



Star Street

By Enas Shraideh Marzouqa

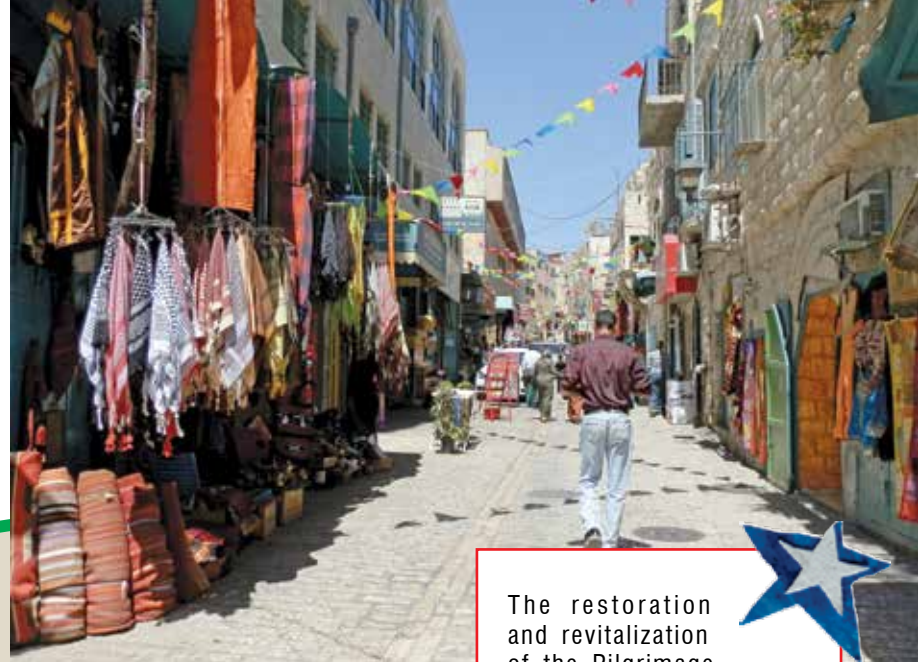


Star Street is a significant historical street in Bethlehem. Leading to the Church of the Nativity, it constitutes the eastern end of the traditional Pilgrimage Route from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and is believed to be the way by which Mary and Joseph reached Nativity Grotto. To commemorate this happening, all Christmas processions follow this street on their way to the Church of the Nativity.

Star Street is enriched by cultural and religious sites such as the Wells of King David, the Salesian Church and Monastery, the Nativity Museum, the Greek Rourm Catholic Melkite Church, the Old Gate of Bethlehem (Qos Al-Zarrara, the oldest and official gate to the town), the *Hosh* Al-Syrian, the Baituna Al-Talhami Folklore Museum, the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab Mosque, and finally Manger Square and the Church of the Nativity. Further significant historical and religious attractions along this route are in the urban fabric and the architectural and historical features of buildings that date back to the Ottoman period, mainly the nineteenth and twentieth century. Star Street reflects both the authenticity and the rapid change in the socio-economic situation of Bethlehem as it has evolved over the last two centuries.

Current Condition of the Street and Revitalization Project

In 2012, the Pilgrimage Route was inscribed on the World Heritage List due to the significant and breathtaking architectural style of the buildings along the route that testify to the physical heritage of the Palestinians. But most of the eighty-eight commercial shops along Star Street are currently closed and neglected by their owners. This



Star Street, Bethlehem. Photo courtesy of VisitPalestine.com.

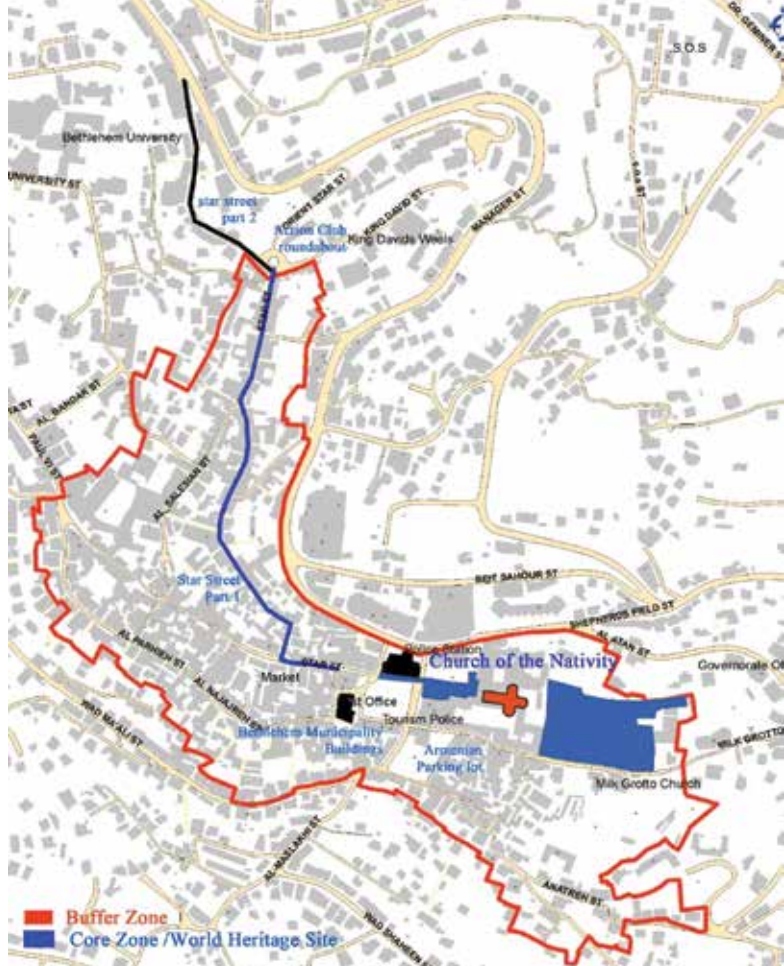
development began with the outbreak of the second Intifada at the end of the year 2000, which had a severely adverse impact on the infrastructure and the urban fabric of the historic town, and was further exacerbated by the current economic crisis. As a result, most of the shop owners along Star Street closed their property to invest in other places, a development that has converted Star Street into a ghost street. Today, it is merely a road that lets vehicles reach their destinations and allows for inadequate parking.

Star Street needs an urgent intervention in order to preserve its Palestinian Cultural Heritage resources, protect its identity, and improve the quality of life for the Palestinian people - and Bethlehem Municipality is working diligently and in cooperation with all the stakeholders involved towards the revitalization and preservation of this Pilgrimage Route. The restoration and revival of the street will provide benefits for both the local community and tourists. The main idea of the project revolves around the stimulation of tourism: hoping to increase the time they spend inside the heritage town

The restoration and revitalization of the Pilgrimage Route involves a series of interventions to preserve the physical attributes of the World Heritage Site while developing the social, economic, and cultural environment in order to improve the quality of life for the local population.

Modern interventions that adapt this site to the needs of today's living standards aim to simultaneously ensure the protection of the tangible and intangible heritage ideals of the historic landscape and the reviving of the values that Star Street embodies.

while simultaneously aiming to revive other interesting sites that exist within walking distance of the Church of the Nativity. It strives to involve locals and encourages them to reopen their neglected property in order to convert the street into a place vibrant with activities and relevant facilities. The project hopes to optimize the current condition of the street and to boost the flow of foreign cash into the city to stimulate the local economy and benefit the livelihoods of Bethlehem residents.



Map of the World Heritage Site.

The Russian Federation has pledged a total budget of the equivalent of four million dollars over the duration of two years to address cultural heritage development at the levels of implementation of construction, repair and revitalization work, raising of public awareness, research, and training. The objectives of the project include

- Involving the local community, as the major constituents of the heritage community, in the revitalization of the street and encouraging them to reopen the closed stores along the world heritage site.
- Enhancing the economic condition for the local community.
- Improving the aesthetic aspect of the street.

- Enhancing a sense of place and belonging.
- Increasing accessibility for pilgrims.
- Investing in cultural heritage resources.

Thus, the activities of the project encompass the rehabilitation and revitalization of the physical conditions of Star Street while avoiding adverse impact on the outstanding universal value of the site.

Enas Shraideh Marzouqa is an architect working for the Bethlehem Municipality as a Cultural Heritage Engineer. Enas graduated from Al-Najah National University in Nablus, Palestine, and has a special interest in art and photography of historical places.