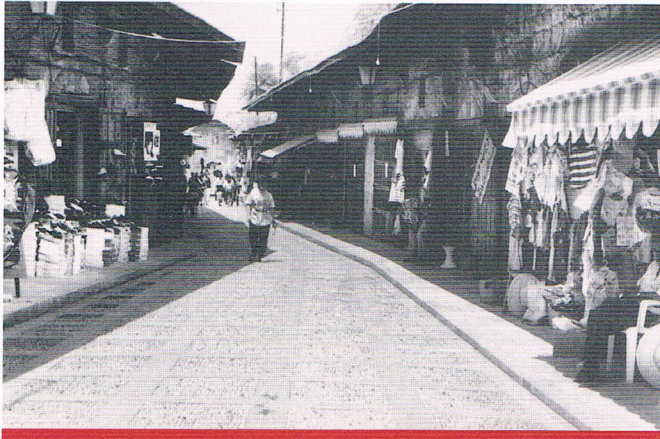




Army soldiers weeding the archaeological site of Byblos



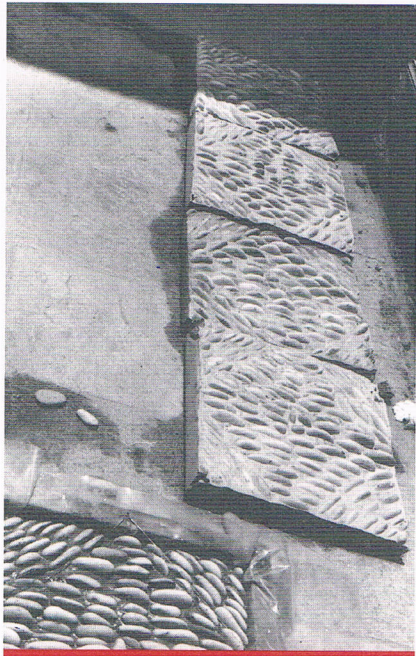
The town of Byblos



The souks



Shingles used as pavement material



Tiles made of shingles

Seventeen years of anarchical urban planning has brought about the disfiguring of historical and archaeological centres in the Lebanon. The new pace of urban development is creating major problems of coherence between residential construction, commercial activity and community services (shops, schools, etc.). To achieve this coherence, continuity in urban planning set within a framework of a supporting administrative infrastructure along with adequate legal and financial expedients, is necessary. To preserve the historical essence of a city (namely the old quarters, souks and monuments) remains a priority of the General Directorate of Antiquities. The November 1933 Antiquities Law, decree number 166LR, article 19, was explicit: "All plans of expansion or improvement of cities must be submitted for approval to the Director of Antiquities and his officially appointed architect. The plan must be drafted by said architect when the area involved includes an archaeological site." Over the years, the law was only partially applied and the ancient fabric of towns and cities was all too often ignored. The Directorate of Antiquities was able to protect a few isolated monuments whilst the Directorate of Urban Development limited its attention to the outline of roads and general plans.

Byblos remains the only example of a city's restoration whereby long-term planning and operational projects were properly carried out. The protection of the archaeological site of Byblos, along with the renovation of its historical town centre, was done by the Directorate of Antiquities between 1970 and 1976. The elaboration of master plans set the guidelines for this political strategy: The decree (number 8645) issued on the 5th February 1962 had already protected the city of Byblos from all urban projects and had divided it into separate zones:

- Excavation site (public domain)
- Port sector (planned reconstruction)
- Repossessed property sector (assigned for demolition)
- Sector set aside for repossession (to extend the excavation site)
- Zone for the protection of the medieval part of the city
- Protection zone for the area immediately surrounding the City Wall
- A preservation order (non aedificandi) placed on the Outer Wall zone
- An additional zone also placed under a preservation order in order to cover any future expansion of the excavation sites.

The restoration project for the city of Byblos was amended by a decree (number 3362) issued on the 26th of May 1972. The change involved the 8th zone which although protected by a preservation order (non aedificandi), actually had a main road behind the ancient souk and right through the excavation

site. It was obvious that the architect in charge of the project at the time had never visited the site. Nevertheless, the compulsory-purchase laws made possible an efficient reorganisation of the Byblos site including the creation of financial reserves and the slowing-down of urban development in these zones. These same compulsory-purchase laws were applicable to all buildings in the vicinity of the port which were henceforth to have their original historical origins restored. Indeed these ongoing projects highlighted the importance of the different aspects of the city.

The scope of the restoration project was widened not only by the nature of the monuments needing renovation but also by the diversity of the epochs they represent (extending from the Neolithic to the 18th century A-D). The Directorate of Antiquities undertook, therefore, the selective rehabilitation of each entity with the objective of upgrading the Byblos site as a whole. Although the ultimate goal was to improve and renovate, a constant preoccupation remains the problem of integrating within this plan, the needs of those who live and work within the city. Assessing optimal solutions for the Byblos site, both in terms of capacity and quality in urban planning, has thus been a priority for the Directorate of Antiquities.

The Souks

In 1975, by ministerial decree, stock-taking and renovations were undertaken of all the retail outlets as part of the decision to relay the paving stones and turn the souks into a pedestrian area.

The City Wall

The renovation of the fortification wall, trapezoidal in shape, was only made possible by the removal of all the de figuring adjacent construction in a perimeter of 10 metres. The walls and towers were reinforced in particular the port tower which underwent extensive restoration. The work was completed with the creation of a 'green area' around the City Wall.

St. John's Cathedral

The stained-glass windows of the Norman cathedral needed replacing. Mr. Gabriel Loire, a master-glazier from Chartres, was put in charge of the project. The colour of the glass was carefully chosen to blend as harmoniously as possible with the prevailing light and patterns consistent with the cathedral's architecture were also chosen for the stained-glass windows, similar to those found on the columns protruding along the walls.

Our Lady of Deliverance Church

This Orthodox Church is of particular interest as characteristic traits of three overlapping epochs are clearly discernible within: the Byzantine altar, the medieval upper sections of the church and the 1805 repairs to its

apse. The church square and its paving stones were also in need of an overhaul.

The Mir Yousef Chehab Mosque

The square-shaped mosque which dates back to the 18th century is characterised by the pendentives supporting its dome and its remarkable stone minbar. In the mosque the walls were stripped of the layers of coated filler. On the exterior, a Roman column was discovered after the demolition of an adjacent shop. It was preserved in situ close to the mosque's minaret.

The Saydet Al-Bouabe Chapel

This small chapel built into the side of the City Wall was restored by simply removing all the accumulated extensions built on to its facade. The simplicity of the church's interior is characterised by a crib-like ceiling and a small apse.

The latest renovations to date involve the upkeep of the archaeological site where Maurice Dunand once worked. Due to a shortfall in the number of employees and labourers, the twice or thrice yearly weeding of an area extending over 10 hectares/100,000 square metres, became a problem for the Directorate of Antiquities. For over two months in 1994, the Army worked on weeding the site before it could be reopened to the public. A more permanent solution was sought by spreading the area in nylon sheeting and then covering it with gravel in order to prevent the return of the weeds. Another protective measure was to surround the monolithic monuments of the Temple of the Obelisks with an ironwork fence. A more immediate event is the imminent public opening of the new Museum of Fish Fossils whilst a Natural History Museum is also being planned.

Byblos is only one example in the beginning of a new effort to preserve Lebanese historical sites born out of a common concern to protect a unique national heritage. Jounieh, Tripoli and Sidon, to name but a few, have already expressed their interest in reclaiming their heritage and the renovated souks of Souk Mikael, which we discuss at length in the forthcoming issue of the newsletter, are a successful exercise in urban redevelopment policy.



Umayyad Mosque in Baalbeck, General view



Umayyad Mosque in Baalbeck, Hypostyle hall