



# Report on the missing wooden interiors ( *'ajami* rooms) of the historic house Bayt Ghazala in Aleppo/Syria

Produced and presented by  
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Prepared by  
Rami Alafandi

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## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

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## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Report on the missing wooden interiors ( 'ajami rooms)

#### The aim of the report

The Aleppo Built Heritage Documentation Project, a co-project of the Syrian Heritage Archive Project, has been collecting all available data of the house Bayt Ghazala in Aleppo due to its architectural and art historical importance, especially as regards wooden, highly decorated interior decorations called 'ajami. These 'ajami rooms were missing during the recent conflict in Aleppo. In order to prevent them from being illegally sold, this report presents most of the removed panels by using photos that were taken before September 2012.

#### Bayt Ghazala: damage situation of the house

Bayt Ghazala suffered structural damages and loss of interior decorations. It seems that a significant part of the polychrome wooden interiors ('ajami rooms) were missing, according to photos from 2013. Shown in recent photos and a 3D scan video (AGP) in 2017, all wooden panellings are gone except for the ceilings.

For more about the damage assessment see the report by the Syrian Heritage Archive Project – Aleppo Project, link: <https://goo.gl/m7fRg8>

#### Bayt Ghazala: history and importance

Bayt Ghazala is located in al-Judayda, an extramural quarter of the Old City of Aleppo. It was built in 17th century, during the Ottoman period. This house contains the oldest preserved 'ajami ceiling in Aleppo. Located in the red reception room (*qa'a*), it dates from 1691 AD/1102 AH and bears the name of the first owner of the house, Khajadur bin Murad Bali. Also, Bayt Ghazala contained many 'ajami rooms of exquisite quality belonging to a later period. In 1737 AD/1150 AH, the family Saba 'Ayda lived in this house. After this, the Ghazala family lived there from 1834 AD/1250 AH. The upper floor on the north side of the house was built in 1880 AD.

Early in the 20th century, the house was used as a German school and later as an Armenian school. In recent times, the Directorate of Antiquities and Museums in Aleppo (Aleppo-DGAM) acquired part of the house with the cadastral number VI-2339. In 2007, the ordinance number 166 declared the transformation of the house into a Museum for the Memory of Aleppo. Consequently, a restoration project was started; funded by the Syrian-Turkish Regional Cooperation Project, in 2009 the restoration was focusing on the 'ajami panellings. The current plan of the house (1000 m<sup>2</sup>) contains three courtyards surrounded by different types of rooms of various sizes. The size of the largest courtyard is 260 m<sup>2</sup> with an open hall (*iwan*) and a main reception hall (*qa'a*). The second courtyard is 80 m<sup>2</sup>, it was likely used as service yard. The third courtyard is 25 m<sup>2</sup> and contains a bathhouse (*hammam*). Bayt Ghazala is the only traditional house in old Aleppo that comprises a private hammam.

For more about the history of the house and its 'ajami wood panellings see: Alafandi, Rami and Asiah Abdul Rahim. "The Lost Treasure of the Polychrome Wooden ('ajami) Interior of Ghazalyeh House, Aleppo, Syria." *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 222 (2016): 596–620. <https://goo.gl/PDUjaq>.

#### Art historical significance

Elaborately painted and carved wooden wall panellings and ceilings of the 'ajami style are a substantial part of the interior design of the traditional Syrian-Ottoman courtyard houses. In particular, sumptuous reception rooms (sing. *qa'a*) of noble residences were decorated by this special technique. Historic 'ajami rooms are a significant element both to the traditional arts and crafts and the urban and domestic culture of few major Syrian cities like Aleppo. Only in recent years, public awareness and appreciation increased regarding the conservation of these lesser known yet essential art objects in Aleppo. Comprehensive scientific surveys about this kind of interior design in Aleppo are underway. Given all this, it is at present of crucial importance for the securing and future preservation of these missing 'ajami rooms – integral components of Aleppo's rich and diverse built heritage – to act.

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Plan of the ground floor and location of the 'ajami panellings



Figure 1: The location of 'ajami interiors with room names

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Condition of the house in 2006



Figure 2: Courtyard, eastern façade (red *qa'a*)

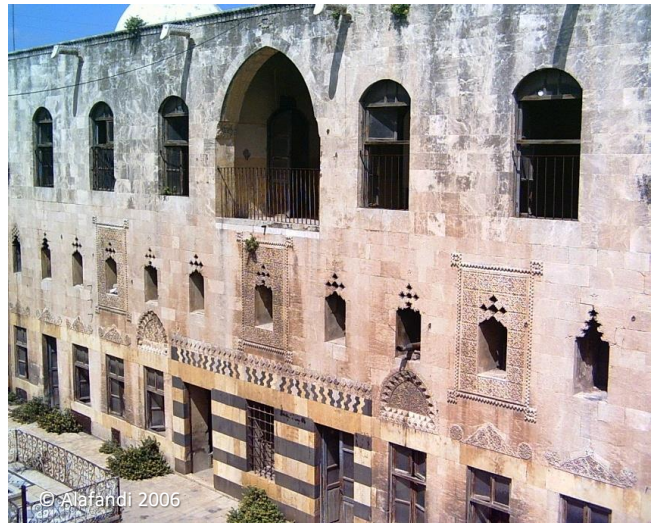


Figure 3: Courtyard, eastern façade



Figure 4: Courtyard, western façade (main *qa'a*)



Figure 5: Courtyard, southern façade (*iwan*)

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Condition of the interiors in 2009 (before restoration)



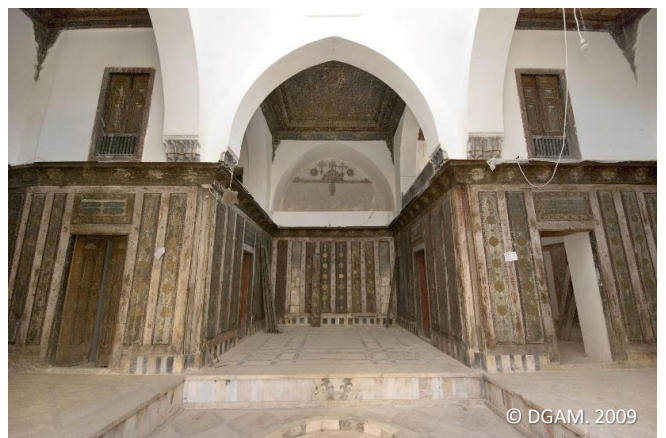
© DGAM. 2009  
Figure 6: *Qubbat al-iwan*



© DGAM. 2009  
Figure 7: Winter *qa'a*



© DGAM. 2009  
Figure 8: Red *qa'a*



© DGAM. 2009  
Figure 9: Main *qa'a*

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Condition in 2010 (during restoration)



© François Cristofoli, 2010

Figure 10:  
Courtyard from right to left: northern façade, western façade (main *qa'a*), southern façade (*iwan*)



© Baydoun Co. 2010

Figure 11: Main main *qa'a*, 'ajami interior

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Damages in 2017 (post-conflict Old City of Aleppo)



Figure 12



Figure 13: The location of removed 'ajami panellings with structural destruction



## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Red qa'a

The red *qa'a* consists of a *'ataba* and an elevated seating area. It is decorated by *'ajami* panels that cover the ceiling and the walls, including the shutters of the windows and cupboards. The inscription on the ceiling mentions the name of Khajadur bin Murad Bali together with the date 1691 AD (1102 AH).

The wooden cornice above the decorated wall panels mentions two dates: 1239 AH (1823–24 AD) at the southeast corner and 1834 AD (1250 AH) with the name Nasrallah Ghazala at the northwest corner.

The *'ajami* wall panels were missing but the ceiling is still *in situ*.

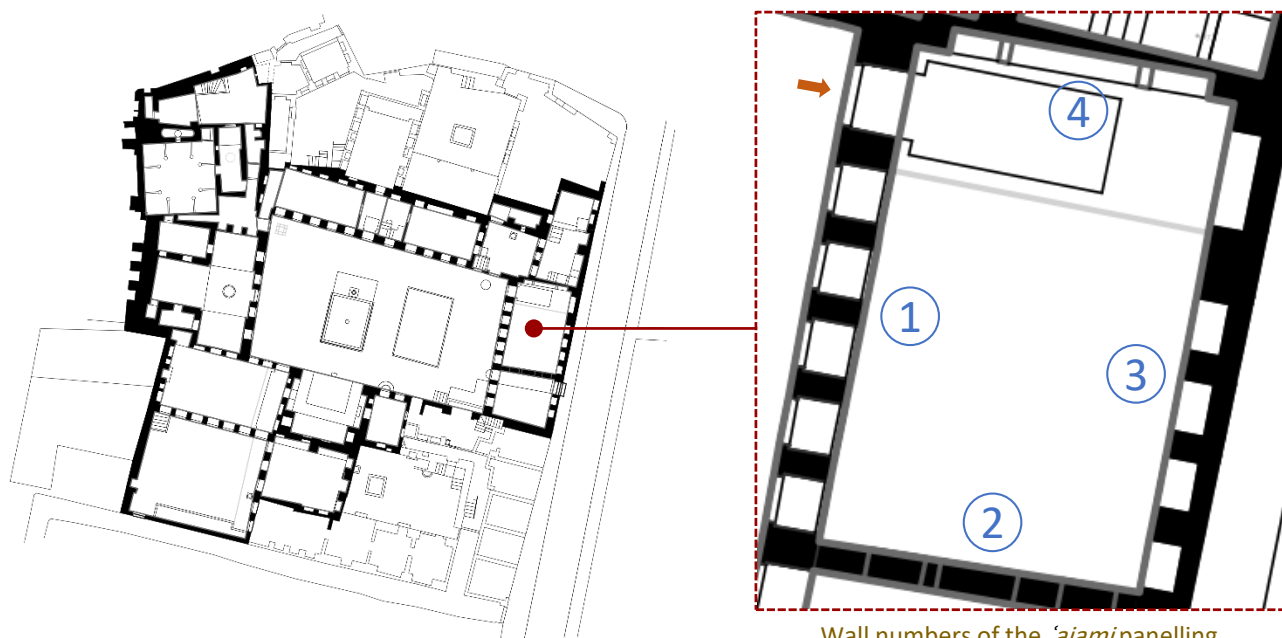


Figure 14: Ground floor plan

Wall numbers of the *'ajami* panelling



Figure 15

© Baydoun Co. 2012

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Red qa'a – Wall (1) with details



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

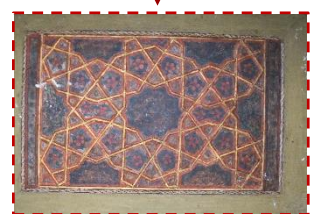


Fig. 22

Ceilings of the window niches

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Red qa'a – Wall (1) 'ajami panelling removed

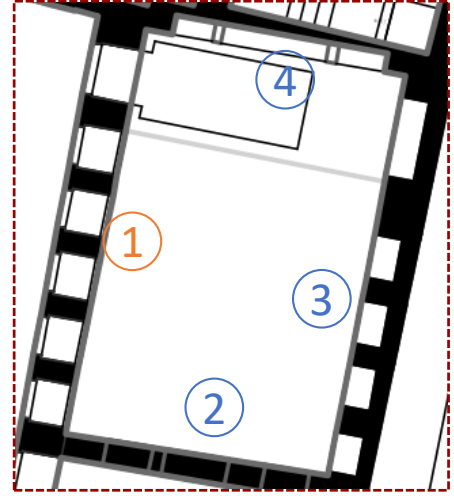


Figure 23

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Red qa'a – Wall (2) with details

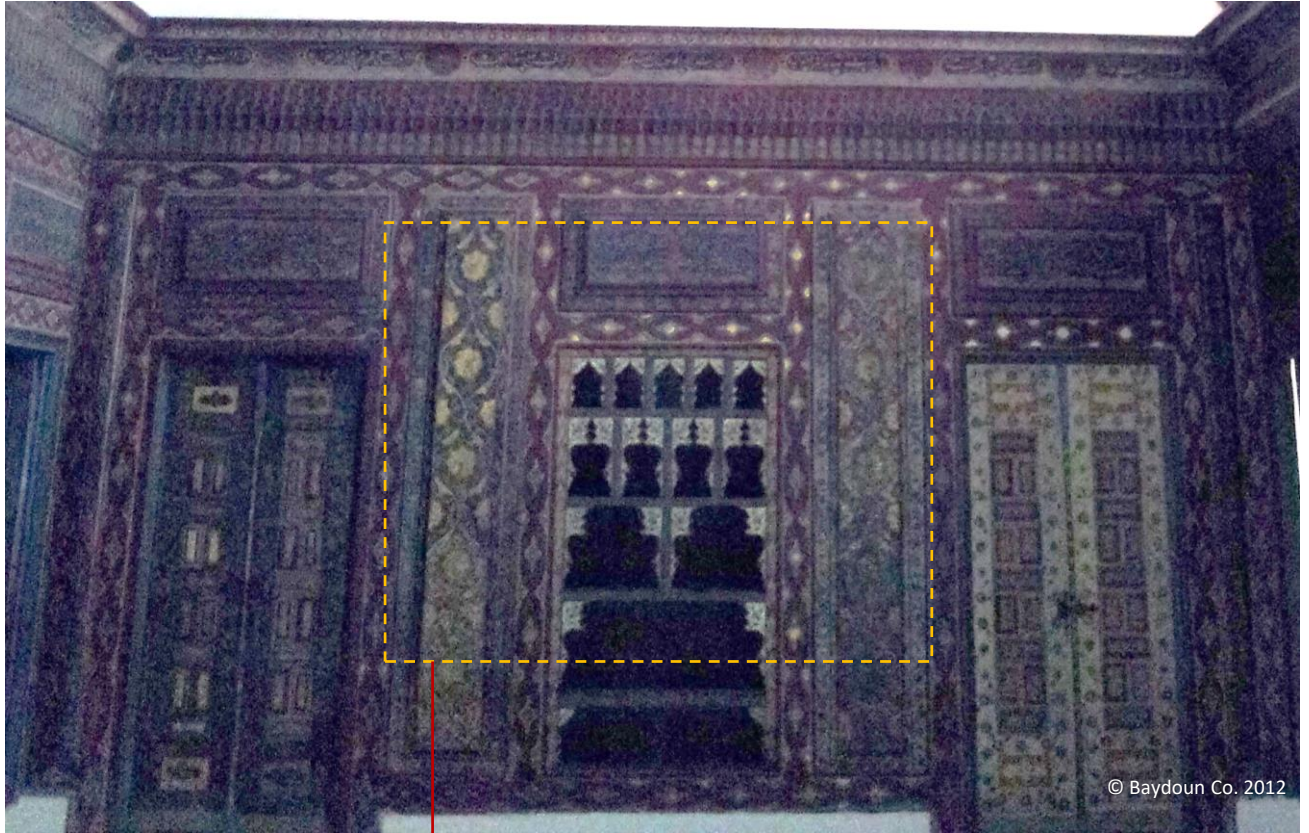


Figure 24



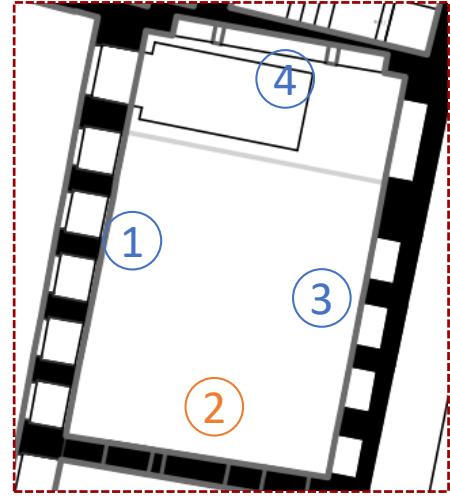
Figure 25



Figure 26

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Red qa'a – Wall (2) 'ajami wall panelling removed



© Mahmoud Sikt. May 2017.

Figure 27

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Red qa'a – Wall (3) with details

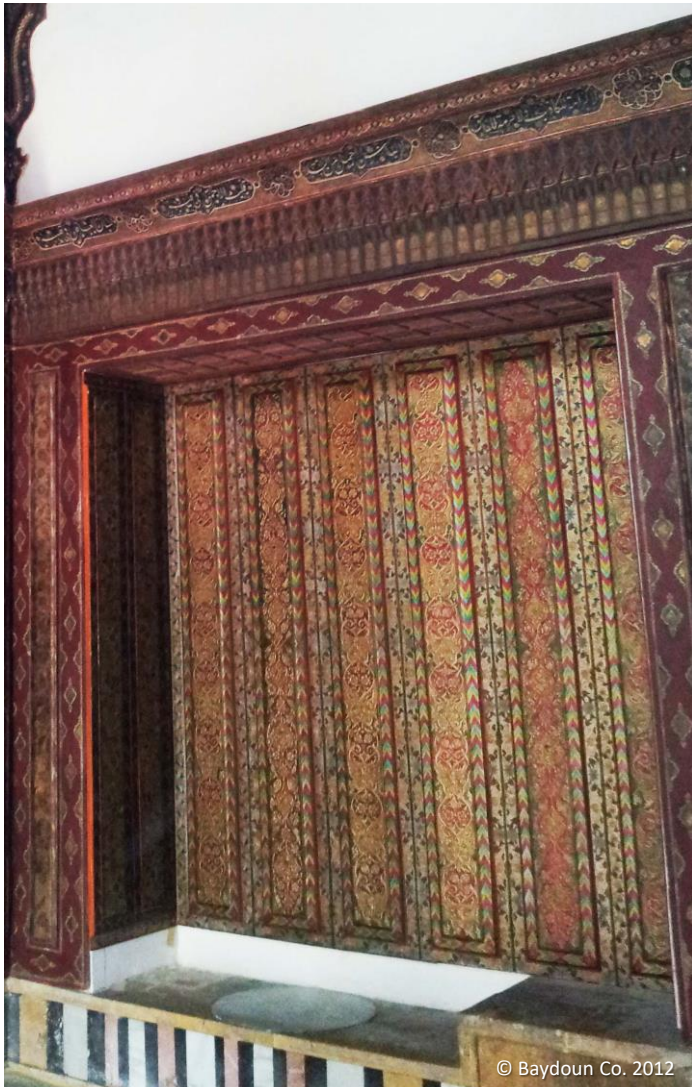
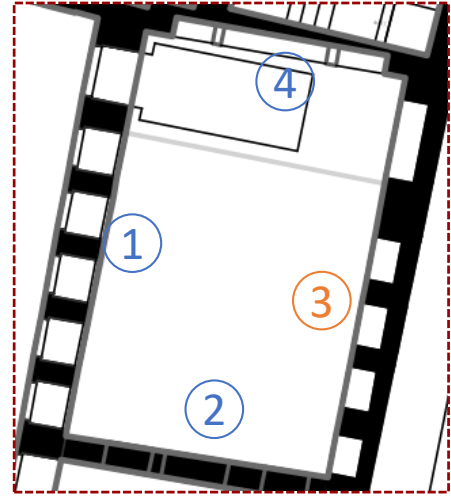
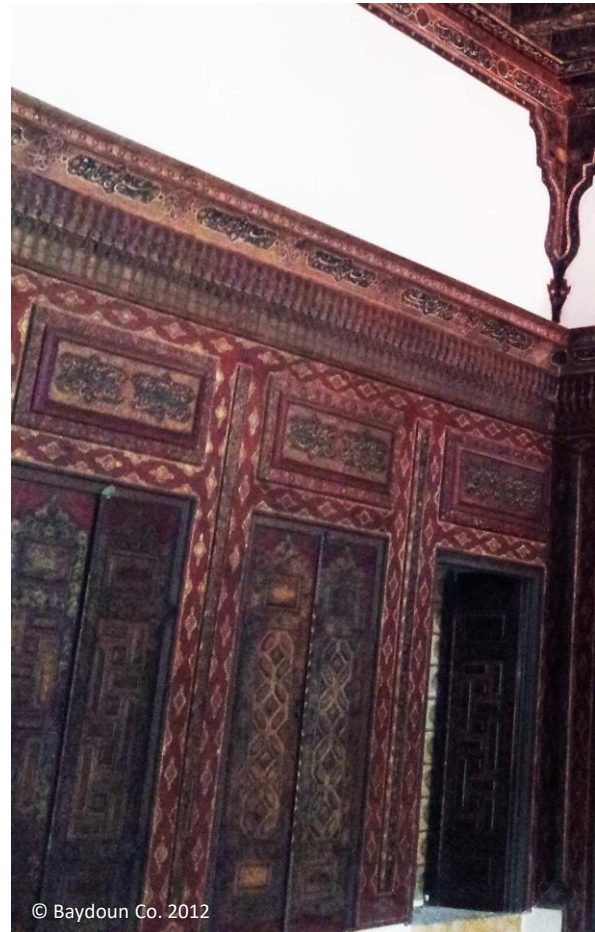


Figure 28



© Baydoun Co. 2012

Figure 29

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Red qa'a – Wall (3) 'ajami panelling removed



Figure 30



Figure 31

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Red qa'a – Wall (4) with details



Figure 32

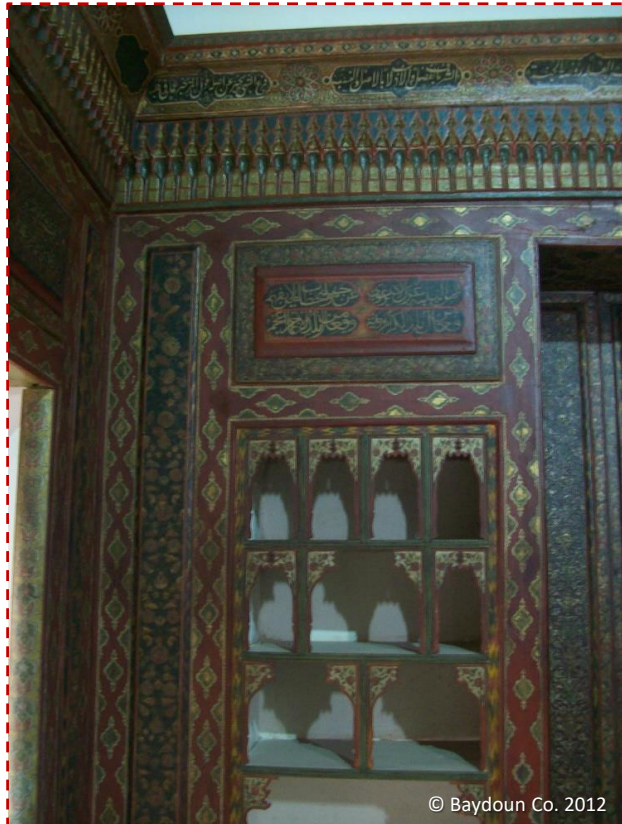


Figure 33



Figure 34



# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Red qa'a – Wall (4) with details

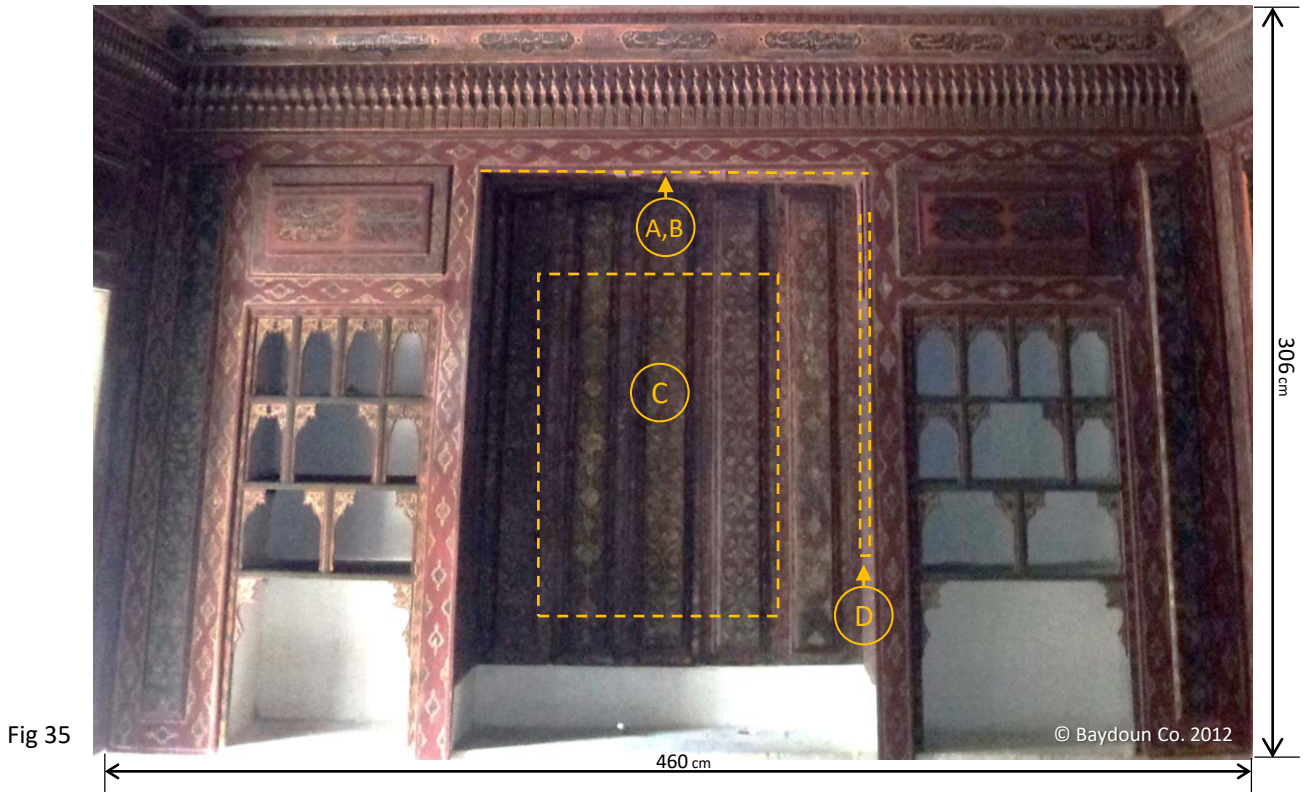


Figure 36, 37:  
Cabinet ceiling

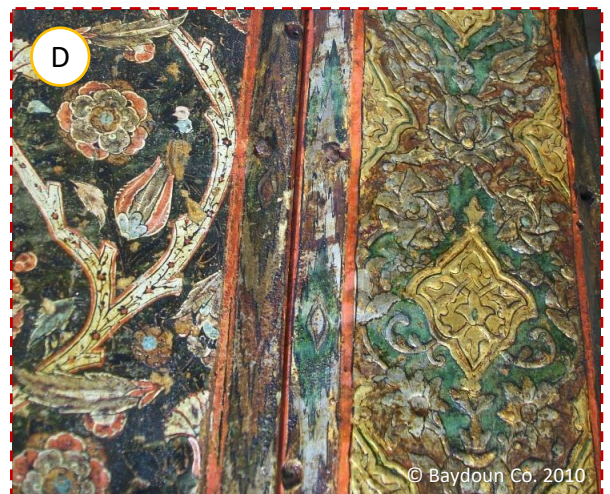
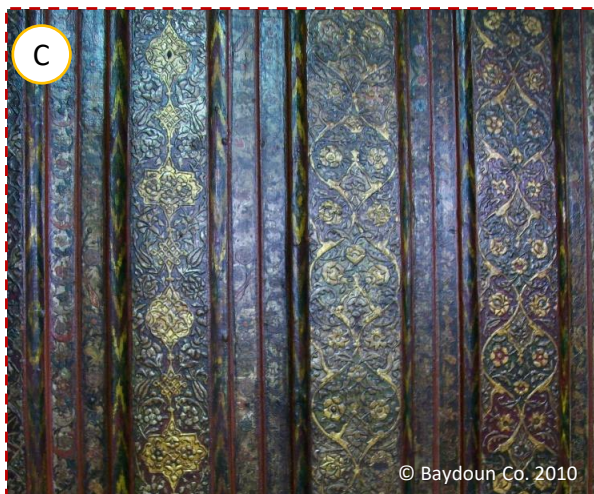


Figure 38: Cabinet wall

Figure 39: Cabinet (right side)

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Red qa'a – Wall (4) 'ajami panelling removed

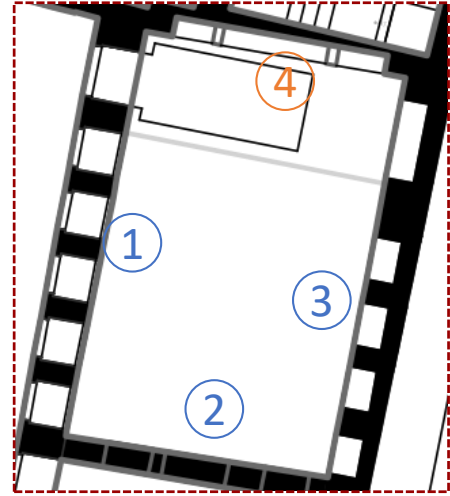


Figure 40

© A.G.P. Nov. 2017

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Main qa'a

The main *qa'a* consists of a *'ataba*, three elevated seating areas, and two *qubbat al-qa'a*. It is decorated with *'ajami* panels covering the ceiling and walls, including the shutters of the windows and cupboards. The inscription above the board inscriptions mentions the family's name, Saba 'Ayda, together with the dates 1737 AD/1150 AH.

While the wall panels were missing, all the *'ajami* ceilings are left *in situ* except for the ceiling of the southern seating area, which was destroyed with the roof.

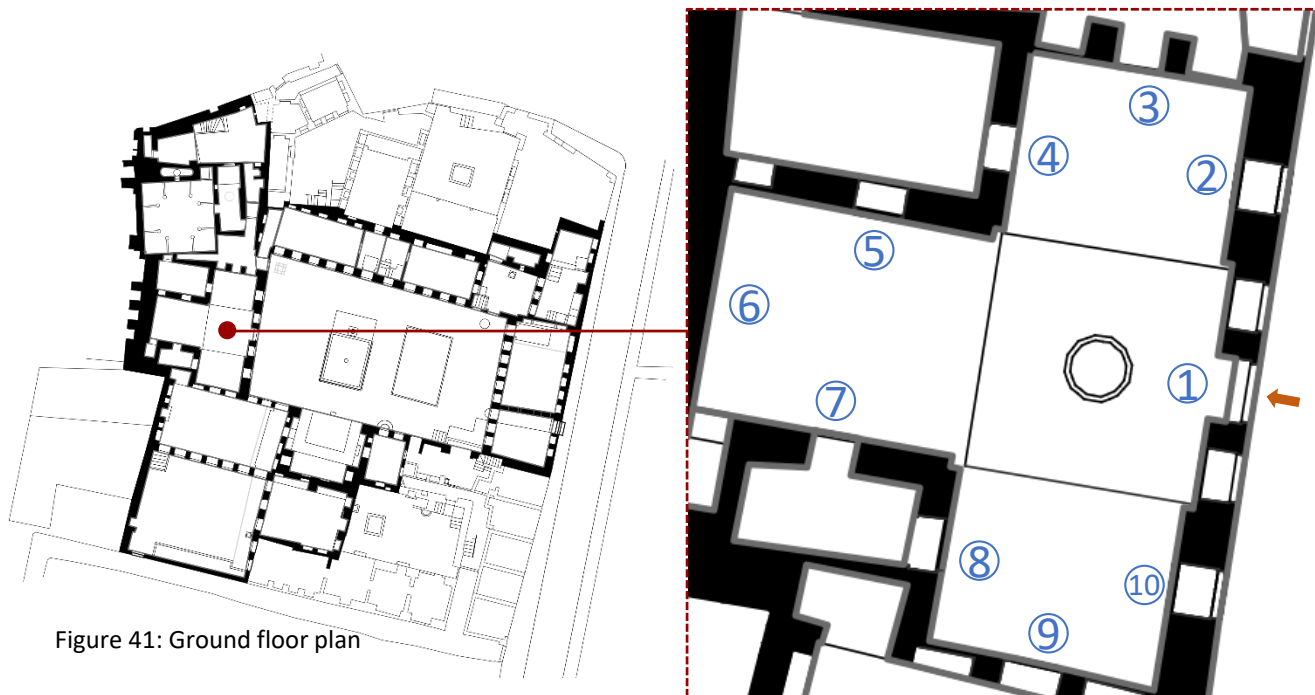


Figure 41: Ground floor plan

Wall numbers of the 'ajami panelling



© DGAM. 2009

Figure 42

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Main qa'a – Walls (1,2) with details

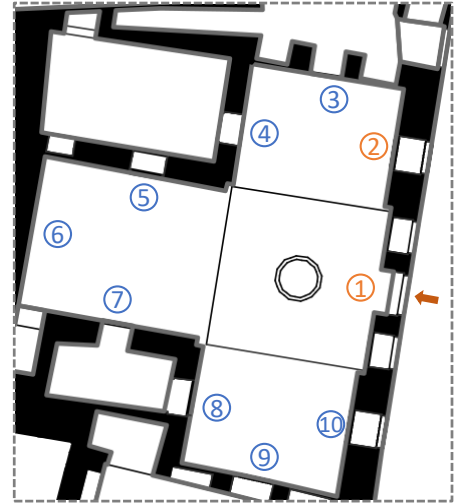


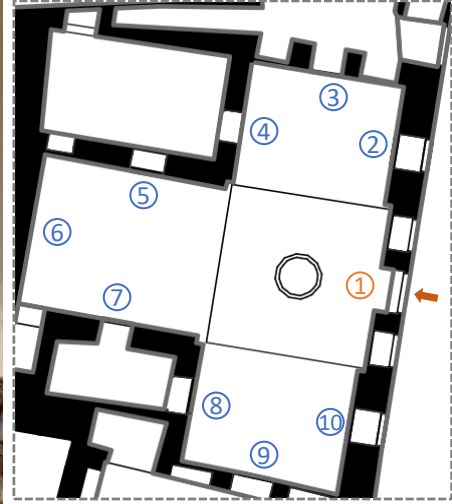
Figure 43



Figure 44

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Main qa'a – Walls (1,2) 'ajami panelling removed

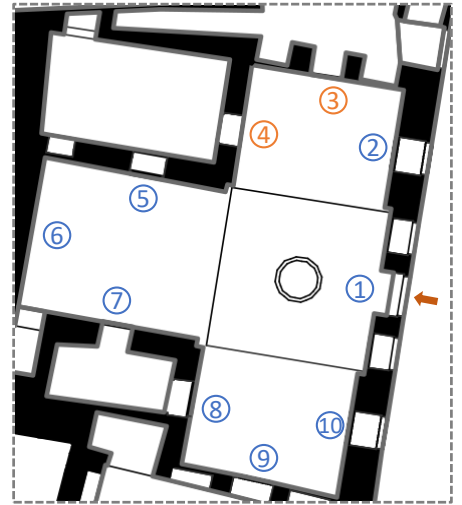


© Khaled Almulla March 2017

Figure 45

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Main qa'a – Walls (3,4) with details



© Baydoun Co. 2012

Figure 46

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Main qa'a – Wall (4) with details

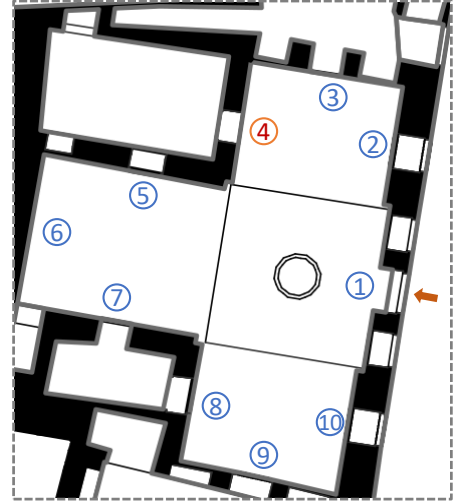


Figure 47

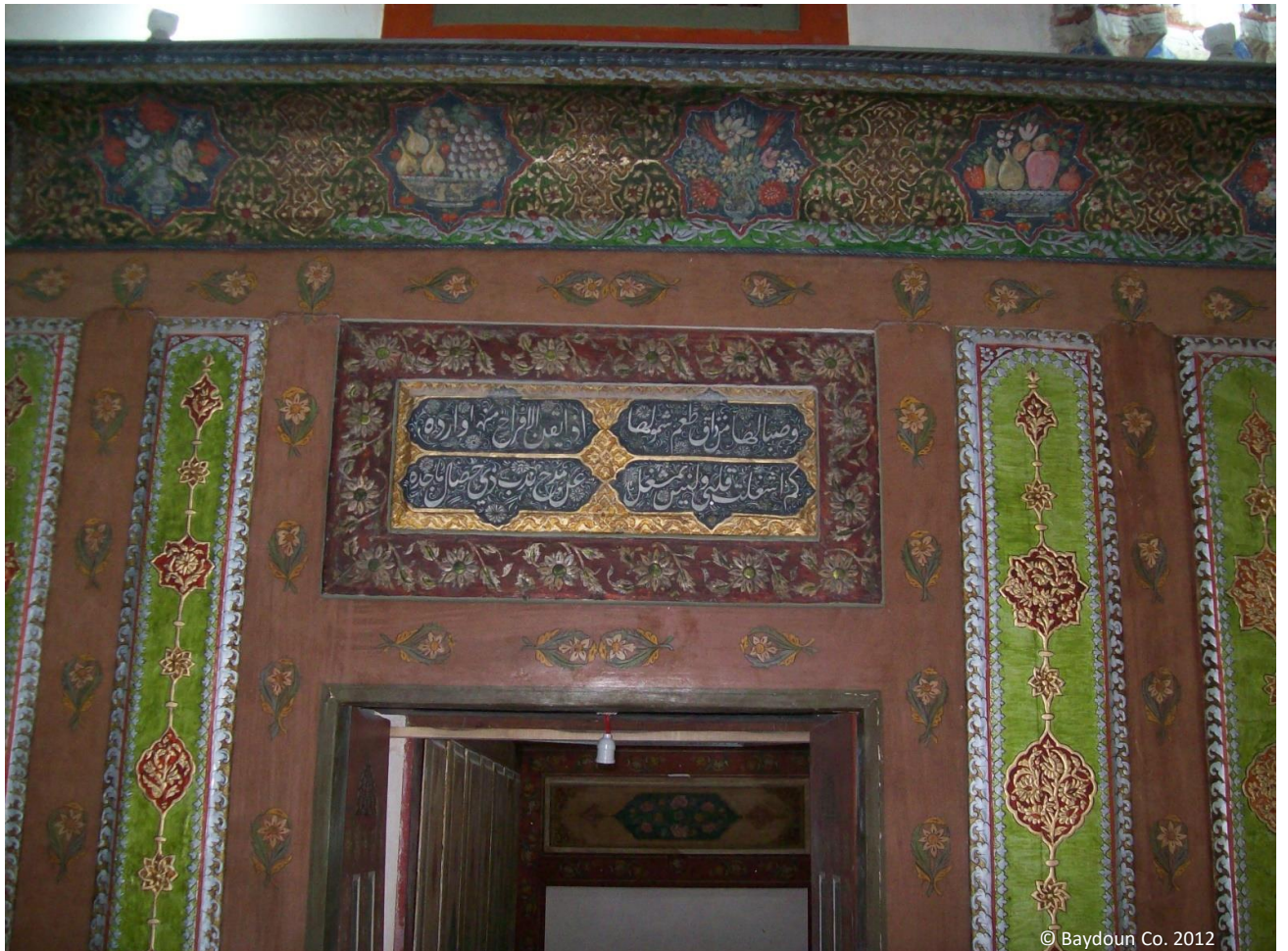
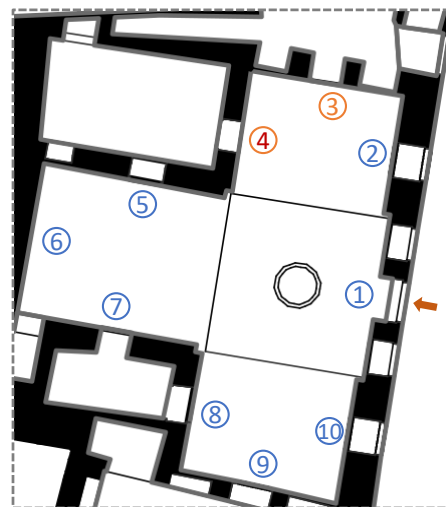


Figure 48

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Main qa'a – Walls (3,4) 'ajami panelling removed



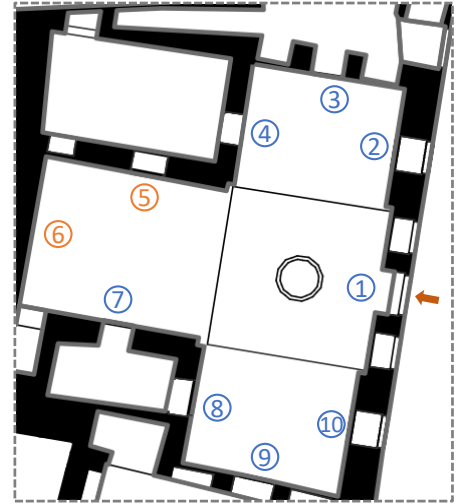
© A.G.P. Nov. 2017

Figure 49



# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Main qa'a – Walls (5,6) with details



© Baydoun Co. 2012

Figure 50



© Baydoun Co. 2012

Figure 51



## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Main qa'a – Wall (5) 'ajami panelling removed



© DGAM 2013

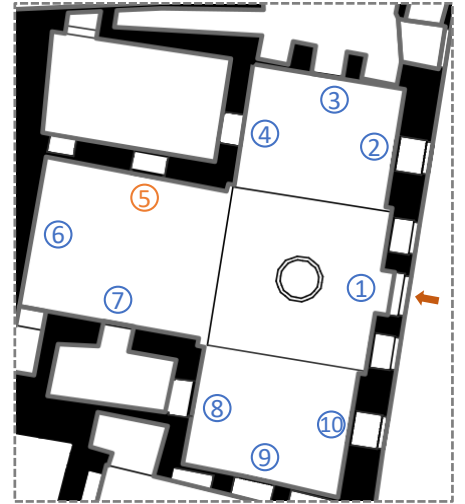
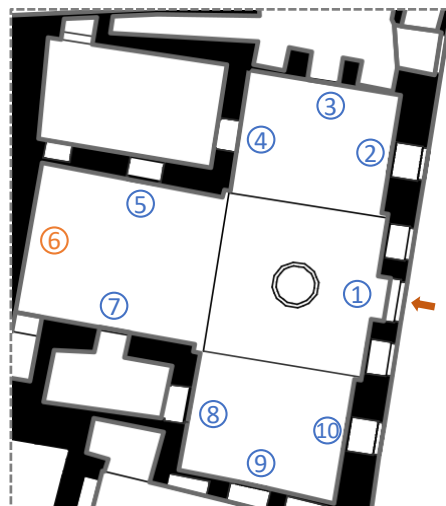


Figure 52

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Main qa'a – Wall (6) with details

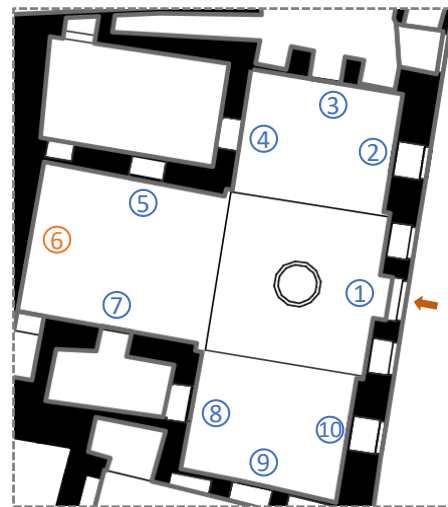


© Baydoun Co. 2012

Figure 53

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Main qa'a – Wall (6) 'ajami panelling removed



© Khaled Almulla March 2017

Figure 54

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Main qa'a – Wall (7) with details

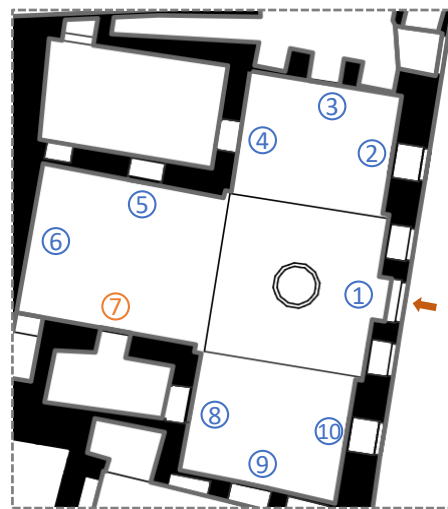
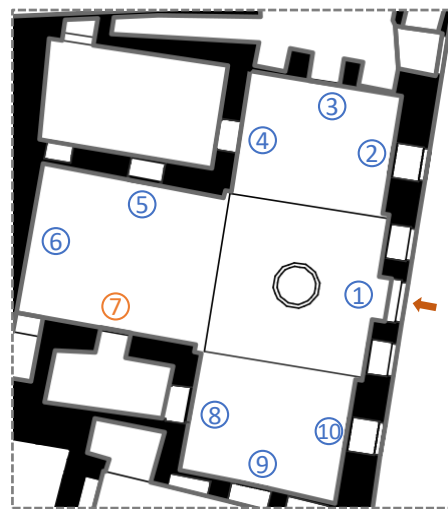


Figure 55

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Main qa'a – Wall (7) 'ajami panelling removed

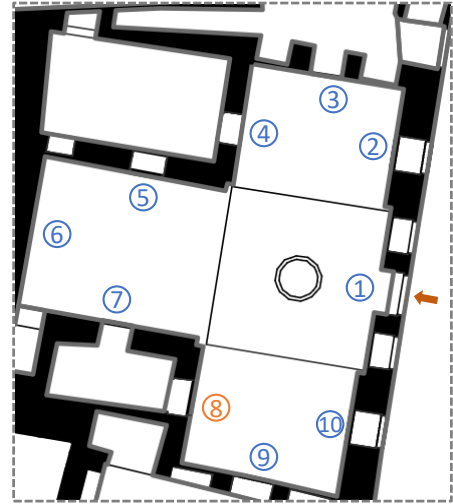


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Figure 56

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Main qa'a – Wall (8) with details



© Baydoun Co. 2012

Figure 57



## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Main qa'a – Wall (8) 'ajami panelling removed



© DGAM 2013

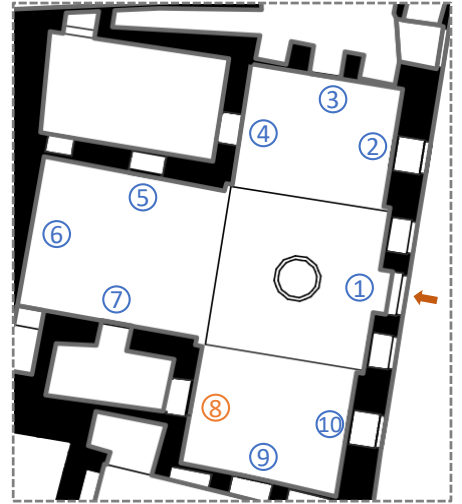


Figure 58



## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

Main *qa'a* – Wall (9) **destroyed together with ceiling**

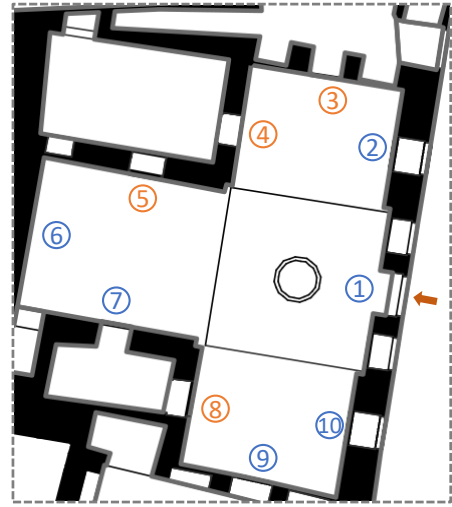
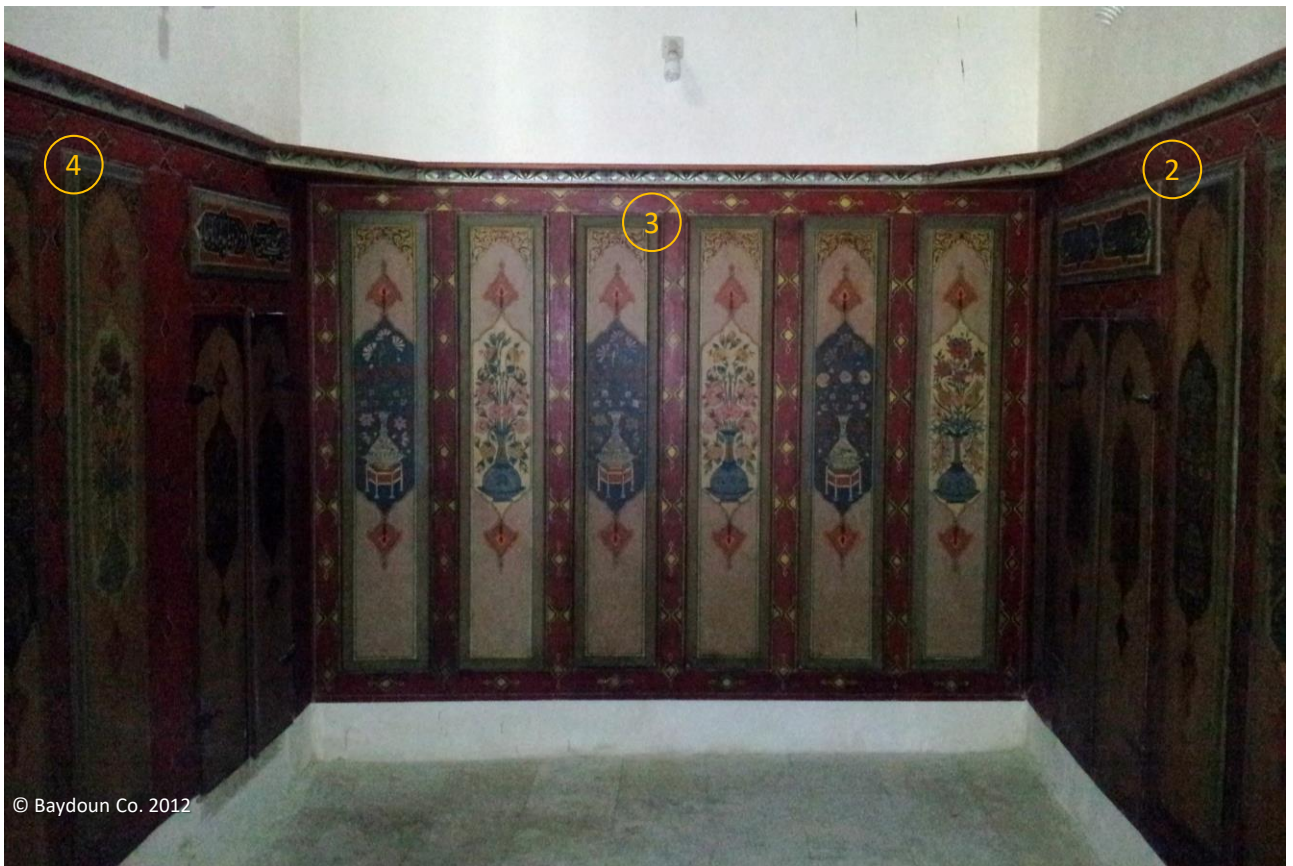
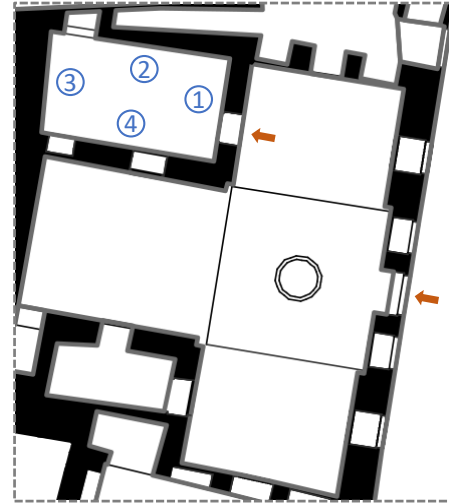


Figure 59

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Main qa'a – qubbat al-qa'a (right side)

Most of the wall panelling in the *qubbat al-qa'a* (right side) was modern, all of which have been removed.



© Baydoun Co. 2012

Figure 60

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Main qa'a – qubbat al-qa'a (left side)

All of the wall panels in the *qubbat al-qa'a* (left side), which were all modern, have been removed.

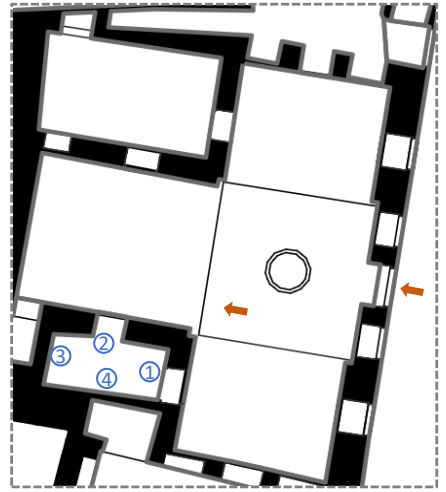


Figure 61

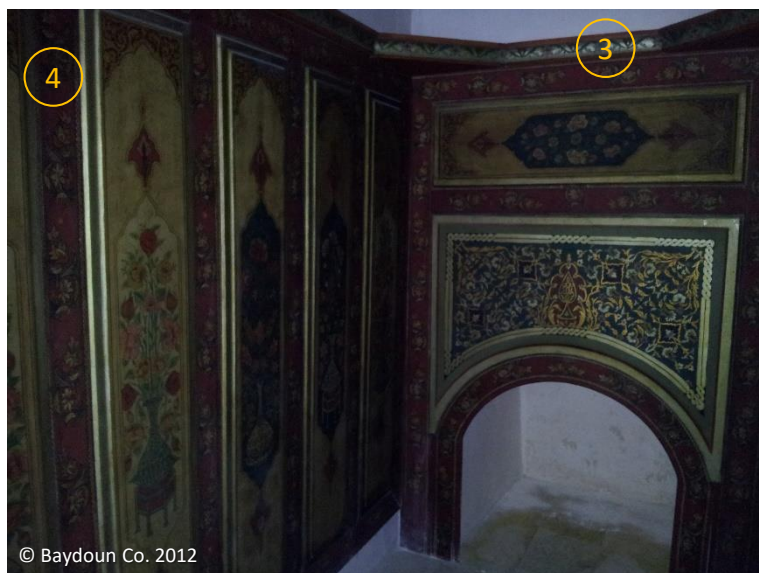


Figure 62

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Winter qa'a

The ceiling and wall panels of the winter qa'a are all modern except for the frame panels. Though the qa'a was totally destroyed as well as the ceiling, apparently the wall panels were previously disappear.

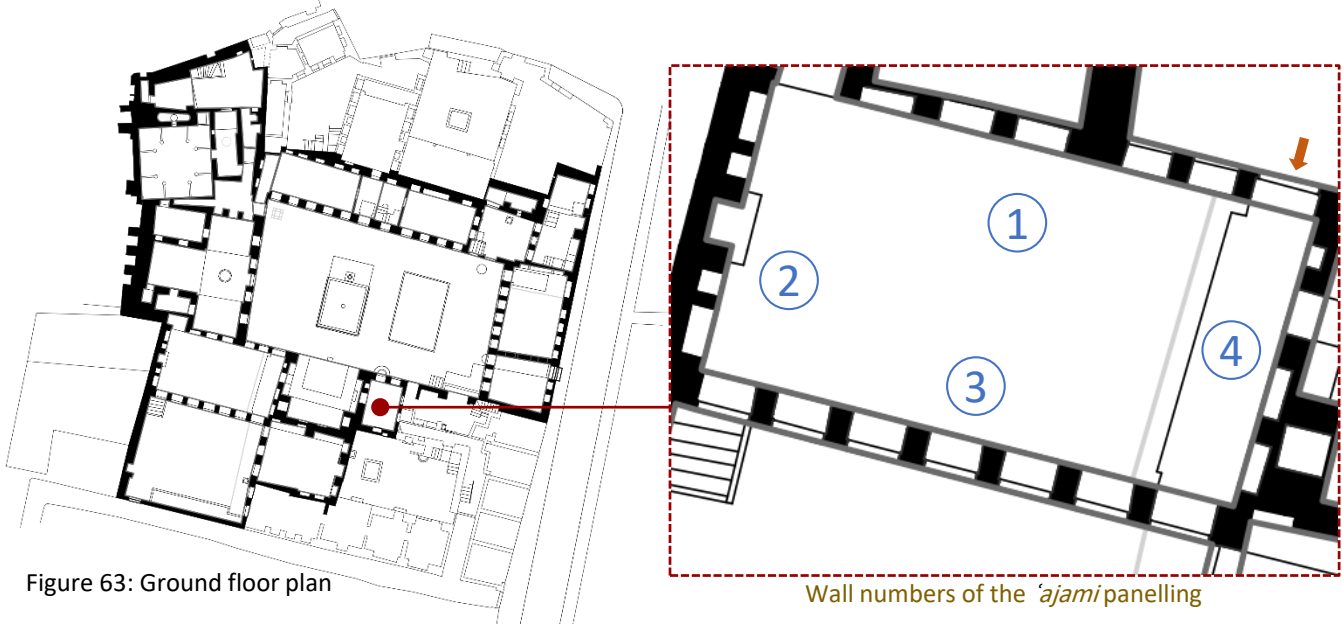


Figure 63: Ground floor plan

Wall numbers of the 'ajami panelling



© Baydoun Co. 2012

Figure 64

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Winter qa'a – Walls (1,4)

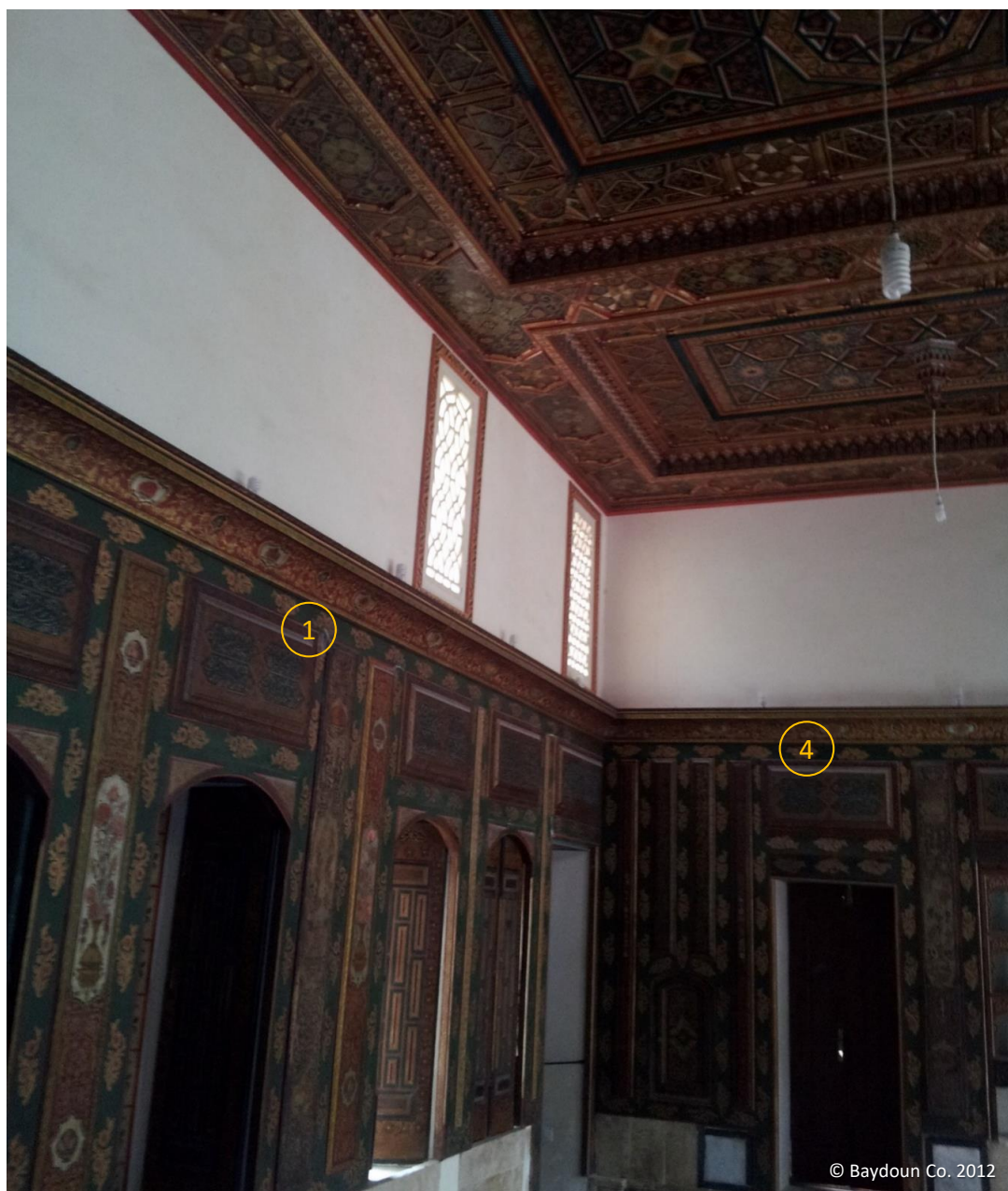
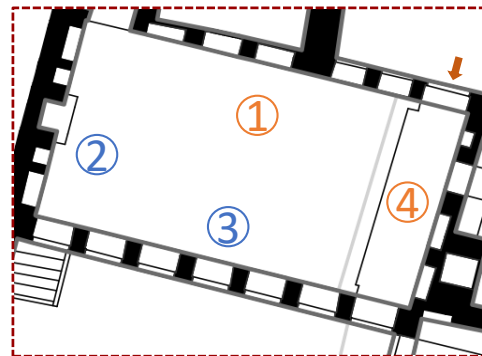


Figure 65

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Winter qa'a – Walls (1,2)

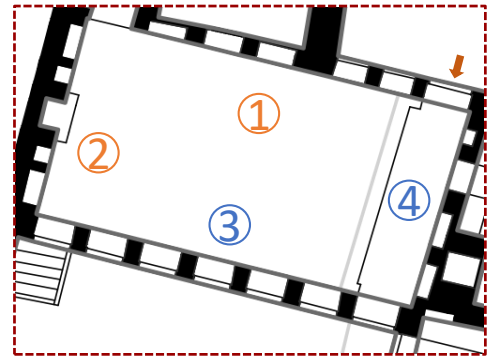


Figure 66

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Winter qa'a – Wall (2)

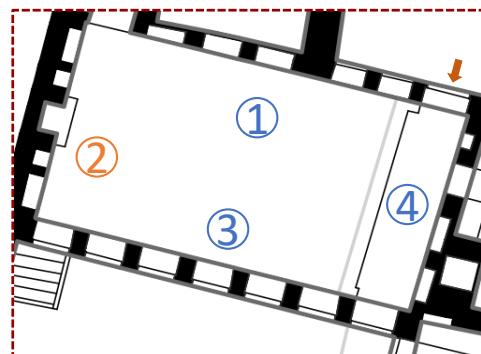


Figure 67

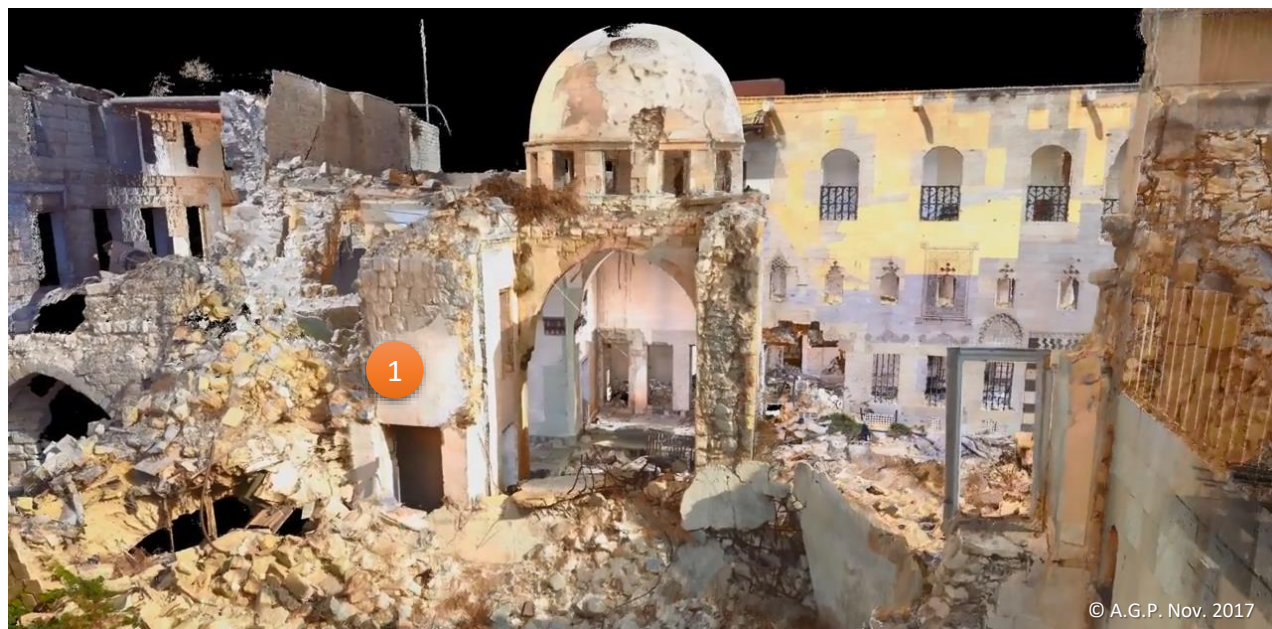
## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Winter qa'a – damages and destruction



© DGAM 2013

Figure 68



© A.G.P. Nov. 2017

Figure 69



# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Service room

Most of the service room's wall panelling, which was all modern, was missing. However, the original ceiling panels were left *in situ*.

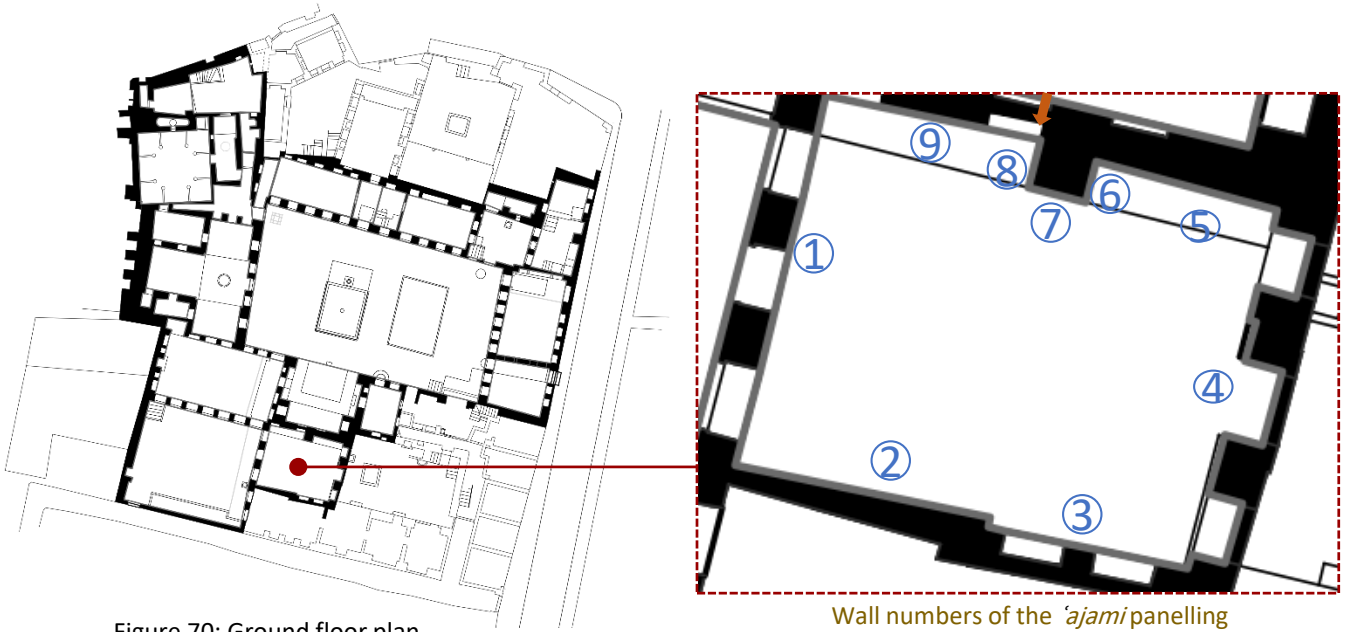


Figure 70: Ground floor plan

Wall numbers of the 'ajami panelling



Figure 71

© Baydoun Co. 2012

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Service room – 'ajami wall panelling removed



Figure 72

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### *Iwan*

Most of the *iwan's* wall panels were modern except for the upper cornice and the inscription panels. Probably, most of them were removed before the *iwan* was destroyed. The original sunshade was in bad condition until it was restored in 2010. Unfortunately, it was also destroyed together with the *iwan*.

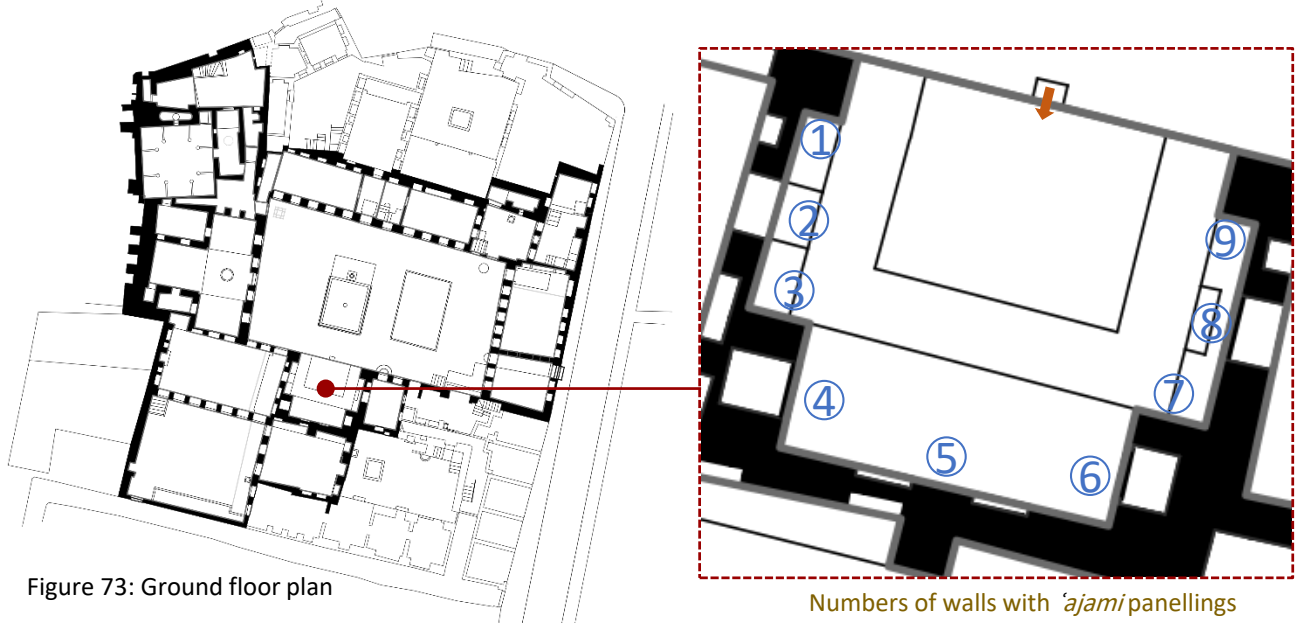


Figure 73: Ground floor plan

Numbers of walls with 'ajami panellings



Figure 74

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Iwan

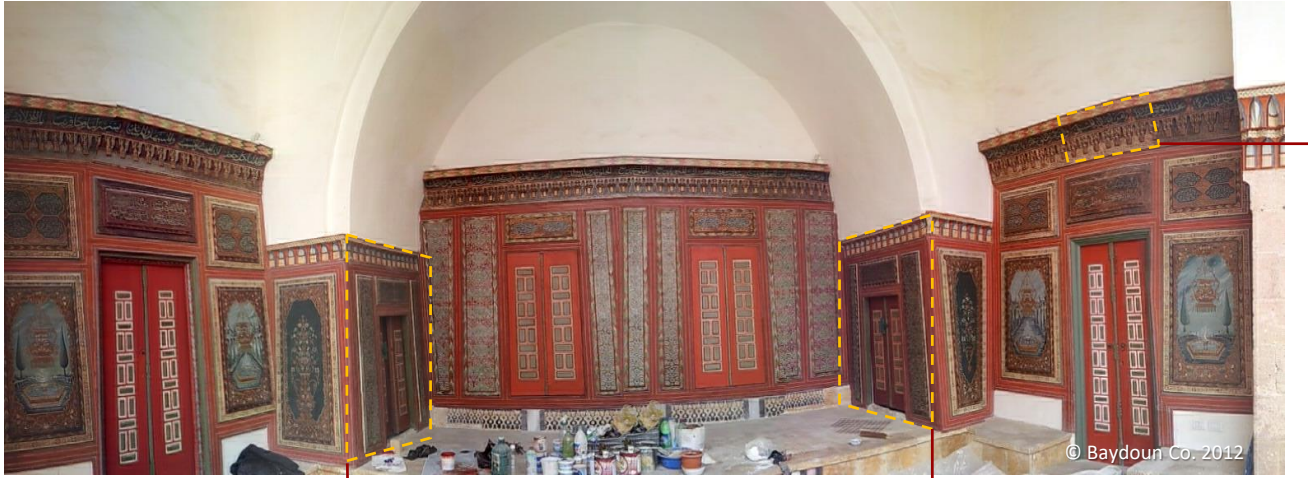


Figure 75



Figure 76



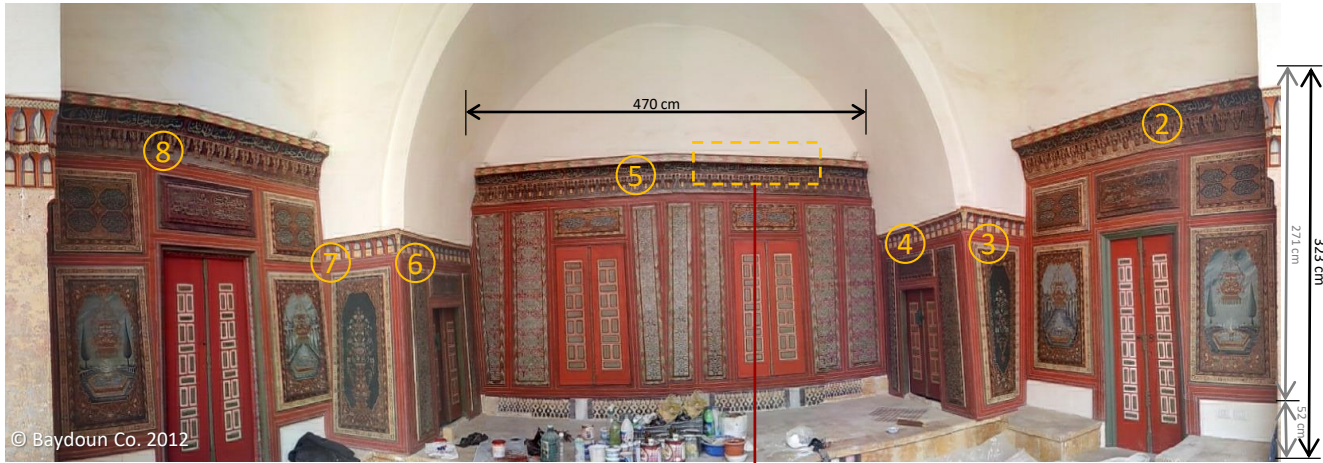
Figure 77



Figure 78

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Iwan



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Figure 79



© Baydoun Co. 2009

Figure 80

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Iwan – destruction



© Mahmoud Sikt. May 2017.

Figure 81

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Qubbat al-iwan

The room is damaged and the 'ajami wall panels were removed.

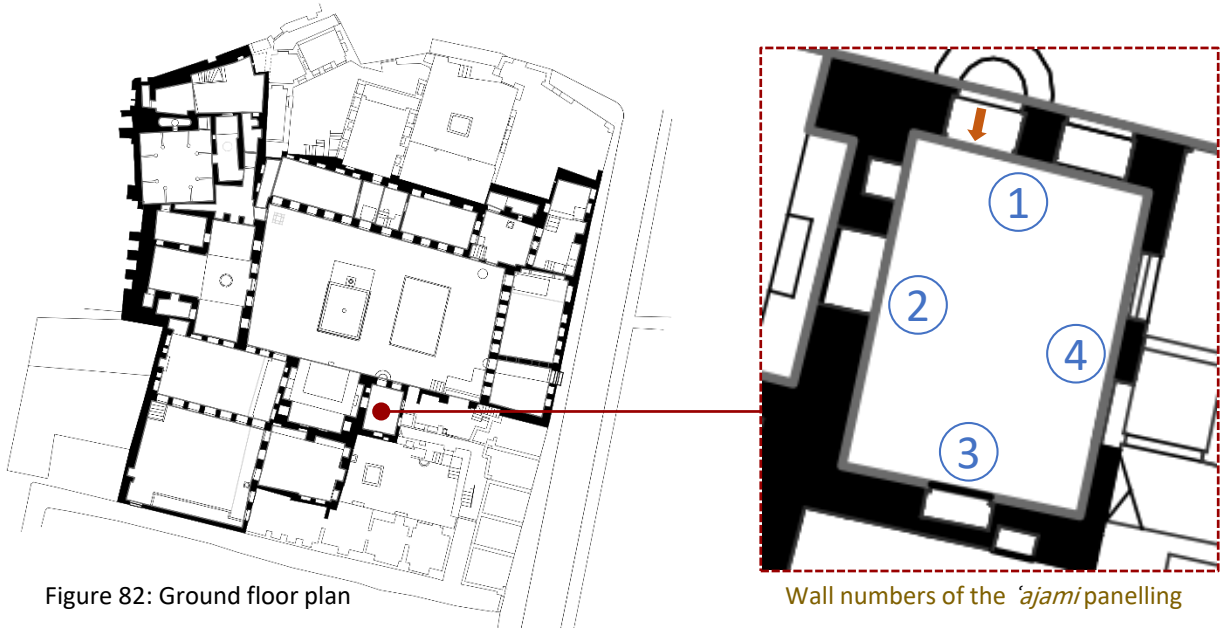


Figure 82: Ground floor plan

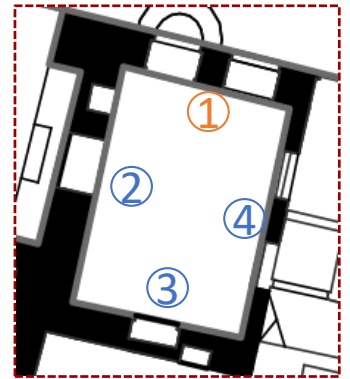
Wall numbers of the 'ajami panelling



Figure 83

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Qubbat al-Iwan – Wall (1) before restoration



© DGAM. 2009

Figure 84



## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### *Qubbat al-iwan* – Wall (1) damage

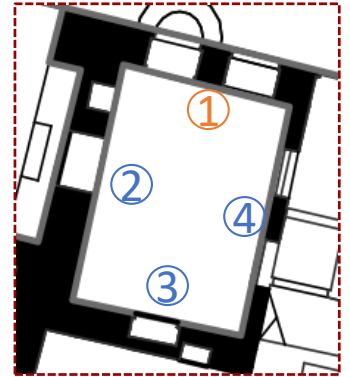
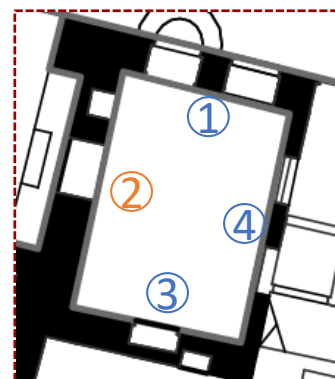


Figure 85

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### *Qubbat al-iwan – Wall (2)*



© J.Cavid. (ca.2010)

Figure 86

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Qubbat al-iwan – Wall (3)

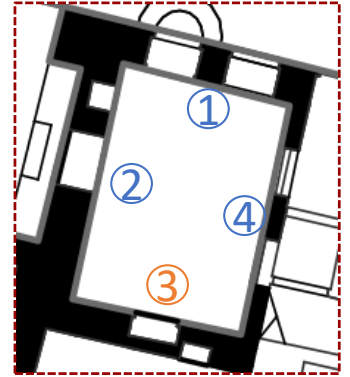


Figure 87

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### *Qubbat al-iwan* – Wall (3) **damage**

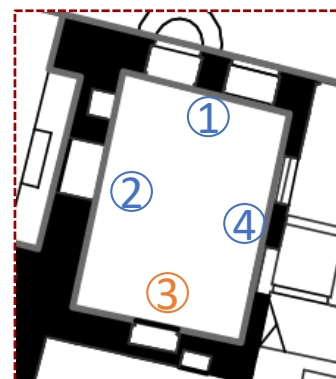
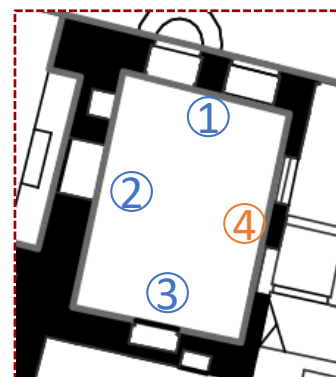


Figure 88

# Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

## Qubbat al-iwan – Wall (4) before restoration



© DGAM, 2009

Figure 89

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Conclusion

Bayt Ghazala suffered structural damages and the loss of interior decorations. All of the 'ajami wall panels were removed with the exception of some panels of the *iwan* and the winter *qa'a* which were structurally destroyed.

It seems that the 'ajami wall panels were removed by non-experts who may have caused significant damage to the removed panels. The photos from 2013 show that the panels were removed in stages.

All of the 'ajami ceilings were left *in situ*, except for the *qa'a* ceiling in the southern wing. The winter *qa'a* ceiling was most likely structurally destroyed.

The remains of the 'ajami ceilings are in urgent need of protection. Otherwise, they should be removed and stored in a decent, safe place – like the Aleppo Museum – until the house is completely renovated.

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Copyrights of photos

#### **A.G.P. (Art Graphique & Patrimoine)**

**Figures 12, 23, 27, 31, 40, 49, 59, 69, 85, 88**

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Images from a very high precision 3D laser scanner survey (1.2 billion data points) of Bayt Ghazala. This was a collaborative scientific work for the studying, safeguarding and emergency consolidation of remains of the structure. (UNESCO, DGAM & AGP), November 2017. Link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-bzlll2gls>.

Art Graphique & Patrimoine was founded in 1994 by the passion for the crafts of stone and for heritage preservation. Its R&D hub, specializing in architectural and archaeological surveys, has contributed through 20 years to the evolution of digital technologies for the heritage enhancement and preservation. Website: <http://www.artgp.fr/>.

#### **Baydoun Co.**

**Figures 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 50, 51, 53, 55, 57, 60, 61, 62, 64, 65, 66, 67, 71, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80**

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Images from Baydoun Company. The company was commissioned to renovate the 'ajami panellings of Bayt Ghazala in 2009-2010. The founder of this company is Abdul Raouf Baydoun, craftsman and specialist in the restoration of 'ajami interiors, who is working with his son, Ziad Baydoun, an interior designer with masters degree and CEO of the company. They implemented many restoration projects in Syria and Lebanon. Website: <http://baydoun-sy.com/>.

#### **DGAM Syria**

**Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 30, 42, 52, 58, 68, 83, 84, 89**

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Images from the Directorate-General of Antiquities & Museums (DGAM Syria) for the 'ajami panellings of Bayt Ghazala in 2009, before the restoration project.

#### **Habib Nasta**

**Figure 72**

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Civil society photographer of historical buildings the Old City of Aleppo.

#### **Khaled Almulla**

**Figures 45, 54, 56**

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Civil society photographer of historical buildings in the Old City of Aleppo.

## Documentation of the 'ajami panellings in Bayt Ghazala

### Copyrights of photos

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##### **Figure 81**

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Civil society photographer of historical buildings in the Old City of Aleppo.

#### **Rami Alafandi**

**Figures: 2, 3, 4, 5.**

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Archaeologist, team member of the Syrian Heritage Archive Project – Aleppo Project.

#### **RC HERITAGE (RCH)**

**Figures 1, 13, 14, 41, 63, 70, 73, 82**

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RC HERITAGE consultants builds on the professional expertise of its two founders (Simone Ricca and François Cristofoli ), whose complementary backgrounds range from policy-drafting and site management to planning, from conservation to graphic design.

#### **François Cristofoli**

**Figures 10, 87**

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#### **Jean-Claude David**

**Figure 86**

**(CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Jean-Claude David is a geographer and a retired CNRS research fellow, who spent ten years in Aleppo, from 1968 to 1972 and then from 1977 to 1983. Later, nearly every year, he returned to Aleppo, as well as Damascus, Beirut, and Cairo, to do research projects.. David is particularly interested in public spaces, domestic architecture and institutional or "popular" heritage, which have given rise to numerous publications on these.

<https://archeorient.hypotheses.org/8332>.