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Power and Control in Crusader Acre ('Akko): The Fortifications of the Genoese Quarter

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An impressive fortification system on the northern border of the Genoese Quarter at Crusader-period Acre was discovered, comprising a defensive wall built of bossed ashlars and incorporating arrow slits, a fortified gate leading to the quarter through a vaulted passageway and a projecting tower with two levels of arrow slits. The gate and parts of the passageway were blocked, apparently during the Crusader period, as a consequence of the Saint Sabas War. This war broke out following a dispute between Venice and Genoa over ownership of a monastery located on the border between their quarters, near the port, which was rooted in their struggle over control of the harbor of Acre and the eastern Mediterranean lucrative maritime trade. Written sources indicate that the outcome of this fierce conflict was the expulsion of the Genoese from Acre and the blocking of their quarter. The presence of a blocked gate and the abandoned state of the area are physical evidence of the aftermath of the War. These remains, well-preserved within eighteenth-century Ottoman buildings, do not only shed light on the nature of the Genoese Quarter's northern fortified borderline but also provide the first concrete material evidence of defense, power and control by the Italian communes in the maritime hubs of the Crusader states.

Keywords: Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, Crusader Acre, Genoese Quarter, fortifications, War of Saint Sabas, medieval Mediterranean, Genoa, Venice, Pisa

Introduction

Following the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 and the establishment of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, the maritime Commune of Genoa assisted the Crusading armies to conquer cities along the Mediterranean coast, including Acre in 1104. The Commune of Genoa was reciprocated with commercial privileges and possessions in the kingdom, among them a designated area for commerce and residence in Acre. Later in the twelfth century, Venice

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(1110, 1123) and Pisa (1168) were also granted quarters nearby (Pringle 2009:5). Remains of the Genoese autonomous quarter have been unearthed in archaeological excavations and surveys carried out within the Ottoman Old City of Acre, including residential buildings, shops, a defensive wall incorporating arrow slits, a fortified gate and a projecting tower. Along the course of the fortified wall runs a vaulted passageway, identified as *ruga cooperta*, 'the Covered Street' (Kedar and Stern E. 1995; Kesten 1993:29–39). In the past, several attempts to reconstruct the urban layout of Crusader Acre have been made based on historical maps and written sources (Kesten 1962; 1993; Jacoby 1979; Pringle 2009:32–34), suggesting various boundaries for the different Italian quarters and military orders. For the Genoese Quarter, the northern perimeter remained uncertain and different suggestions for its location were put forward by various scholars.

Archaeological excavations carried out in 2015 and 2018 revealed substantial, well-preserved remains of an impressive fortification system on the northern border of the Genoese Quarter, integrated within eighteenth-century Ottoman buildings. These architectural remains could be associated with a high degree of certainty with previously surveyed similar remains to the west (Kedar and Stern E. 1995:106, Figs. 1–7). The fortification system comprised a passageway adjacent to the wall, providing access to the quarter through several gates. Certain parts of this passage and a gate were blocked, likely as a result of a conflict during the Crusader period.

A major violent outbreak took place in Acre in the mid-thirteenth century—the Saint Sabas War. This war was the result of a dispute between Venice and Genoa over the ownership of a house that was part of the Saint Sabas Eastern Orthodox monastery, located near the port, on the border between their quarters (Jacoby 2003:246–247; Pringle 2009:79–80). Its roots were the struggle over control of the harbor of Acre in particular, and the eastern Mediterranean lucrative maritime trade in general. The outcome of this fierce conflict was the expulsion of the Genoese from Acre and the blocking of their quarter.

Despite the fragmentary nature of the remains exposed in the Genoese Quarter, they provide the first concrete evidence of the Genoese Quarter's defensive system and the physical consequences of the Saint Sabas War. They also contribute to the study of broader issues, such as urban layout, development and most significantly, architectural expressions of defense, power and control by the Italian communes in the maritime hubs of the Crusader states and in the wider medieval Mediterranean context.

The architectural remains of the Genoese Quarter's fortification system are presented below, supported by historical sources, medieval maps, and archaeological surveys and excavations. The excavations and research presented here are the result of an ongoing collaboration between archaeologists of the Israel Antiquities Authority and the University of Genoa (Benente et al. 2009–2010; 2016),[2] initiated by Professor Benjamin Z.

[2] On behalf of the Department of Antiquities, Philosophy and History (DAFIST). At first, it was led by Prof. Carlo Varaldo, with the assistance of Prof. Fabrizio Benente, who later became the main director on behalf of the University of Genoa.

Kedar,[3] following a survey of the remains identified as the Covered Street (*ruga cooperta*) of the Genoese Quarter in Acre (Kedar and Stern E. 1995) and his ongoing interest in the history of Genoa (Kedar 2019).

The Genoese Quarter: The Historical Record

The strongly fortified Fatimid city of Acre, with its man-made harbor and shipyard, public buildings and large tracts of empty land, fell to the Crusader army led by King Baldwin I in early May 1104. Under the Franks, Acre became the main port in the Latin East, at which crusaders, merchants, pilgrims and supplies arrived. This led to the city's economic growth, reaching a peak in the thirteenth century and coinciding with its role as the capital of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem from 1191 (Jacoby 2004:97–100). The prosperity of Crusader Acre depended on the regular arrival of ships from the West, mainly during the period of *passagium*, from the months of April–May until mid-October, when winds were most favorable for maritime navigation. During these months, the town was flooded with thousands of pilgrims and merchants, who travelled by Genoese, Venetian and Provencal ships, and were accommodated in large commercial quarters (*hospitalia*; Pryor 1988:3–4). The pilgrimage to the Holy Land not only greatly influenced the pilgrims' social status in the Christian West, but also served a major economic resource (Jacoby 2012; 2014:54–66). This is attested by numerous contracts concerning goods and maritime transportation, as well as documents that mention active bankers, money lenders and other financial services, alongside artisans and craftsmen manufacturing souvenirs for the pilgrims (Jacoby 2004; 2005). The Crusader city's urban layout is depicted in an early fourteenth-century map drawn by the Genoese cartographer Pietro Vesconte, based on information from the Venetian author Marino Sanudo, who visited Acre in 1285 or 1286, before its destruction by the Mamluks (Fig. 1; Jacoby 1979:2–7, Fig. 1; Mack 2018: 486).[4]

The fall of Acre to the Mamluks on May 18, 1291, led by Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil, was mentioned by both Western and Arab chroniclers (Pringle 2009:24; Amitai 2017:335–336). This event marked the end of Western presence in the Levant, bringing about an abrupt change in trade routes, which terminated the colonial and lucrative commercial activities of the main Italian communes. Following the Mamluk conquest, Acre was significantly damaged by means of extensive burning, demolition of its fortifications and structures, and the displacement or killing of its Frankish residents. The city then remained mostly in ruins—apart from meager activity connected with foreign maritime trade (Pringle 2009:24–

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[4] For a discussion of the streets depicted on these maps, see also Boas 2016:23.

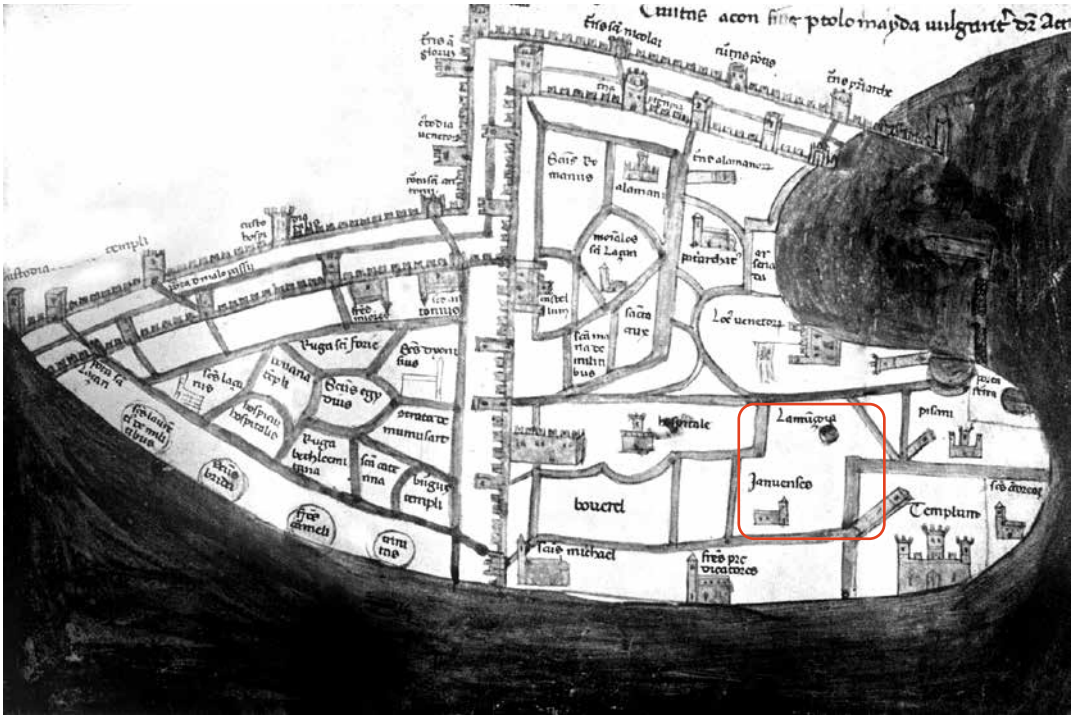


Fig. 1. Marino Sanudo map of Acre, early fourteenth century, drawn by the Genoese cartographer Pietro Vesconte (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marino_Sanudo%27s_plan_of_ACRE.jpg.); the Genoese Quarter wis marked in red)

27; Amitai 2017)—which contributed to the relatively good preservation of the Crusader-period remains.

In the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the Druze Emir Fakhr ad-Dīn II, who ruled on behalf of the Ottomans in southern Lebanon and northern Palestine, revived the port of ʻAkko as a source of income within the European–Levantine trade network. During this period, and until the end of the seventeenth century, the ruins of the Frankish city were still visible, as attested both in pictorial and written testimonies of contemporary visitors, for example, the depiction prepared by Gravier d'Ortières (Fig. 2; Kedar 1997:164–166, Fig. 7; Shotten-Hallel 2010:187–189, Fig. 3) or the travel diary of Henry Maundrell, who visited Acre in 1697 (Maundrell 1703). It was only during the reign of the Bedouin leader Daher al-Omar (1750–1775) that Acre was rebuilt, albeit in smaller dimensions than the twelfth–thirteenth-century Crusader city. The Ottoman city, within the limits of today's Old City, included the area of the former Genoese Quarter. During this time, and that of Daher's successor, the Ottoman governor of Sidon Ahmad al Jazzar (1776–1804), the city flourished economically and architecturally, and the Crusader buildings were concealed from the cityscape, either destroyed, buried beneath or integrated within the newly built structures (Fig. 3; Pringle 2009:27–32).

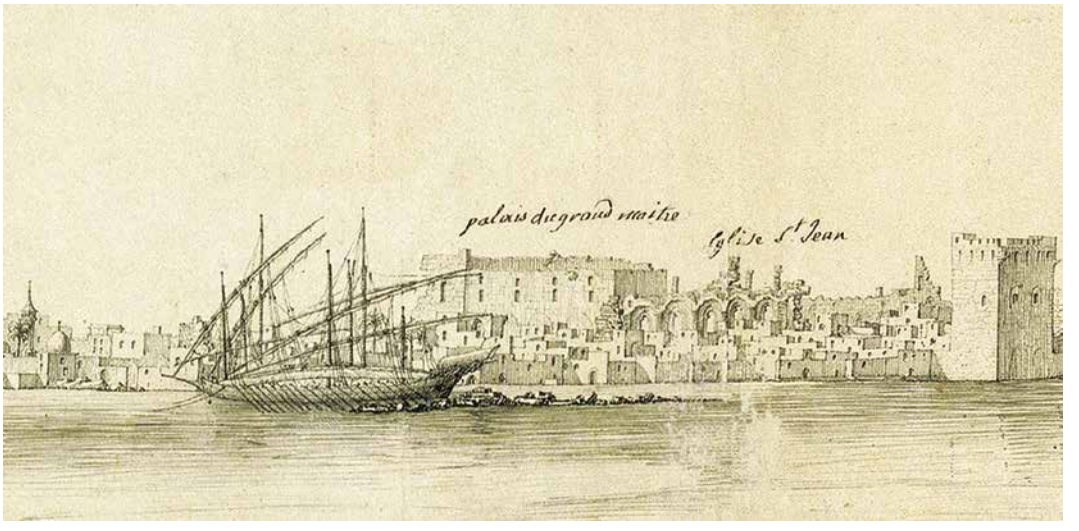


Fig. 2. Detail of the ruins of Crusader Acre, painted by Gravier d'Ortières for King Louis XIV, dated c. 1685–87, view from the bay (courtesy of the BnF; https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7200301t).

Fig. 3. Drawing by David Roberts of St. Jean d'Acre, April 24, 1839 (https://fineartamerica.com/featured/st-jean-dacre-april-24th-1839-plate-david-roberts.html).

During the period of the British Mandate and the modern State of Israel, remains of the Frankish city were exposed following clearance activities, archaeological excavations and restoration projects undertaken in anticipation of the development of the modern town and the Old City of ʻAkko, and to promote tourism (Stern E.J. and Stern E., in press).

Genoese Presence in Acre

The Church of St. Laurance and the Commune of Genoa received a grant *(donatio)* to extend naval aid to Baldwin I during the conquest of Acre in 1104. A late twelfth-century copy of a document dated September 1104 was preserved in the *Archivio di Stato di Genova*,[5] in which it is said that Baldwin I endowed "*...terciam partem civitatis Acharon [cum] tercia parte redditus portus et civitatis et illius terre usquequo distenditur leuga una ac trecentos bisan [cios co]mutatione casalium in unoquoque anno*," i.e., one-third of the town under their jurisdiction, a third of the commerce revenues from the port and the right to establish a church. In addition to these privileges, the Genoese were granted one-third of the land outside the city walls, as well as an annual income of 300 *bezants* from farmhouses (Puncuh and Rovere 1992:99–102, Doc. 61; Pringle 2009:5, 117; Mayer and Richard 2010:132–136, No. 28). Some of the rural areas controlled by the Genoese were located based on archaeological finds, such as boundary stones bearing the inscription IANUA (Fig. 4; Frankel 1980; 1988:260–262; Artzy and Quartermaine 2014:21).

Information concerning the Genoese settlement in Acre prior to the Crusader defeat at Ḥattin (1187) is sparse, while more written sources are available after the Third Crusade reconquest of the city in 1191. A significant source, drawn up for recording annual taxes, is an inventory of the Genoese possessions in Acre dated July 14, 1249, shortly before the defeat of the Genoese in the Saint Sabas War (Desimoni 1884:213–222; Kool 1997:188–191, Fig. 1). The properties described in this inventory provide valuable information regarding the layout of the quarter. It mentions a total of 74 buildings owned by the commune, including public and private buildings in the possession of Genoese citizens residing in Acre. Among them are the Church of St. Laurence (*San Lorenzo*), three towers (*turris vetera comunis*; *turris nova*; and *Lamançoia*), a plaza, a covered street (*ruga cooperta*), an oven, a *jardinum*, houses, shops, stalls and warehouses. The inventory also lists individuals of the aristocratic class, merchants, and many middle-class and common people: stall owners (*bancherii*), woolen thread spinners (*filatores*), a soap producer (*sabonerius*), a metal pot producer (*calderarius*) and a tailor (*draperius*). Interestingly, apart from the towers, no other fortifications are mentioned; however, as the Genoese Commune and its citizens possessed numerous assets, it is assumed that defensive measures were necessary.

[5] Although the authenticity of the document was challenged by Mayer and Favreau, who claimed that it was a skillful Genoese forgery (Mayer and Favreau 1976; Mayer 1983:V), Antonella Rovere conducted comprehensive research and provided evidence that disproved their argument (Rovere 1996; see also Kedar 1986; 2004).

Fig. 4. A Genoese border stone, now on exhibit at Kibbutz Shomrat (photography: Yoav Lerer).

In addition to the 1249 inventory, information concerning the Genoese Quarter can be deduced from the Vesconte map (Fig. 1), on which two landmarks appear: the Church of St. Laurence and a round feature, labeled *Lamançoia*, apparently a representation of a pond indicating where the tower had stood before it was demolished in the War of Saint Sabas (Wardi 1997; Prawer 2001:371). This map also indicates the outer city fortifications, the urban layout and some quarters, and numerous towers.

Due to changes in the urban layout in the thirteenth century, the Genoese Quarter in Acre was located inland, without immediate access to the port, while the quarters of their rivals, Venice and Pisa, were situated closer to the port. This, the continuous rivalry and the growing tension between these communes, seem to be the trigger for the outbreak of the Saint Sabas War (Jacoby 1979:19–35; 2003:240–248; Berrou 2017:57–72).

The Saint Sabas war involved other western trading cities and military orders residing in Acre, including the Pisans, Templars, Teutonics and Hospitallers, as well as overseas nobility. Texts describing this war, including the Genoese and Venetian chroniclers, tell of archers and many siege machines (*bricole*, *trebuchets* and *petriere*) used to throw heavy stones from one city quarter to another (Madden 2020:211–218; Musarra 2009). The ‘Chronicle of

the Templar of Tyre' describes fighting from street to street and from house to house in the Genoese, Pisan and Venetian Quarters. He further describes the use of war machines that hurled stones day and night, destroying not only the houses in the rival quarters but also those of the neighboring residents. For example, Thomas Bérard, Master of the Temple, had moved his household from near the Pisan Quarter to the Order of St. Lazarus due to the noise and inconvenience of the siege engines that were firing at each other (Crawford 2003:23–29; Madden 2020:218; Del Punta 2010:41).

At the outset of the war, the Genoese had the upper hand; however, in 1257, the Pisans and the Venetians signed a ten-year agreement, which resulted in the defeat of the Genoese on June 24, 1258. The Genoese were expelled from the city; casualties on their side were many, with thousands of men either killed or captured, and fifty galleys and four ships destroyed in the harbor (Mack 2018:490). Once the Genoese were expelled from Acre, the Venetians and Pisans destroyed the buildings within the Genoese Quarter and its fortifications, including the main tower; only the Church of St. Laurence was left. The dismantled stones were then used to fortify their own quarters, which were enlarged by annexing parts of the former Genoese Quarter; the area of the tower now became a pond.

The Genoese left Acre and moved to Tyre in 1261, but in 1270, they were permitted to return to their then-ruined quarter in Acre. In 1288, the Pisans returned part of the Genoese Quarter they had annexed earlier and destroyed their newly built fortifications (Pringle 2009:10, 118).

The Towers

From the eleventh century, defensive tower houses became common in Italian cities, built at the initiative of the rising elite of merchant families. As an Italian-city icon, such towers were introduced in the Latin East by Italian merchants (Boas 2010:88–89, 244–245). The Genoese, Pisans and Venetians all built towers, and fortified their palaces and quarters in the cities and islands around the Mediterranean, including Acre (Boas 2010:252, 254–256). These towers had not only a military function but furthermore served as symbols of power and wealth (Mack 2018:486). Between 1336 and 1341, German pilgrim Ludolf of Suchem mentioned strong towers at every street corner in Acre (Ludolph von Suchem:51), and similarly, the map of Vesconte depicts many towers within the urban fabric, usually near the borders between the different quarters (Fig. 1). Although both sources witnessed the city in ruins in the early fourteenth century, they may echo earlier accounts or maps that did not survive.

Madden considered that the Italian communes' quarters in Frankish Acre were fortified with towers to an extent that did not exist elsewhere in the Latin East. This was enabled due to the weakness of the royal government, which overlooked the increasing fortifications and *de facto* allowed the rivalry between the communes over maritime trade control. The role of these towers in thirteenth-century Acre was so significant during the Saint Sabas War that Madden suggested terming it 'the War of Towers' (Madden 2020:214–215).

The Urban Layout

Much effort has been made to reconstruct the layout of the Genoese Quarter (Kesten 1962; 1993:29–39; Benvenisti 1970; Jacoby 1979:26–30; Kedar and Stern 1995:105–106; Kool 1997), mostly based on textual sources, such as the 1249 Genoese property inventory, and Kestens' architectural survey of existing building remains. It was suggested that the Church of St. Laurence was situated beneath the current Orthodox Church of St. George and that the Covered Street was adjacent to a surveyed wall with arrow slits. Several other important buildings, including the towers and the southern fortification gate, were identified; however, the precise location of the northern boundary of the Genoese Quarter remained disputed (see Kedar and Stern E. 1995: Plan 1). Jacoby suggested an extended area, while Benvenisti's proposal seems to be in line with the recently excavated remains of the fortified boundary (see below).

Research focused on the Covered Street (*ruga cooperta*), a vaulted passageway identified as a domestic and commercial street that housed four palaces, some houses, stores, workshops and warehouses (Kedar and Stern E. 1995). As such, it was thought to be of a similar nature as the broad vaulted Crusader-period street uncovered in Jerusalem (Boas 2018:1037–1038, Fig. 5), or the Sottoripa Street in Genoa built in the twelfth century and still in use today (Fig. 5).

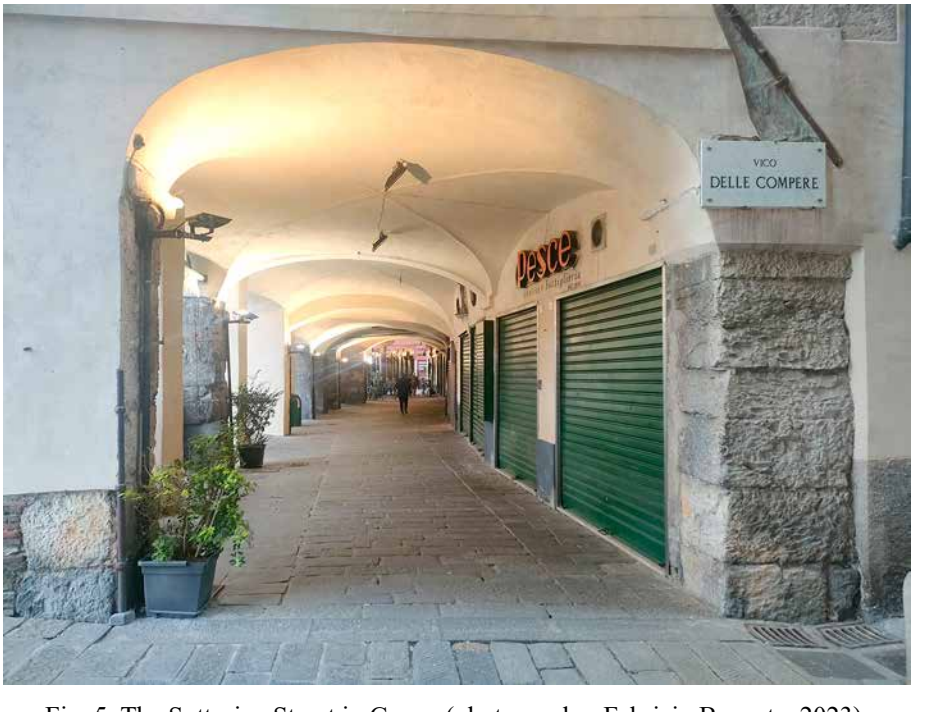


Fig. 5. The Sottoripa Street in Genoa (photography: Fabrizio Benente, 2023).

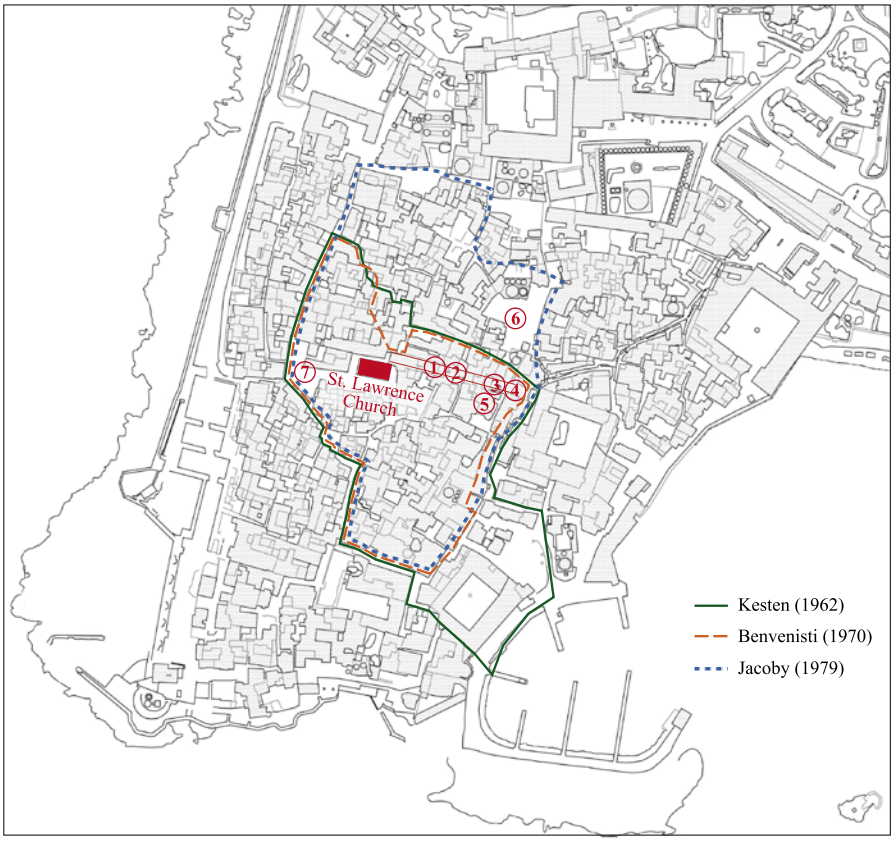


Fig. 6. Map of Acre with the suggested borders of the Genoese quarter, and the surveyed and excavated remains (drafting: Rivka Mishayev, after Kedar and Stern E. 1995: Plan 1).

THE GENOESE QUARTER: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

Archaeological excavations in the Old City of ‘Akko uncovered Crusader architectural remains, occasionally integrated into Ottoman buildings, illustrating that the Frankish city was not completely destroyed in 1291 or by the building activities of the Ottomans (Boas 2010:262–290; Stern E.J. 2021; Stern E., Syon and Tatcher, in press).[6]

[6] From its establishment in 1990, the IAA saw great importance of researching and preserving historic cities. An IAA field office was established in Old ‘Akko, in which Eliezer Stern, the archaeological inspector, and numerous IAA conservation engineers and architects, collaborated with the Old Acre Development Company. The excavations and the meticulous archaeological inspection, as well as the extensive surveys and clearings of the buildings and spaces under in the Old City, led to the discovery of the secrets of ‘Akko and accumulated extensive archaeological information.

Fig. 7. Building 44. The western section of the Covered Street, showing a structure with vaults and a thick outer wall with large niches and arrow slits, looking north (photography: Eliezer Stern).

A brief description of sites located within the Genoese Quarter is presented below, based on surveys, excavations and clearance activities. This data is analyzed focusing on the defensive wall and adjacent vaulted passageway, known as the Covered Street, which seemingly comprised the northern border of the quarter. The various elements are described in geographic order, starting with the fortified wall, and followed by other archaeological remains from west to east (Fig. 6).[7]

The Covered Street

Building 44 (Fig. 6:1). The western section of a vaulted passageway, identified as part of the Covered Street, was located a few meters northeast of the modern Orthodox Church of St. George, the proposed site of the Genoese Church of St. Laurence (Pringle 2009:117–119). It was described by Kesten (1993:36–37, Site 28 [to the west]), who was the first to identify it as the Covered Street of the Genoese Quarter. It is a Crusader-period structure with a thick

[7] Some of the remains were already identified and published by Kesten (1962; republished in 1993). Most elements listed here were also described in the 1992 Covered Street survey by Kedar and Stern E. (1995). Elements described in these publications will be briefly from presented, focusing on details essential for the present discussion. Additional information may be obtained in the abovementioned sources.

outer wall on the north, containing four large niches with arrow slits (for a description and citation from Kesten, see Kedar and Stern E. 1995:106, Figs. 1–4; Fig. 7).

Building 44a (Fig. 6:1). East of Building 44, the continuation of the Crusader-period building remains were identified in another Ottoman-period building by Kedar and Stern E. (1995:106, Figs. 5, 6, Plan 2:44a).[8] Adjacent to it is a two-story well-preserved courtyard house (Boas 2010:284–288, House 1:20, Figs. 77–79). Another room (18 × 9 m), to the south, was also partially cleared; it connected to the street via a gate (Fig. 8).[9]

After clearing c. 3 m of modern debris of sand layers mixed with collapsed stones, and Crusader and Ottoman pottery, a floor coated with white mortar was found.[10] This seems to be the original floor of the Covered Street. The walls and the ceiling of the Covered Street were constructed of ashlars; they were fully preserved to a height of c. 7 m, preserving two additional arrow slits. In the western section of the Covered Street, there is evidence of a gate, comprising an arch springing from two pillars. The gate was blocked in the Ottoman period with four to five courses of carelessly laid ashlars. The continuation of the street to the east was blocked here by an orderly-built wall of bossed ashlar stones, possibly at the end of the Crusader period due to the consequences of the Saint Sabas War (Fig. 8: Section 1–1).

The excavations in Buildings 44 and 44a exposed an area measuring 25 m long and 15 m wide. Considering the results of the later excavations (see below), the finds here can be interpreted as a section of the Covered Street adjunct to a fortified wall with arrow slits in the northern part of the Genoese Quarter. Interestingly, the remains here are of the inner part of the fortification (the interior of the quarter), while what was preserved in "House Becky" (see below) is the outer face of the fortification (the exterior of the quarter).

Point 47 (Fig. 6:2). Further east, a present-day narrow alley runs up and then down from south to north, extending over a Crusader-period vault (see below). Kesten (1993:36, Site 29) hypothesized that this is reminiscent of a buried structure, perhaps the continuation of the Covered Street. This alley was investigated in 2006 (Kedar and Stern 1995:109, Plan 2) through a trial probe (3 × 3 m) excavated within an Ottoman structure close to the alley's summit. After removing the modern concrete floor and fill, the upper part of a Crusader-period vault was exposed (Stern E. and Benente 2008), confirming Kesten's hypothesis. It

[8] The clearance excavation took place in a building that was purchased by the Old Acre Development Company for future touristic development (in the southeastern part of 18012/129). The excavation was conducted by Eliezer Stern and Amani Abu Hamid on behalf of the IAA (License No. G-34/94).

[9] Our thanks to Rivka Mishayev (plans, sections and reconstruction), and Michael Peleg and Alexander Wiegmann (photogrammetry), for producing the graphic material.

[10] It was not possible to excavate beneath the plastered floor to produce a more accurate chronological sequence.

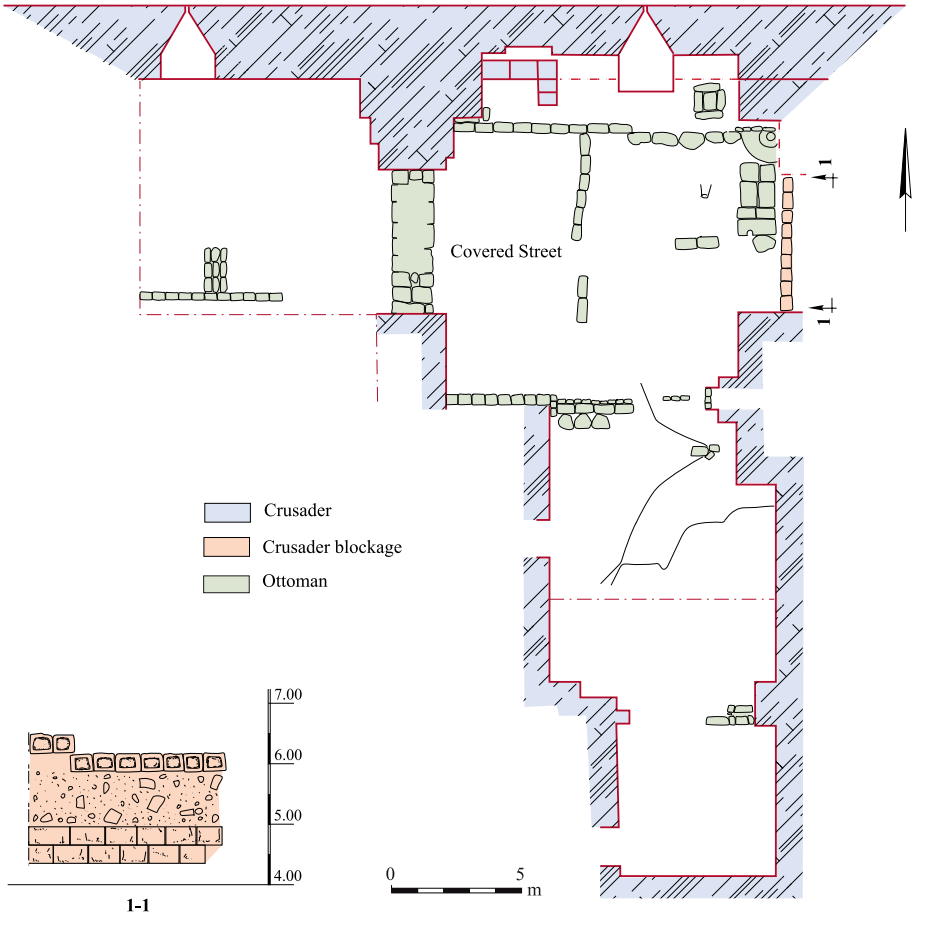
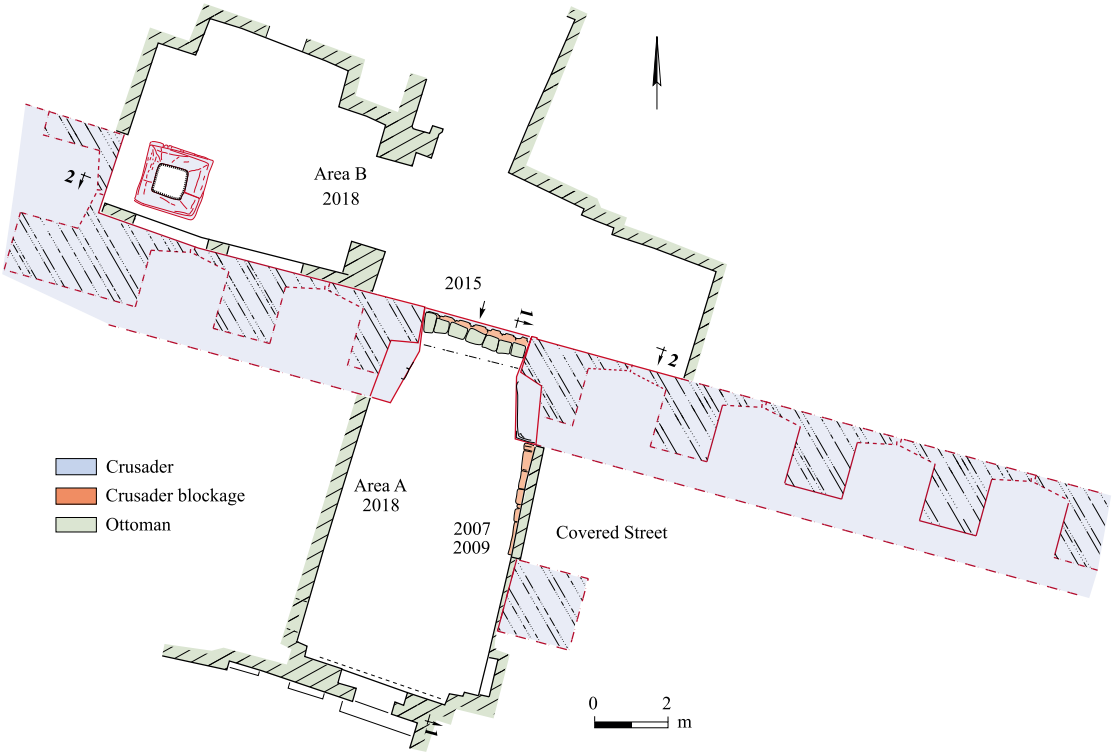


Fig. 8. Building 44a, plan and section (drafting: Rivka Mishayev, after a schematic drawing by Amani Abu Hamid).

seems that the Crusader floor was at least 5 m below the vault, as determined in Building 44 (see above), and that this part of the street was completely preserved and filled in.

House Becky[11] (Figs. 6:3; 9). Another segment of the Covered Street was identified in an Ottoman building near Zeituni Square, including contiguous halls east of Point 47 and directly west of Building 52 (Kesten 1962; Kedar and Stern E. 1995:109, Plan 2). The southern wall of these Ottoman-period spaces was built with bossed ashlars on an east–west axis (Figs. 9: Section 1–1; 10), apparently the perimeter wall attributed by Kesten to the corner building of the Genoese Quarter, which was equipped with three arrow slits (see below). Two sculptured heads (Fig. 11), and two depictions of fish on the walls, suggest a

[11] This Ottoman-period house served as a hostel named "House Becky" in the 1970s.



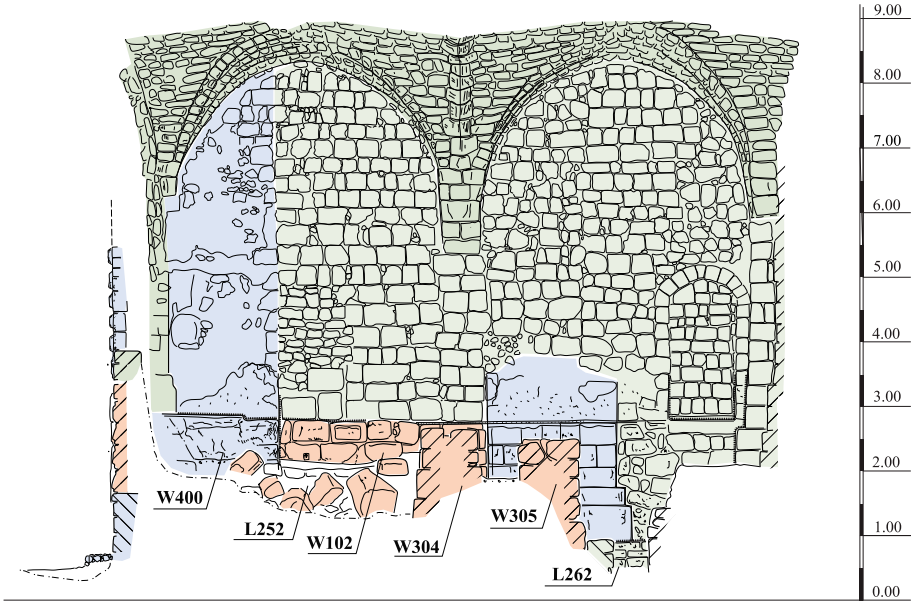


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Fig 9. House Becky, Genoese Quarter fortifications integrated into an Ottoman building, plan and sections (drafting: Rivka Mishayev).

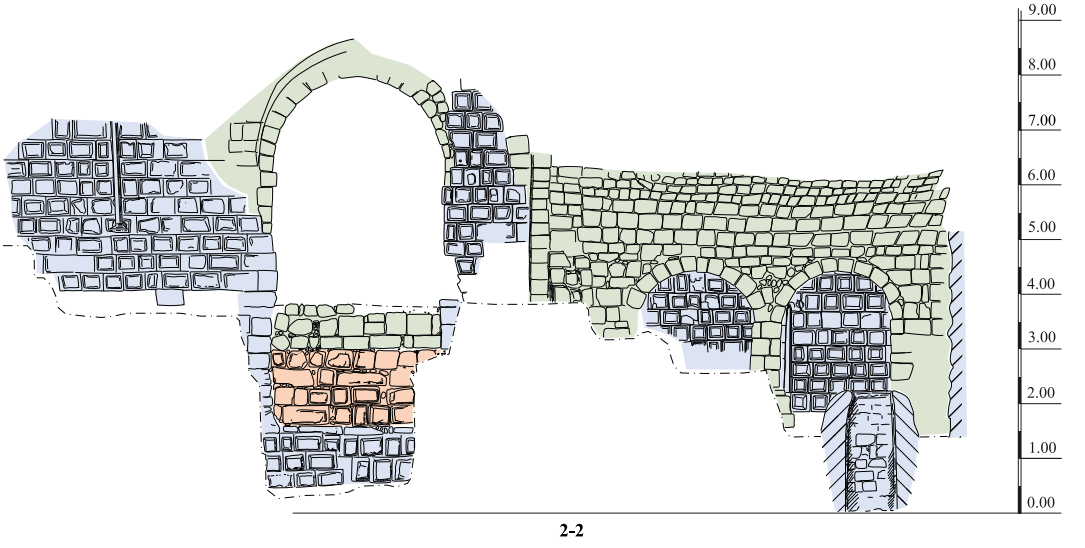

Fig 9. (cont.).

Fig. 10. House Becky. The southern wall of the Ottoman-period halls, built with bossed ashlars, looking south (photogrammetry: Michael Peleg and Alexander Wiegmann).

Fig. 11. Sculptured heads in secondary use in the Ottoman-period northeastern wall (photography: Eliezer Stern).

a

b

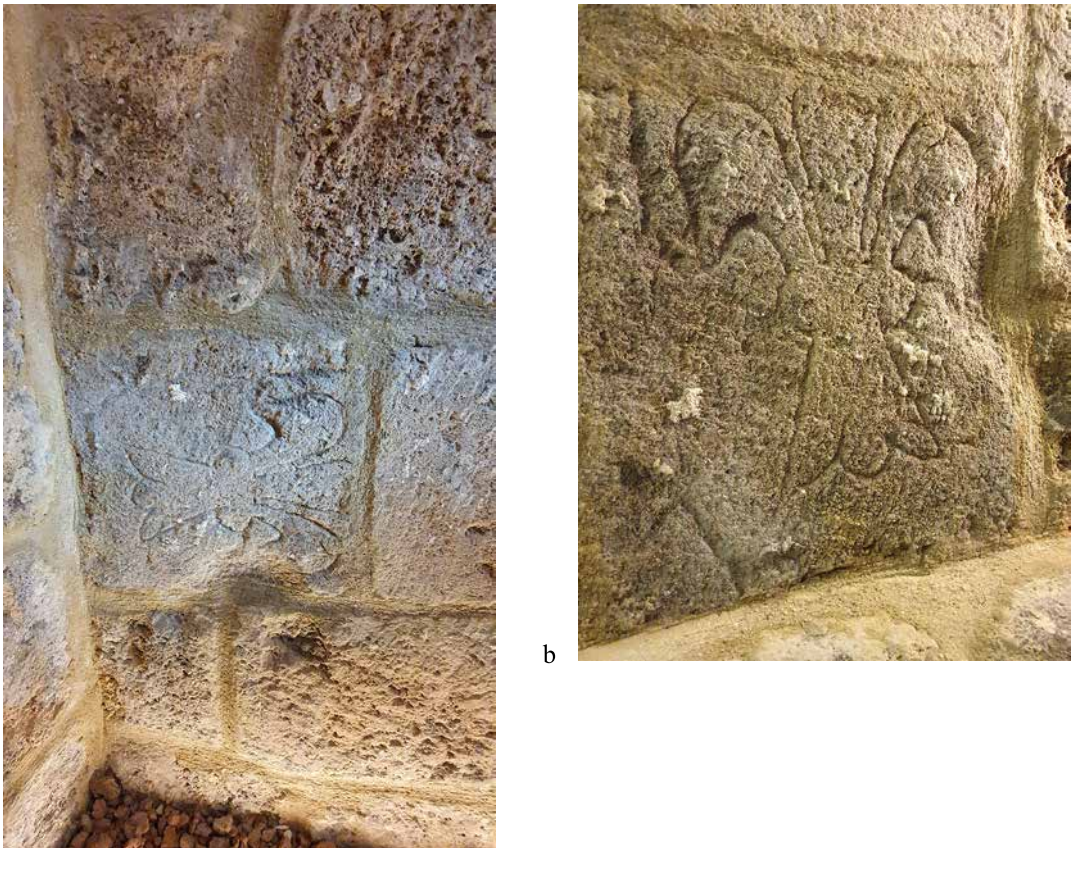

Fig. 12. (a) An ashlar with a carved fleur-de-lis in secondary use in the Ottoman eastern wall and (b) detail thereof (photography: Eliezer Stern).

Crusader date for the building (Kedar and Stern E. 1995:106–109, Figs. 9–12).[12] An ashlar carved with a fleur-de-lis was later identified, apparently in secondary use (Fig. 12).

Following Kedar and Stern's survey, two excavations in 2007 and 2009 (c. 30 sq m) were conducted in the southern hall of House Becky, on the presumed axis of the Covered Street (Fig. 13).[13] This axis was reconstructed by analyzing the building phases discerned within the existing eastern wall of the Ottoman building, where the remains of two corners of two massive, north–south walls constructed of well-hewn ashlars, were identified as the perimeter walls of the now-blocked Covered Street (Figs. 9: Section 1–1; 14, 15). Beneath a series of Ottoman floors and fills, at a depth of 3 m below the modern floor, a levelled layer with low walls covered large ashlars in a collapsed state (Figs. 16, 17). This collapse, dated by pottery to the thirteenth century, leaned against the lower segment of a blocking wall on the axis of the Covered Street (Fig. 9: Section 1–1).[14] Following an analysis of the stratigraphic data and the existing walls, it was evident that the eastern wall of the large Ottoman vaulted chamber was founded atop the Crusader destruction level, integrating the Crusader-period walls of the Covered Street. The east–west axis of the passage was blocked again during the Ottoman period in a slightly different alignment, above the Crusader-period blocking (Figs. 18, 19; Benente et al. 2009–2010; Stern E.J et al. 2011).

In 2015 and 2018, two additional excavations were conducted in House Becky (Stern E.J., Benente and Stern E. 2017; Stern E., Stern E.J. and Benente 2023).[15] After removing an upper fill containing twentieth-century debris in the western hall (Fig. 20), it became evident that the bossed ashlar wall was in fact of Crusader date, almost entirely integrated into the later eighteenth-century building.[16] Moreover, an arrow slit blocked with plaster was detected and cleaned. This bossed ashlar wall, oriented east–west, was clearly the continuation of the perimeter wall (Fig. 6:4; see below) attributed by Kesten to the corner building of the Genoese Quarter. This defense wall was cut and interrupted during the Ottoman period by an arched passage between two halls (Figs. 9: Section 1–1; 10; 21).

In 2015, a probe (3.0 × 3.5 m) was excavated at the center of the passage, north of the Crusader perimeter ashlar wall. A monumental, Crusader-period gate (c. 3 m wide) was

[12] As a result of the 2007 excavation at this site (described below) it can be said with a high degree of certainty that if these sculptured heads date to the Crusader periods, they were inserted in Ottoman walls in a secondary use. The date of the carved fish remains unknown.

[13] These first two excavations (November 2007 and December 2009) were conducted on behalf of the University of Genoa and the Israel Antiquities Authority.

[14] This blocking should be dated before the collapse, within the Crusader period. It remains uncertain if the construction of the small walls built above the levelling of the collapse should be dated to the end of the thirteenth century, while rebuilding the destroyed Genoese Quarter, or to the Ottoman period, when the site was reoccupied.

[15] The salvage excavations of August 2015 and April 2018 were financed by the Old Acre Development Company and conducted on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority before transforming the building into a visitors' center for the nearby RAMHAL [=Rabbi Moshe Hayim Luzzatto] synagogue.

[16] Initially it was surmised that this was an Ottoman building reusing Crusader-period bossed ashlars.

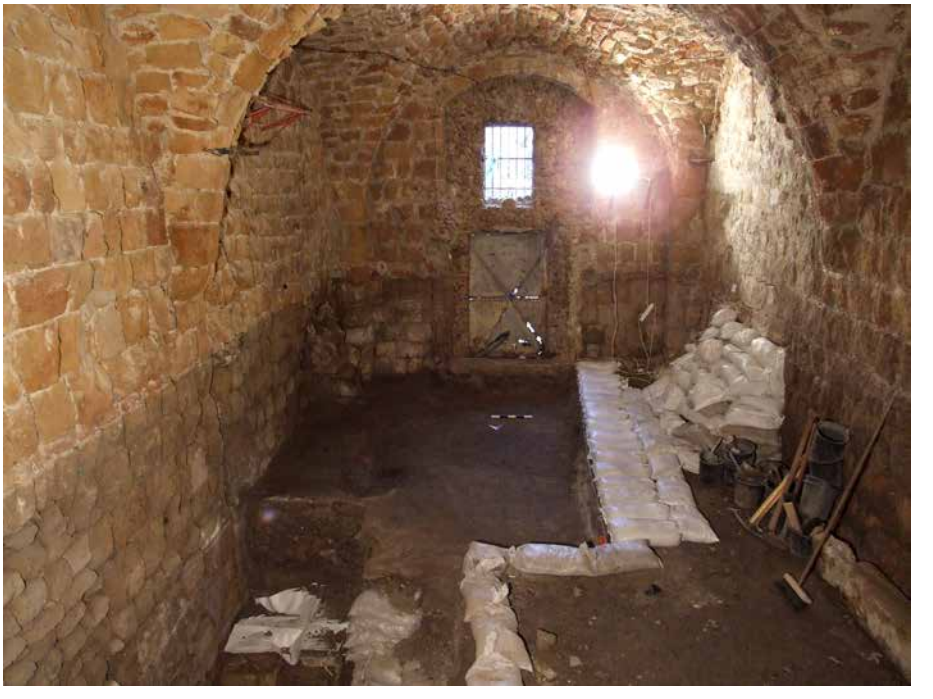

Fig. 13. House Becky (Season 2009), looking south
(photography: Fabrizio Benente).

Fig. 14. House Becky (Season 2009), looking south; note the blocking of the Covered Street incorporated in the Ottoman wall (photography: Fabrizio Benente).

Fig. 15. House Becky, the eastern wall of the Ottoman-period building, looking east (photogrammetry: Michael Peleg and Alexander Wiegmann).

Fig. 16. House Becky (Season 2009), small walls covering large collapsed ashlars, looking south (photography: Fabrizio Benente).

Fig. 17. House Becky (Season 2009), small walls covering large collapsed ashlars, looking north (photography: Fabrizio Benente).

Fig. 18. House Becky (Season 2009), blocking of the Covered Street, looking east; note the two lower courses, in a slightly different alignment from the Crusader period, and the upper Ottoman courses (photography: Fabrizio Benente).

Fig. 19. House Becky (Season 2009), close up of the blocking of the Covered Street, looking east (photography: Fabrizio Benente).

Fig. 20. House Becky (Season 2015), looking northeast (photography: Edna J. Stern).

uncovered, subsequently blocked by ashlars in secondary use (Figs. 10, 21, 22; Stern E.J, Benente and Stern E. 2017).

In 2018, the excavated area was enlarged, extending to the entire hall partially excavated in 2007/2009 (Area A; Fig. 23) and to the hall to the west of the 2015 excavation (Area B; Fig. 24). In Area A, several Crusader-period elements were exposed beneath Ottoman-period floors and fills. In the northernmost part of Area A, a vault of a Crusader-period cesspit was found, reused as a well in the Ottoman period. Beyond this, a collapse was exposed, containing well-dressed ashlars, some very large (1.4 × 0.4 m). This collapse clearly occurred after the closure of the street, and it is possible that the large ashlars were in fact part of a lintel above the arch of the monumental gate (see above). The walls of the Crusader-period monumental gate inclined to the south, hewn in the Ottoman period to create a square hall (Fig. 25).

The main find in Area B was a thirteenth-century plastered floor (Fig. 26), later cut to insert an ashlar-built well (Fig. 27). At a subsequent stage, this well was deliberately filled with sea sand containing the bone remains of a small donkey (*equus asinus*) and two donkey

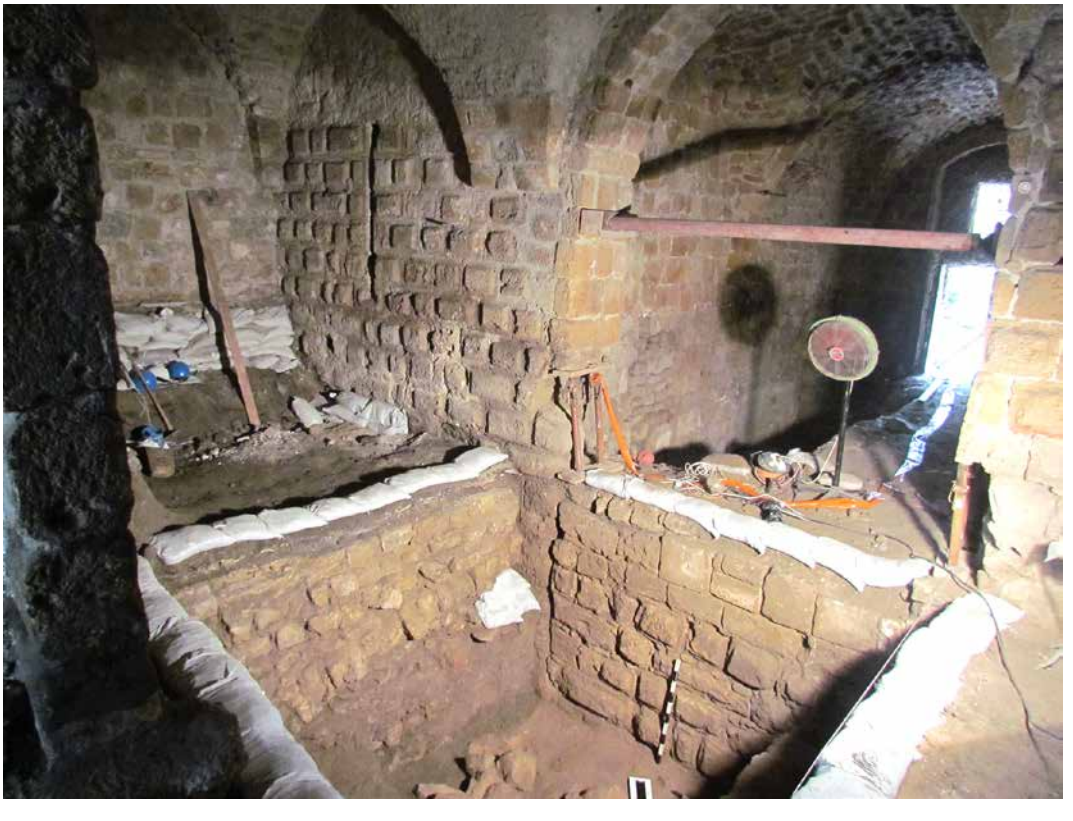

Fig. 21. House Becky (Season 2015), the Crusader wall with an arrow slit to the left, and the blocked gate and the Ottoman period passage arch to the right, looking southeast (photography: Fabrizio Benente).

Fig. 22. House Becky (Season 2015), the blocked Crusader gate with reused ashlars, looking south (photography: Fabrizio Benente).

Fig. 23. House Becky (Season 2018), Area A, looking north (photography: Eliezer Stern).

Fig. 24. House Becky (Season 2018). Area B, looking west
(photography: Fabrizio Benente).

Fig. 25. House Becky (Season 2018), Area A, looking west; the authors are standing on the hewn Crusader-period monumental access gate with inclining walls.

Fig. 26 House Becky (Season 2018), Area B, a thirteenth-century plastered floor, looking south (photography: Fabrizio Benente).

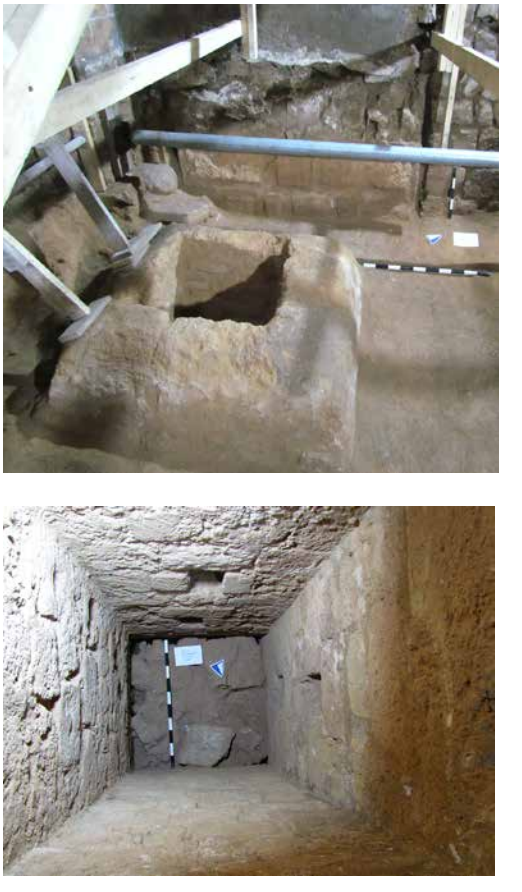

Fig. 27. House Becky (Season 2018), Area B, a well built of ashlars, cutting into the plastered floor: (a) looking west (b) interior (photography: Fabrizio Benente).

shoes.[17] The plastered floor was interpreted as an open courtyard. The southern wall of the Ottoman structure was built directly over it, utilizing the continuation of the Crusader bossed ashlar wall. Upon removal of fieldstones that filled the constructive arches serving as foundations of the Ottoman structure, the continuation of the bossed ashlar wall was discovered, in which another arrow slit was discerned (Fig. 28).[18] Upon removing plaster and debris from the western wall of the eighteenth-century Ottoman structure, a corner of

[17] Our thanks to Zohar Turgeman Yaffe, for examining the bones, and to Joppe Gosker, for examining the shoes.

[18] The excavation was accompanied by engineer Yaacov Schaffer, who was involved not only in the safety aspects of this excavation but also in archaeological aspects, following his ongoing work in ‘Akko since the late 1980s. Therefore, he contributed much to this excavation. It was he who initiated and supervised the clearing of the constructive arches, despite constructional difficulties, to discover whether the Crusader-period fortified wall was preserved in this segment as well.

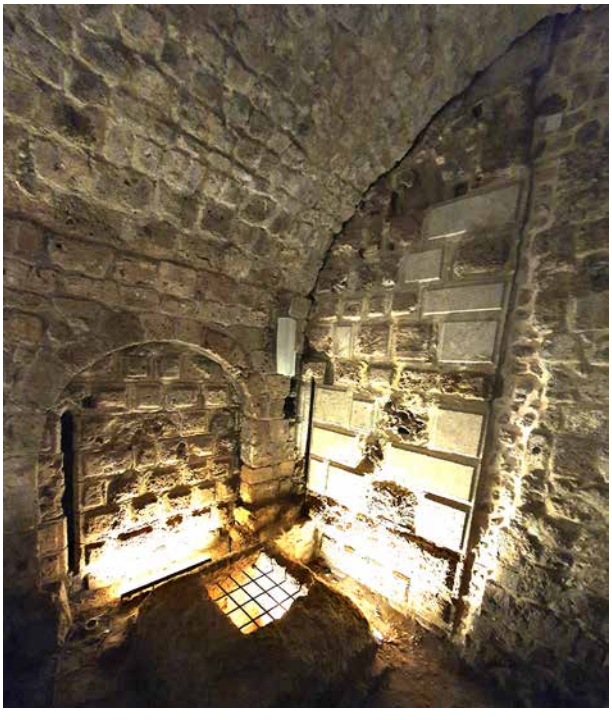

Fig. 28. House Becky (Season 2018), Area B, after reconstruction, looking southwest; to left—the bossed Crusader-period wall with an arrow slit, to right—the tower incorporated within the Ottoman structure and the well (photography: Eliezer Stern).

a Crusader tower was discovered, projecting 2.5 m from the fortified wall with yet another arrow slit. The two arrow slits found here are on a lower level than the one found west of the gate, indicating two levels of arrow slits. These impressive remains were incorporated in the Ottoman-period structure (Stern E., Stern E.J. and Benente 2023).

Building 52 (Figs. 6:4; 8). Further east, the eastern part of the Covered Street consists of a vaulted building—today housing the Sima‘an Brothers restaurant—that abuts Market Street (Kedar and Stern 1995:106, Plan 2). As suggested by Kesten and Jacoby (1979: Fig. 4, n. 21), this seems to be the corner house marking the end of the Genoese Quarter. Kesten mentioned that this wall was thick, with three large defensive niches accommodating arrow slits that resemble those in Building 44. Furthermore, he noted that this structure was situated in a strategic position of the Genoese Quarter (Kedar and Stern E. 1995:109, Fig. 13). The defensive niches (2.2 × 1.6 m) are probably preserved in the restaurant; however, today the walls are covered with cladding imitating ashlars (Figs. 29, 30). The walls of the 10.8 × 12.8 m structure are whitewashed, and it seems that only the stones of the vault are

Fig. 29. Building 52, the two western defensive niches, looking north (photography: E.J. Stern).

Fig. 30. Building 52, the eastern defensive niche, looking southwest (photography: E.J. Stern).

original.[19] Apart from the niches, it is impossible to date the wall segments, as they may be Crusader or later Ottoman-period additions.

Other Remains of the Genoese Quarter

The RAMHAL Synagogue (Fig. 6:5). In the late 1980s, while conducting restoration works in the RAMHAL Synagogue, immediately to the south of House Becky (Fig. 6:3), a threshold and wall remains were exposed, dated by pottery to the thirteenth century. These remains apparently belonged to a residential building in proximity to the Genoese Covered Street.[20]

Zeituni Square (Fig. 6:6). A salvage excavation in Zeituni Square, to the north of House Becky (Fig. 5:3), exposed the remains of a small underground north–south tunnel, two walls and a well, all dating to the Crusader period (Tatcher 1998). The underground tunnel is similar to that found in the Hospitaller compound and other locations in Crusader Acre, comprising part of a sophisticated system of subterranean tunnels (Syon, Stern E. and Mitchell, in press). This area was probably a continuation of the courtyard excavated in House Becky Area B (see above).

Genoa Square (Fig. 6:7). A small salvage excavation was conducted in the area known as Genoa Square, in the western part of the Old City, identified with the western entrance to the Crusader-period Genoese Quarter (Stern E. 1999). The Crusader-period remains included an ashlar-built wall and two floors, one plastered and extending east of the wall and the other paved with stone slabs and extending west of the wall. Artifacts, mainly ceramics, clearly dating to the thirteenth century, were found beneath these floors. It has been suggested that the stone paving was a street, and the plastered floor was an open courtyard, which probably led to the Genoese Quarter to their west.

Connecting the Dots: Reconstructing the Fortified Northern Perimeter of the Genoese Quarter

The survey and excavations carried out along the course of what was identified previously as the Covered Street—the *ruga cooperta* mentioned in the 1249 Genoese inventory—allow for a reconstruction of the northern fortification of Acre's Genoese Quarter during the Crusader period. The fortified gate, and the projecting tower with two levels of arrow slits, indicate that the vaulted passageway served both military and commercial functions. While the northern wall with the arrow slits was intended as defense, the southern side of the street

[19] We would like to thank Romeo Sima'an, owner of the restaurant, for allowing us to measure the building and for elaborating on the various operations the building underwent when the restaurant was enlarged, including the removal of an earth fill (November 13,2022).

[20] The restoration was carried out under archeological inspection by Eliezer Stern, on behalf of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums (IDAM; today, the IAA).

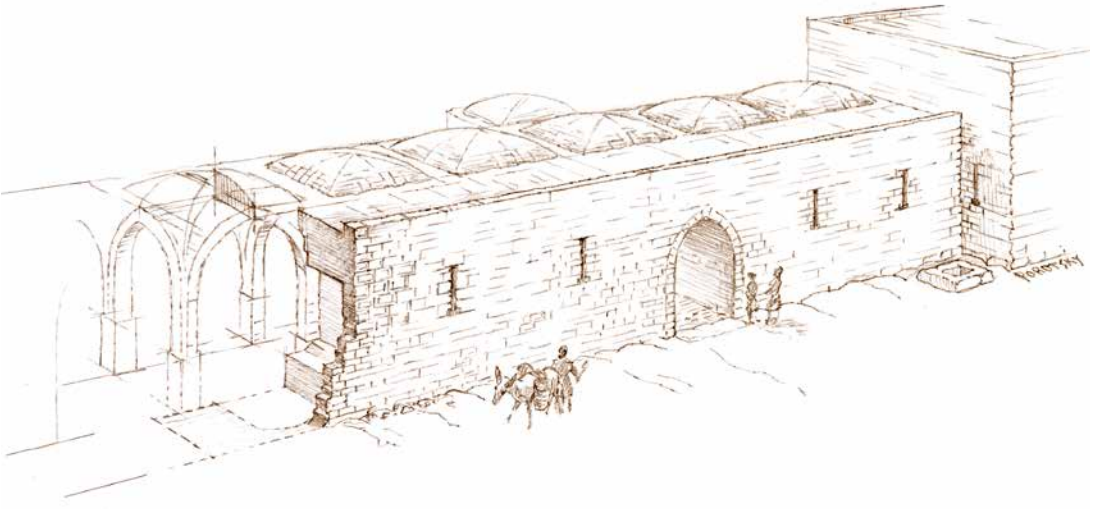

Fig. 31. Artist's illustration of the Genoese Quarter fortification in House Becky and Building 52 (drafting: Dov Porotsky).

housed buildings and shops. The northern wall was constructed in a manner similar to the curtain walls of castles, which featured a supporting vault that enclosed the castle's interior and served multiple purposes, such as a living space and storage (Boas 2006:173). Similarly, the vaulted passageway may have served as a commercial street during peaceful periods, with tables or benches for displaying merchandise. Also, the vault could have supported a walkway providing access to another row of arrow slits and/or crenellations facing north, thus providing an additional layer of defense.[21] The boundary wall of the Genoese quarter that has been fortified with niches containing arrow slits and a square tower is quite similar to the fortification of the Crusader Stown of Caesarea (Mesqui 2014:122–126, Figs. 138–142). The excavations brought to light the extent of the military function, showing that the Genoese Commune had a well-fortified quarter within the walled city of the thirteenth century. This is the first evidence of a thirteenth-century intra-mural fortification.

The excavations revealed that the northern access to the Genoese Quarter was through a monumental gate leading from an open public area to a small square and onto the Covered Street (Fig. 31).[22] From this point, visitors could turn east, and walk a short distance toward Market Street and the port, or west and pass through most of the Genoese Quarter, all the way to the Church of St. Laurence. The alignment of the defensive elements indicates that

[21] We would like to thank the anonymous reader for his suggestions regarding the interpretation of the vaulted passageway; however, the full interpretation is ours.

[22] The reconstruction in Fig. 31 is based on a sketch by Yaacov Schaffer, a section published by Shotten-Hallel (2017: Fig. 5) and a reconstruction by Yael Itzkin.

the monumental gate was well-protected. Three arrow slits were inserted in the northern fortified wall to its east, and a projecting defensive tower and two arrow slits to its west. The construction technique and the masonry style of the tower are similar to those of the northern wall, indicating that they were contemporary. The north face of the tower was later incorporated into the wall of the Ottoman building; therefore, it is not possible to reconstruct the original width of the tower and its height, or the possible continuation of the defensive wall. Based on the surviving defensive elements, one may assume that at least two additional arrow slits were inserted along the defensive line between the gate and the one just before the tower.[23] Also, it is possible that a similar projecting tower existed to the east. This would create a well-secured military layout with vantage points covering most of the area outside the northern gate and along the fortified wall.

In times of peace, the towers could have been manned by guards, who overlooked and controlled those entering the Genoese Quarter; in times of conflict, they could serve as combat outposts. The series of arrow slits every 1.5–2.0 m would further enable the Genoese archers to gain strategic control, protecting the vulnerable open space from enemy attack.

Given the width of the entrance jambs of the monumental gate in House Becky (Figs. 9; 25), it seems that the northern fortified wall was approximately 3 m wide. Kesten (1993:36) has also stated that the walls of the Covered Street were 3 m wide and that the height of the vaulted roof was 4 m. Combining all the data, the total known length of the fortified wall is c. 100 m. The entire northern face of the wall was probably defended by arrow slits, at least twelve of which were documented: four arrow slits in Building 44; two in Building 44a; three in House Becky; and three in Building 52.

The archaeological data therefore considerably contributes to our comprehension of this impressive inner-city defense wall, comprising the northeastern boundary of the Genoese Quarter. The other boundaries of the Genoese Quarter were not recorded in the survey or excavation; however, it would be safe to assume that they were also fortified. The fortification of the Genoese Quarter would provide everyday protection for its residents, artisans and merchants, as well as in times of direct conflict.

Nevertheless, this massive defensive system did not prevent the Genoese defeat. Evidence of their defeat survived in the archaeological record: part of the northern defensive wall was demolished in House Becky; the monumental gate was blocked; the passage on the central axis of the passageway between the internal space within the gate to the east was blocked and sealed; and the passageway was blocked also in building 44a. These blocking activities utilized collapsed bossed ashlars, laid in a relatively orderly manner but lacking mortar. Since the excavation results have shown that already in the second half of the thirteenth century the course of the internal passageway was blocked and abandoned, it is possible to suggest that buildings along this street were also partially destroyed.

[23] This could not be fully established since the Ottoman building wall covers the face of the Crusader defensive wall here.

When and why did the demolition and blocking activities take place? Juxtaposing the information from the written sources with the material finds exposed in the excavations, it is most likely that these activities took place after and due to the Saint Sabas War in Crusader Acre (1256–1258). The written sources vividly describe the defeat of the Genoese and their expulsion from the city by the Venetians, which resulted in the partial destruction and the subsequent abandonment of the Genoese Quarter. The new borders of the Venetian Quarter are mentioned in a document dated 1260, which renders the rights of the Venetian Church of St. Mark (San Marco). This document provides a glimpse into the urban landscape of the city, specifically the areas encompassing the Venetian and Genoese Quarters, as well as those of the Provençals and the Hospitallers. It confirms the construction of new walls by the Venetians, reusing building materials from the Genoese Quarter, that now face a square or a street "*plateam*" of the Genoese and the Hospitaller Quarters. It also mentions the blocking of gates (*clausurae portarum*; Röhricht 1893:336, doc. 1285; Jacoby 1979:34, 35). These changes are probably tangible evidence of the Saint Sabas War and the subsequent expulsion of the Genoese, resulting in the rearrangement of the quarters and inner passageways in this part of the city.

After a long period of abandonment following the 1291 violent conquest of Acre, from the seventeenth century onward, the general plan of the city was redesigned based on the needs of the new urban organization, such as markets, mosques, palaces, etc. The Ottoman buildings integrated the surviving Crusader-period walls, while their floors were constructed at a higher elevation. The earlier halls were occasionally subdivided; some of their openings blocked. The twentieth-century changes have further altered the urban layout and plan of the buildings. Consequently, the remains of the Genoese Quarter fortifications were concealed by the Ottoman structures.

What Have We Learned and Where Do We Stand Today

The fortification remains of the Genoese Quarter, and their subsequent blocking and destruction, contribute greatly to the study of military architecture and reconstruction of the dramatic events of the Saint Sabas War. The fascinating material remains complement to what was heretofore known only from the textual sources, attesting to the consequences of the Saint Sabas War: the intentional blocking of the gate and the vaulted passageway at various points with reused ashlars; the massive stone collapse; and the filling of the well with remains of a donkey. It seems that the quarter was sealed by blocking the entrances in an orderly manner by the Genoese in the hope of returning.

The significant, costly architectural planning of these autonomous fortified quarters is in line with the economic prosperity enjoyed by the Italian mercantile cities due to maritime trade in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Although such fortifications are mentioned in the textual sources, this is the first time that they were uncovered in archaeological excavations. The remains also shed light on everyday life in Frankish Acre, on its dense urban landscape, the ongoing rivalry between the Italian communes, and on the consequences of war and their influence on the lives of the residents of Acre.

Kesten, who extensively surveyed the Old City of ʻAkko in the 1960s, wrote that (Kesten 1993:37):

> We will not fully understand the plan and design of the Covered Street until it is properly cleared and measured, but it is, beyond question, one of the most interesting sites in the heart of the Old City. Yet only a few people know that it exists. It deserves to be exposed and restored.

His words are still relevant today, as also after the clearing activities and excavations described above, the finds remain scant and fragmentary. Additional archaeological work and an in-depth evaluation of the Ottoman architecture are in need for refining our understanding of the topography, urban layout and military architecture of the period, and for reconstructing the Genoese Quarter. Restoration works are in call too, to allow the opening of at least the fortified wall and the Covered Street to the public.

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