaa represented a unique example of an old Islamic water-saving technique for Wudu, yet it was obliterated, disfigured, and replaced by modern sinks. The third is the Roman street network's pavement style, which was used to enhance the integrity of the old city and provide evidence of the ancient paving pattern. The remaining parts of this valuable archaeological evidence were modernized contrary to the original form of pavement style.

The comparison involved a detailed examination of architectural features, materials, and overall aesthetic changes between the pictures, with particular attention paid to any alterations or modifications that may have affected the historical and cultural value of the buildings. The before pictures were obtained from historical archives, previous documentation, and available sources (Google Images) depicting the original state of the buildings. The after pictures were obtained from several social media pages or courtesy of some agencies, and they document the current condition following intervention projects. Other qualitative data (historical maps and historical images) was available for public domain usage or obtained from friends (per their request, some are listed anonymously with only their initials listed in this study). Additionally, qualitative assessments were conducted to identify any discrepancies between the original intent of the interventions and their actual outcomes. In addition to comparing the historic images, Google Earth played a crucial role in this study as it enabled the capture of maps from the site and the before and after images of specified locations, using the time slider that enables the movement between acquisition dates. The images were analyzed to compare and assess the applied interventions.

Limitations include the inability to conduct on-site investigations and capture pictures due to my current presence abroad. Additionally, there were difficulties in obtaining other archival materials, e.g., historical images for the original Maidaa space (an image showing the previous change was obtained). Despite these limitations, the images obtained were sufficient for conducting this study and revealing the applied transformation. The collected data was analyzed to understand each landmark's transformation and impact on Libya's cultural heritage.

## Case Evidence

Below is a detailed description of the three selected interventions applied in Tripoli's old city.

## Galleria Marriotti's Dome

The Galleria Marriotti building is located within the Bab-Alhurya quarter on the southeastern side of the walled city. The three-story building occupies approximately 1,350 square meters and was previously a center for artistic crafts. The ground floor level has been utilized for mercantile activities where many culturally related supplies are sold. The gallery was previously occupied by part of the city's surrounding ancient wall and an attached ancient structure (unknown). The glass dome allows sunlight into the space, bringing a delicate tone to the interior spaces while enhancing their historic ambiance (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Marriotti Gallery's dome (cropped). Source: Pinterest (Accessed April 15, 2024).

Although the Galleria Mariotti was designed and built during the Italian colonial period (1911-1943), little information was found about the precise date of its erection. Several scholars asserted the presence of three detailed Italian maps for developing Tripoli. Grisoni (2020) mentioned that in 1914, a map of Tripoli was created with different scales: the first shows the entire region, the second for the capital, and the third shows the plan for the city. "It represented the plan of the city on such a scale (1:15000) as to include not only the old and the new parts

but, precisely, also those of expansion, to the south-west, envisaged by the Regulatory Plan" (p. 931). Figure 4, left, is Tripoli's 1914 historic regulatory map, which does not show the gallery's presence.
On the contrary, the gallery building is illustrated on the 1933 Italian regulatory map for developing Tripoli (Figure 4, right). However, the gallery could have been built between the 1920s and 1930s when several restoration projects took place within that area, including restoring the Red Castle, which entailed using ancient stones (Ejroushi, 2023). According to Aurigemma (1916), the Italians demolished part of the old city's walls to use the stones for restoration.

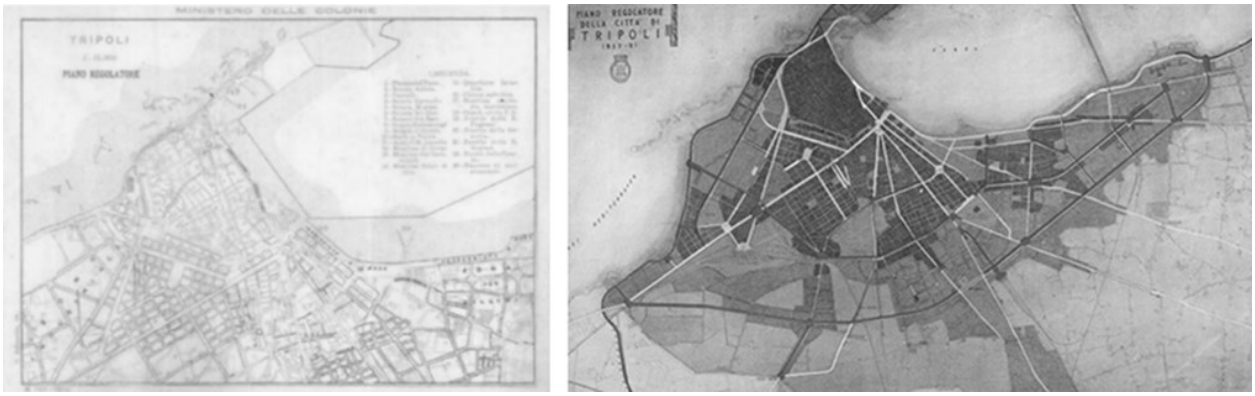


**Figure 4.** Left–the 1914 regulatory map of Tripoli. Source: Public domain (Accessed April 15, 2024) from Wikimedia Commons. Right–the 1933 regulatory map of Tripoli. Source: Courtesy of the Libyan Department of Antiquities (DoA).

**The Applied Intervention**

In June 2020, news about the work started on the Galleria Marriotti building's dome was circulated. Decisions were made by the authorities of the OCTAB to demolish the old glass of the dome and replace it with colored sheets of plastic. Figure 5 shows the shape of the rough glass used to cover the dome and the proportion of its broken and intact pieces. Instead of repairing the dome's metal structure, replacing the missing glass pieces, and softly cleaning its whole structure to maintain its originality and historic character, the Intact pieces were demolished and thrown away. The lack of specialized people in the administration agency led to the selection of an uninformed approach to dealing with the gallery's historical materials.

**Figure 5.** The shape of Galleria Marrotti's dome and the considerable amount of its intact rough glass before the 2020 interventions. Source: Photos uploaded by Hadia Gana (OCTAB's board member and the creator of the idea to replace the dome's glass with plastic sheets) to a Facebook post made by the author on June 13, 2020.

The shocking images of removing the historic glass and replacing it with sheets of colored plastic, a non-construction material, raised questions about the authorities' awareness regarding the importance of safeguarding the historic character, material, and integrity of the old city's historic evidence. This intervention also raises two criticisms. First, altering the original material of the dome with an irrelevant material was a violating action as it contradicts the Libyan preservation law and the international legislations that underscore the importance of protecting the original shape, materials, and historical character of cultural evidence. Second, using plastic, which is not a construction material, reflects a hasty and uninformed decision. Even though the plastic sheets adhered to the dome's steel frame with a strong bonding material, they will likely twist, break, or detach from the frame due to the sun's intense heat. Additionally, the plastic sheets may pose risks to people moving beneath them and could threaten the stability and durability of the dome's structure itself. Today, the Galleria Marriotti's dome speaks to the significantly inappropriate interventions that altered its historic shape, appearance, significance, and integrity. (Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** Left two Photos - the exterior and interior sides of Galleria Marriotti's dome during the process of adding colored plastic sheets. Source: OCTAB Facebook page (Accessed June 2020). Right-a photo of the interior side of the dome, uploaded by Hadia Gana to a Facebook post made by the author on June 13, 2020.

## Al Nakah Mosque's Maidaa

Al Nakah mosque is one of the ancient mosques in Tripoli's old city and an original example of the Libyan vernacular architecture. It is located on the southeastern side of the old city, near Al-Fnideqa Square. The label on the Al Nakah mosque's main facade indicates its erection during the middle of the tenth century AD by Muslims who inhabited the city from 975-953. The mosque comprises many majestic components (Figure 7). First, there is the prayer hall with a roof consisting of forty-two small domes raised on different columns and capitals, most likely found around the old city while the mosque was being built. Second is the courtyard, partially covered by arcades of rows of columns surrounding its open space. Close to the courtyard's southwestern side was a stone-raised garden bed known for its two palm trees. Third is a Moroccan-style minaret, a square-shaped tower with a height of about ten meters and a balcony where the call for prayer is made. Fourth is the Al Mihrab, a niche on the wall that shows the Gebla's direction (towards Mecca city, in Saudia Arabia). Fifth is the Maidaa, one of the main elements of the Al Nakah mosque and an example of a unique Wudu technique used in Islamic mosques.

**Figure 7.** Left two images–a view through the Al Nakah Mosque's courtyard arcades and an overview overlooking the courtyard space and prayer hall's roof with 42 small domes (cropped). Right–an inner view of the prayer hall. Source: Shaglouf, et al. (1980, pp.42-43).

According to Shaglouf et al. (1980), the Al Nakah mosque's Maidaa is located at the corner of the building on the southwestern side, overlooking the mosque's courtyard. They asserted that "the place of the Maidaa is covered with a roof in the form of two parallel vaults supported by the outer wall of the building. The Maidaa place can be reached through a long corridor next to the main door of the mosque" (p. 43). Figure 8 (left) shows the location of the Maidaa space within Al Nakah Mosque. To the right is an undated image of the Maidaa place's old shape before the 2021 interventions. Al Nakah mosque's original Maidaa included a series of closely spaced small stone bowls carved in a stone base and spread along the Maidaa space's northwestern wall. A domestic water well stands on the southwestern side close to the corner. These pieces of cultural evidence explain how old Muslims who inhabited the old city used to apply Wudu using a unique water-saving technique. It could be inferred that water saving was considered when the size of the stone bowls was decided and that the bowls were likely sufficient for each individual to apply Wudu.

However, the image (to the right) reveals that a rectangular structure covered the original Maidaa's stone bowls at an unknown date. The facing side of the structure was utilized to add a series of water taps and a shelf for soap and cleaning liquids. The distance between the water taps and the room's wall represents the location of the old Maidaa. Limited information was found about whether the inside part of the rectangular structure was a hollow space or a solid mass. However, it is more likely that building such an immense structure around the original Maidaa reflects considerable attention to hiding them as an outdated Wudu technique while creating a modern Wudu technique using water taps. To conveniently help those praying to wash their body parts, a raised block used as a

seat was attached by a rectangular lowered duct where those praying could also wash their feet. Ceramic tiles covered the rectangular structure's vertical and horizontal sides.

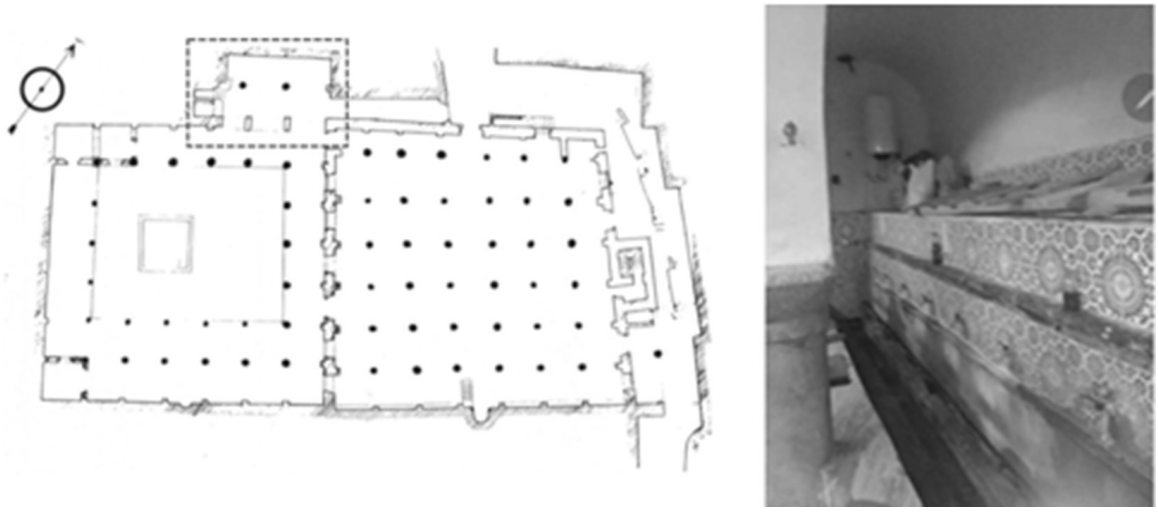

**Figure 8.** Left–the location of Al Nakah mosque's Maidaa place (source: Shaglouf et al. (1980, p. 39). Right–the built structure above the old Maidaa, added between an unknown year and 2021. Source: Courtesy of Ms. MS.

**The Applied Intervention**

Around April 2021, news spread about the applied renovations in Al Nakah mosque on the old city administration's official Facebook page. The images showed alterations applied to the shape and materials of the mosque's Maidaa place. By comparing the before and after images, it can be inferred that the rectangular structure was removed, revealing the original location of the original Maidaa, represented in the small stony bowls. There is limited information about whether the stone base in which the bowls were carved was the original floor level of the Maidaa space. Unfortunately, the applied interventions altered the previous water taps rather than preserving the original Maidaa. The images show that most of the stone bowls were affected, and their details were either faded, demolished, or obliterated. The remaining number of small stone bowls is comparably small, as many have been affected by the added changes. In addition, above the historic stone bowls, a series of modern white sinks were built, and modern tiles covered the wall between the bowls and the new sinks.

Moreover, the original floor of the Maidaa place was altered with new modern tiles. Today, Al Nakah mosque's unique historic Maidaa space speaks to the inappropriate approach to restoring such an ancient technique and building. It also reflects shortages in prioritizing preserving historic evidence over renovating historic landmarks (Figure 9).

**Figure 9.** Al Nakah Mosque's falsified shape of Maidaa and the added modern sinks on top of the stone bowls. Source: OCTAB's Facebook page (Accessed April 9, 2021).

In addition to altering the mosque's Maidaa space, the existing floor tiles for the courtyard and the arcade space were replaced with a modern type of marble tiles that removed the raised garden bed and the palm trees (Figure 10, left two images). Shortly after these changes, other interventions were applied, including adding a movable mechanical roof. The idea was later altered by adding two big curved rectangular canopies resting on steel trusses and other elements. The two canopies were added on both sides of the courtyard, leaving a rectangular void between the two canopies (Figure 10, right image). Today, Al Nakah mosque has lost substantial parts of its original components, the Maidaa space, the courtyard's historic character, and the floor's historical materials. These interventions reflect that no efforts were made to restore the Maidaa space and the original Wudu technique.

Instead, they were neglected and lost their historical significance for the interest of adding modern sinks. In such an iconic historic building, alterations should be limited while preserving the mosque's historic character, which is the priority. Figure 10 includes images of the original shape of the courtyard space before the intervention and the floor tiles that were replaced, and the roof elements added after the intervention.

**Figure 10.** Left two images–the Alnagah mosque before the 2021 interventions. Source: Ms. MS. Right–the mosque after the applied interventions. Source: Al Nakah mosque's Facebook page (Accessed April 2024).

The other alterations to the Al Nakah mosque changed the shape and material of its exterior elements: the domes, minaret, and facades. Layers of cement plastering were used mainly to give the domes regular semi-spherical shapes rather than maintaining their original forms. Moreover, a color paint pattern was applied on each dome using light yellow and light orange colors (Figure 11). These inappropriate interventions disfigured the domes' original shape and eradicated their historic character. The mosque's minaret and facades were treated similarly and painted using modern and shiny colors. Figure 12 shows Google Earth captures for the Al Nakah mosque before (2011) and after (2023), and the added changes to its original components and their altered functions. Today, the outer and inner spaces of Al Nakah mosque embody the awkward approach of restoring Tripoli's old city and its irreplaceable components.

**Figure 11.** Left–the Al Nakah mosque's original roof domes. Source: Shaglouf, et al. (1980, p. 41). Right–the applied changes to the mosque's roof domes. Source: OCTAB's Facebook page (Accessed October 17, 2020).

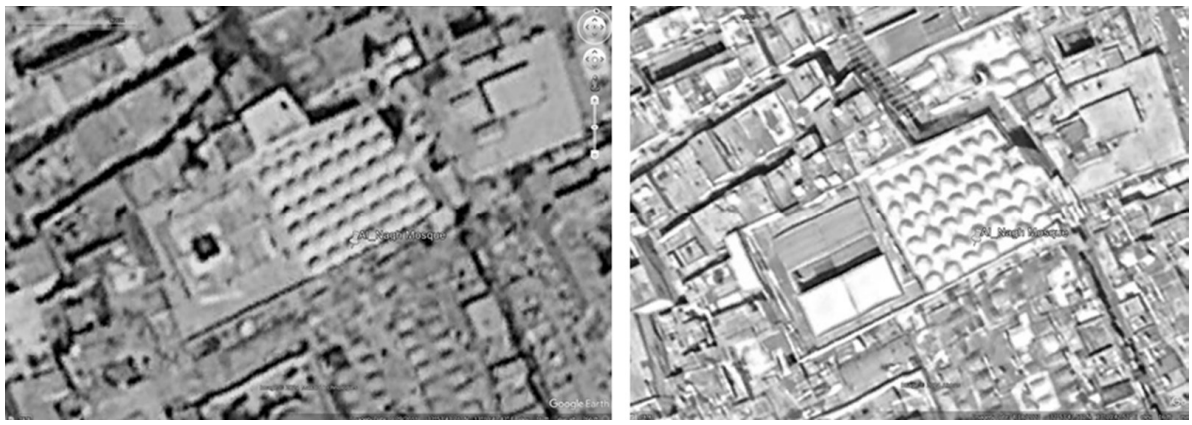

**Figure 12.** Left– Al Nakah mosque's courtyard before adding the canopy roof. Right–the roof after (2023). Source of images: Google Earth (Captured on April 18, 2024).

## The Ancient Streets' Pavement Pattern

The third selected project to reveal the uninformed interventions within Tripoli's old city was the one that affected the originality of the shape, material, and pavement pattern style of the city's ancient streets. The city's street network was one of its iconic components, known for its ancient natural stones. Limited information, however, was found about the specific materials of the used Roman stone, which could be materials such as basalt, granite, limestone, or travertine. Another critical characteristic that distinguished Tripoli's old city streets was their linear interlocked pavement style, which enhanced the tiles' durability, cohesiveness, and connectivity (Figure 13). This pavement style contributed to the area's historical authenticity and provided a sense of continuity and unity throughout the streetscape. However, the images show informed and uninformed interventions that occurred over time and led to eradicating parts of the ancient pavement due to applying groundwork to enhance the existing water, drainage, and sewage systems.

**Figure 13.** Left–long-lasting pavement style of Tripoli's old city streets with an interlocked straight pattern. Middle–informed approach using a narrow line for installing sewage and water systems, minimizing damage to the existing pavement. Right–uninformed approach caused significant damage to large sections of the original pavement. Source: Courtesy of Mr. Nasser Gurgi.

Typically, the urban planning of Roman cities is characterized by the presence of a street network that includes an intersection of two main streets, Cardo Street and Decumanus Street, under an arch of triumph. From this intersection, other streets and alleys branch out and are arranged. Similarly, these primary components exist in Tripoli's old city due to the Roman occupation that lasted from the second century BC to the seventh century AD. However, Tripoli has two Decumanus Streets, resulting in two main intersections with Cardo Street (Figure 14). The main street intersection starts under the Marcus Aurelius Arch of Triumph, located on the northeastern side of the old city, and represents the primary approach to the city from the sea. The second intersection is at the midway point of Cardo Street. It is called (in Arabic) 'Al Arbaa Arsat,' which means "the four columns" due to inserting four different, in shape and size, Roman columns (with Corinthian capitals) at the corners of the intersection's four buildings. Despite many spots of the Roman streets' pavement having faded or erased over time due to erosion and lack of preservation efforts, the remaining evidence conveys considerable information about these ancient streets' paving patterns and material.

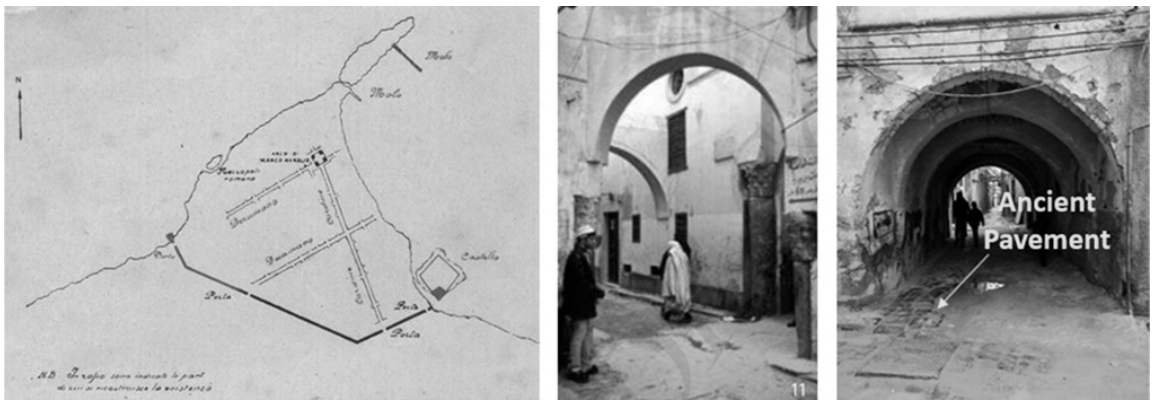


**Figure 14.** Left–Tripoli's ancient city and the Roman Street Network. Source: Aurigemma (1916, p. 300). Middle–the 'Al Arbaa Arsat' intersection between Cardo Street and the second Decumanus Street. Source: Micara (2014). Right–the remaining evidence of Roman streets pavement in one of Tripoli's old city streets. Source: Courtesy of Mr. Nasser Gurgi.

**The Applied Intervention**

For a long time, Tripoli's original street pavement pattern conveyed its urban identity and historic character. However, in July 2020, news spread on social media about paving the streets of Tripoli's old city as part of a new project named The Pathways. The project aimed to improve the city's deteriorating water and sewage systems and targeted the street network pavement. Despite the intention to improve living conditions for the inhabitants, the applied interventions showed uninformed practices in this project.

***The Inappropriate Use of Motorized Digging Machines***

Instead of using manual digging techniques with limited excavation widths along the city's historic streets to avoid affecting the fragile buildings on both sides, bulldozers, caterpillars, and other motorized digging machines were employed, resulting in strong vibrations and ground disturbance. Moreover, the excavations extended from edge to edge of the streets, causing damage to old buildings that lack supporting structures and threaten their stability and cohesion (Figure 15).

**Figure 15.** Bulldozers were used to remove the historic street pavement of Tripoli's old city and dig the ground for water and sewage system maintenance. Source: OCTAB's Facebook page (Accessed August 2023).

***The Inappropriate Size and Depth of Excavation***

The adopted uninformed approach by the OCTAB to prepare for underground and pavement projects has caused significant damage to the city's components and raised a public debate. Complaints from the old city's residents revealed the scary and intense sounds and heavy vibrations caused by the excavation works throughout the city's tiny alleys and fragile buildings. Moreover, in August 2023, one of the old city's historic buildings, on Kosha Al Soffar Street, completely collapsed due to the intensity of excavation. The images in Figure 16 show the narrow width of the alley per the size of the created excavation's depth and width. Not only did the forceful digging, excessive depth, and extended width of the excavation on the alley's two sides lead to the collapse of the building, but they, no doubt, disturbed the cohesion of the other buildings, either attached or close by.

**Figure 16.** The collapsed building on Kosha Al Soffar Street in Tripoli's old city. The collapse was due to excavation works. Source: Facebook pages: Save the Old City and Tik (Accessed July 2023).

***Altering the Original Pavement Pattern Style***

Instead of employing narrow excavation pits to add pipes for the water and sewage systems and patch the missing pavement tiles throughout the targeted street, the adopted width of excavation led to the removal of all the existing pavement tiles that hindered the project's implementation. The removed replaced historic tiles were more likely thrown away regardless of their historical significance as intrinsic and rarely found materials.

More significantly, the original linear pattern style of pavement was altered by a chaotic circular pattern (Figure 17). The rectangular stone tiles were replaced by a mix of sharp cubical and rectangular granite stones (cobblestone) of three colors (light gray, dark grey, and light brown). In addition, the new paving stones were installed randomly by unskilled workers in irregular circular shapes, resulting in chaotic shapes. The new paving pattern style reflects its irrelevance to the old city's original and long-lasting pattern. Moreover, the circular paving pattern has affected the serene atmosphere of the old city's alleys and the safety of pedestrians on it.

The original linear arrangement of the city's street pavement was installed in an interconnected pattern, which connected and secured each stone tile to unify them into a cohesive whole. This approach ensured that the entire structure functioned as a unified, interlocked system, maintaining the integrity and durability of the street. In contrast, the sharp squared and rectangular cobblestone units introduced in the recent project are not interlocked or tied together. This lack of integration prevents the stones from acting as a single structural component, leaving them separated and unstable. The unassembled new pavement can pose significant risks to the safety of pedestrians and the tires of bicycles and carts. The inconsistent surface and lack of cohesion can lead to potential hazards such as tripping, slipping, or damage to any moving object passing through the area. Today, Tripoli's old city has lost the remaining evidence of its long-lasting ancient pavement materials, and the resulting chaotic circular shapes reveal a severe shortage of specialists and a lack of commitment to historic preservation legislation.

**Figure 17.** The imposed circular pavement pattern style using cobblestone and the arbitrary distribution of stone units over the old city's streets and alleys. Source: OCTAB Facebook page (Accessed February 1, 2020).

***The Significant Alteration in the Street Elevation***

The project caused substantial changes in the street elevation, creating a disparity between the building's entrances and the street level. These changes led to adding obstructive steps to facilitate access to the buildings' doors, further exacerbating accessibility shortages for individuals with disabilities within the area. Such an intervention suggests a lack of careful planning and attention to the existing heights of the buildings' entrances. Figure 18 illustrates the significant differences in elevation between the street level and the buildings' entrance levels that the OCTAB's inappropriate interventions have caused. This deformation could have been avoided through proper design and planning during the project's initial stages before implementation.


**Figure 18.** The differences in street elevation and buildings' doors created due to a lack of informed street paving practices. Source of left two images: OCTAB Facebook page (Accessed September 2021). Source of right image: Zawaia Trablsia Facebook page (Accessed May 2024).

## Social Attitude and Public Opinion

Personal experiences within Tripoli's old city reveal the complexities of its preservation and the challenges faced despite efforts to engage with authorities and offer free consultations. These obstacles underscore the urgency of adhering to Libya's preservation Law No. 3 of 1995 and the country's commitment to international conventions' legislation, policies, and practices. The alteration of three landmarks within Tripoli's old city using uninformed approaches highlights the lack of public awareness about proper preservation methods. Briefly overviewing the public attitude towards these changes shows a considerable lack of awareness about the appropriate preservation methods. Some citizens among those born and living in Tripoli's historic center started expressing their dissatisfaction, yet incomprehensibly, due to the successively imposed significant transformation in that area. However, many citizens accept changes that modernize the old city without understanding the impact on its authenticity and historic character.

One such example of the lack of awareness in preserving Tripoli's old city can be found in research conducted by Manal Omar Shghaiwi, who obtained her master's degree in 2021 from the Melbourne School of Design, The University of Melbourne, Australia. Shghaiwi's (2021) research lacks transparency and adherence to ethical research standards as it was conducted without obtaining IRB (institutional review board) permission from the University of Melbourne. It also lacked any compelling argument regarding my critiquing opinions on safeguarding the old city's cultural legacy, while it showed bias by extensively endorsing the OCTAB's uninformed interventions.

The primary evidence that reflects a lack of transparency in her thesis was her hiding of crucial aspects of the OCTAB's interventions, such as using plastic as a replacement material, a wrong intervention that she complemented by stating "the cultural significance of the place was revived through its restoration in this way" (p.32), and the obliteration of the Al Nakah mosque's Maidaa and substitution of the linear pavement with circular patterns, which she complemented by criticizing my opinions stating that "Authenticity is linked to the truthfulness factor of something. However, how it is measured is not always correct, as our understanding is typically confined to materiality. In the case of Al Naqaa Mosque and the Medina's alleys, Ejroushi believes that the "wholeness of the Mosque [and the alleys] was disrupted." Eljroushi maintains that this disruption is caused by replacing the flooring in the Mosque and re-arranging the tiles of the alleys, neglecting how people relate to those places" (p. 34). Shghaiwi did not bring a convincing argument to refute my opinion, and she avoided the fact that they falsified the authenticity of these historic landmarks.

Moreover, her thesis lacked a comprehensive assessment of these interventions and their impact on the old city's historical and cultural integrity. By not acknowledging these significant changes, she failed to explain the reasons behind my critique and allegedly described it as a 'material-based approach.' This description reflects her lack of knowledge of historic preservation principles. My approach is not based on personal opinions but on an educational background and a deep understanding of what local and international preservation legislations state, which I am committed to following as Libya's cultural legacy is worthy of being treated based on these bases.

Shghaiwi also stated that the Libyan law regarding preservation, Law No. 3 of 1995 On Protecting Antiquities, Museums, Ancient Cities, and Historical Buildings, "Is the only legislative document that should be observed and obeyed by all heritage and urban planning institutions and organizations" (p. 24). She failed to mention that if enforced, the Libyan preservation law is a sufficient regulation to safeguard Libya's cultural legacy. On the contrary, Shghaiwi stated that the Libyan preservation law "provides a framework for what heritage means and what are the consequences for breaching the mentioned rules, it does not clearly specify how heritage should be protected" (p. 28). Shghaiwi's argument regarding a shortage in the Libyan preservation law in specifying heritage protection practices to deal with the old city reveals her lack of knowledge in this field as these preservation techniques have been widely expressed by scholars in published research that reference the guidelines these international organizations have issued for these practices, all of which rely on collective knowledge in the field as well as the experiences of previous nations. In addition, the international legislation introduced has become obligatory for all member states. While Libya may not have established these rules, they have agreed to follow them with the intention of protecting our country's cultural legacy.

Moreover, Law No. 3 prohibits changing old cities' components. Chapter 4 (Protecting ancient cities, neighborhoods, and historical buildings), articles 38, 39, and 50 specify those inappropriate interventions. Specifically, Article 38 states:

> "Engaging in any activities, constructions, or any activities that may cause damage to ancient cities and historical neighbourhoods or buildings in the protected area surrounding it shall be prohibited. The public bodies related to infrastructure, public facilities, and environmental services shall manage and maintain networks for providing services in ancient cities and neighbourhoods, in accordance with the technical and historical specifications approved by the competent body under the procedures and controls set out in the implementing regulations." (p. 8, Libyan Law No. 3 of 1995).

In Chapter 5 (Penalties), Article 52, Law No. 3 states that changing historical evidence within historic sites is prohibited and considered a cultural crime. 'It states:

> "Anyone who obliterates a historical feature, whether through erasure, burial, or destruction of a portion thereof, or who defaces a historical feature, whether by replacing its original architectural elements with others that are not original or making modern additions or changes thereto, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a period of not more than one year, a fine of not less than two thousand Libyan dinars and not more than five thousand Libyan dinars (LYD 5000), or one of the two penalties." (p. 10, Libyan Law No. 3 of 1995).

Additionally, Shghaiwi's claim that "the DoA [Department of Antiquities] offered minimal help" (p.25) and failed to safeguard Tripoli's old city is unfounded, as the OCTAB operates independently of the DoA. First, the DoA is responsible for cultural archeological evidence, not historical. Even so, the DoA is responsible for the archaeological evidence within the old city of Tripoli, such as the Marcus Aurelius Arch of Triumph and any underground archaeological evidence. However, the DoA does not possess authority over the OCTAB as the latter is associated directly with the Libyan Presidential Council. The irony is that as the OCTAB possesses full authority over the old city, it neglects the archaeological aspect. Shghaiwi also claimed that the OCTAB has limited financial support when, in fact, it is supported by the Libyan Presidential Council. Furthermore, the OCTAB generates additional revenue by renting buildings within Tripoli's old city.

In the time since Shghaiwi's research was conducted, the OCTAB has continued to exceed the limits of their authority, most recently having trespassed on the boundaries of the triumphal arch in 2023 by constructing a small amphitheater nearby and permitting concerts to be held just beneath the arch despite its fragility. These actions further demonstrate a disregard for the significance of Libya's cultural heritage, considering how such monuments are preserved in other places (Figure 19).

**Figure 19.** Left–Triumphal Arch of Marcus Aurelius in Tripoli after OCTAB's 2023 interventions. Source: Medina's Nights Facebook page (accessed July 13, 2024). Right–Triumphal Arch of Constantine in Ancient Rome. Source: Stefano Montesi/Corbis via Getty Images (cropped), ThoughtCo (accessed May 5, 2024).

Research that neglects many of the realities regarding preservation efforts in Libya, coupled with the OCTAB's continued disregard for preservation legislation, highlights the need for a more informed understanding and adherence to preservation standards when addressing the old city's cultural heritage. Shghaiwi's research appears to lack preservation knowledge and familiarity with local and international laws governing heritage sites, emphasizing the importance of maintaining original materials and features of historic landmarks. This gap highlights the need for researchers to engage in ethical practices and ensure a comprehensive and balanced assessment of the issues.

## Results

The visual assessment analysis of three historical landmarks in Tripoli's old city revealed significant alterations due to recent interventions (2020-2021). First, the Galleria Marriotti's dome's original glass was replaced with a non-construction material, colored plastic sheets. This change compromises the dome's integrity and poses risks to people moving beneath it. Second, Al Nakah Mosque's Maidaa space and the historic character of the building are altered. The original stone bowls used for Wudu were mostly destroyed or altered, replaced with modern white sinks and tiles. These changes erased the historical significance and unique water-saving technique of the Maidaa. Third, the streets' pavement pattern: The ancient streets' original linear pavement pattern was replaced with circular cobblestone patterns, causing significant damage to the original material and form. This uninformed intervention altered the urban identity and historical integrity of the streets.

## Discussion

The interventions within Tripoli's old city expose a concerning lack of informed preservation practices and skilled specialists in the field. Replacing original materials with modern substitutes without regard for historical

significance or aesthetic consistency reflects a critical deficiency in preservation knowledge and training. These alterations endanger the sites' cultural authenticity and heritage and introduce potential hazards to the public. The observed changes highlight the urgency of establishing a robust framework for historical preservation that integrates advanced methodologies and international best practices, including the need for detailed assessments and tailored approaches to restoration that respect and enhance the city's heritage.

Additionally, the interventions signal a broader issue of neglecting the intrinsic value of historical landmarks for short-term development goals. Such approaches may be rooted in a lack of public awareness and appreciation for the city's cultural heritage, underscoring the importance of targeted education and outreach efforts.

## Conclusion

This study documents and raises awareness about the inappropriate interventions in Tripoli's old city, emphasizing the risks these pose to its historical and cultural heritage. The findings underline the need for action to safeguard the city's invaluable landmarks using informed and scholarly preservation methods.

Libya's Law No. 3 of 1995 necessitates that historic preservation entities are competent and include experts. Thus, the OCTAB, as a historic preservation entity, must consist of decision-makers specifically educated and trained in historical preservation. However, the current shortcomings in expertise indicate a gap that must be addressed. Enhanced education and training will ensure that decision-makers can effectively protect and maintain the cultural heritage and historic value of Tripoli's old city. Establishing clear guidelines and standards for preservation based on international practices and effectively implementing them is crucial for the future protection of Tripoli's old city.

In conclusion, preserving Tripoli's old city requires a comprehensive approach that considers local and international historic preservation principles to safeguard its cultural heritage and preserve its historic value for the long-term. Such an effort entails concerted efforts from authorities, preservation specialists, and the community to ensure the city's unique heritage endures for future generations.

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## Conflict of Interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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