

Local Identity: The language of the Traditional Dwelling in Latakia.

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Abstract:

The city of Latakia has a distinct spatial and cultural identity that is formed through the interaction of individuals with the surrounding environment, The urban and architectural fabric of the Old City is considered one of the pillars of local identity, similar in its general context to other cities on the Syrian coast, but it has unique characteristics. This research project defines the local identity of the city of Latakia by identifying types of basic traditional dwelling and understanding the language of traditional dwellings, based on literature review, field visits, aerial photographs, and cadastral maps. This study shows that courtyards dwellings are considered the main prototype of habitation in the city of Latakia; they meet the environmental and social needs of the population. It is recommended that the architectural identity is not neglected and should be used in shaping future architecture.

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1. Introduction

Traditional architectural culture was developed by the simple architects, who had spontaneous creative abilities, they used their arms, hands, fingers and threads to measure distances and diameters of circles, based on their intuition and social and religious affiliations. They did not depend on theories or textbooks, their accumulated experiences and inventions formed a way of thinking and a school followed by subsequent generations of architects. Simple non-architect people also played an important role in shaping the traditional architectural culture; they adopted the principle of experimentation, right and wrong. They used the surrounding natural components. Such architectural practices resulted in an architectural language, this language has unique symbols influenced by surrounding environment and with strong relationship to local customs, traditions and cultural and spiritual values. These symbols can be passed on to future generations and can be changed to reflect the changing needs of society.

The city of Latakia, like other cities, has distinct spatial and cultural identity that is formed through the interaction of individuals with the surrounding environment. Traditions and customs as well as distinct visual properties played essential part in forging the city's identity. Furthermore, the urban and architectural fabric of the Old City is considered one of the important characteristics of the local identity, which is similar in its general context to other cities of the Syrian coast, but it has unique characteristics that distinguish it from others.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research concept

Historically, the Arab region was subjected to both political and social subordination, as a result, architecture deviated from its local path, lost its originality and character and influenced massively by western architectural styles that were seen to be easier to implement and utilize. This strange architectural invasion changed the character of the city, so it lacked identity and character and detached from its roots, environment and inhabitants.

2.2. Objective of the study

This study aims to identify the residential architectural identity of Latakia by deducing the language of old houses, defining their basic patterns, vocabulary and their design structure within a time frame extending up to 1920.

2.3. Methods

The study was conducted in 2017. Basic dwelling patterns were derived from published literature, Field visits and survey of the old city's cadastral maps. Residential patterns were documented by the corresponding author (researcher) using some of the old photographs, sketches and aerial photographs of the city from official circles.

3. Latakia

The city of Latakia lies in a natural peninsula on the northwestern coast of Syria and on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean (fig.1). It is surrounded by hills, orchards and villages, rich in agricultural land. It was built on the ruins of Ramita in 290 BC and was ruled by the Romans, the Arabs, the Crusaders, the Mamluks and then the Turks after their seizure of location Syria in 1516 (Al-Hakim, Y.1991).The population was 3,000 until the start of World War 1, three quarters of whom were Muslims and the other quarter were Christians. Due to its location and proximity to the Mediterranean Sea, it enjoys a moderate Mediterranean climate, which makes it different from the nearby mountainous areas. It

is characterized by its moderate winter, abundant rain (600-1000 mm a year), and moderate summer temperatures ranging from (25-27 C). However, due to the high humidity of more than 70% summer can feel hotter. Its atmosphere is tempered only by the prevailing winds coming from the south and southwest. In spite of multiple earthquakes that struck Latakia before and after the birth of Christ, some of the ancient monuments and buildings are still standing. They were not different in structure and their urban fabric from others in cities of the Levant in the Ottoman period (fig. 2) that, until the twentieth century, kept all the features of the Islamic cities with their dense fabric surrounding the Great Mosque and the central market. The surrounding residential neighborhoods were left with its winding alleys and close neighborhoods with their terraced dwellings. This is illustrated in the scheme of Latakia dating back to 1925 (Ahmad, A.2008).The Old City of Latakia has been divided into more than 17 camps or spots, including: Al-SheikhDaher, Al-Owainah, Al-Qalaa, Al-Salaybah, Al-Sabbaghin, Al-Shihadeen and Beit Al Daya. The real history of the old buildings remains largely unknown due to lack of documented information (Othman, H.1991).



Figure 1: map of Syria



Figure 2: Old urban fabric in Latakia.

4. Architectural language and local identity

The architectural language, like any other language, consists of vocabulary, which is used by architects to communicate and express the details of their work. Such vocabulary was abundant varied and influenced by different users and architects belonging to different environments. To understand the language of architecture, we must comprehend its vocabulary, elements and structures that give the architecture a clear and understandable meaning, so architecture forms a clear personality and character that enables us to link it to a specific place, cultural group, or time period. It is paramount to note that establishing a new architecture in a place requires a full understanding of the language of architecture of that place, with its vocabulary and grammar. More understanding of the architecture language allows us to create different designs. Architects, therefore, differ in their designs and creation depending on the level of their understanding of the architecture language and its vocabulary and grammar. Competent understanding and knowledge of the language and the surrounding environment results in exceptional talented creations reflective of the local culture and environment.

Afif Bahnassi¹ states: "Architecture is an embodied language with spiritual and material connotations, it expresses human and social functions in different ways, similar to any language that has

¹-**Afif Bahnassi:** (1928– 2017) was a Syrian Islamic art historian and museum curator, General Director of Antiquities and Museums in Damascus, Syria. He has authored books such as *The Ancient Syria and His Art* (1987) and *The Art of Islam*,

human and cultural functions. The unity between a language and a culture reflects the identity of the nation. "(Bahnassi, A. 2003).

Modern architecture has been separated from the historical language of local architecture, this language expressed the people. Modern architecture remained without a language or identity. Critics have found that modern architecture has no identity that help people to live in their historical and social environment. Therefore, the voices calling for a return to the original architectural language have been adopted in order to create an innovative architecture that bears the identity of the place and the essence of the past.

In this study, in order to identify the language of architecture in the city of Latakia, the general composition of the ancient historical architecture must be analyzed through studying the residential architecture in Latakia and identifying its vocabulary and the spatial relations that connect their spatial elements to each other.

5. Traditional Dwelling in Latakia

Latakia dwellings were characterised by beauty and elegance, and were built using sandstone and limestone (Bahnassi, A. 2003). The courtyard dwelling has been the dominant residential prototype over hundreds of years. This feature was very common in the Ottoman period. The majority of this prototype was destroyed by natural disasters. the last of which was the earthquake that destroyed a large part of the city of Latakia in 1822. However, the few remaining courtyards, real estate schemes that were developed during the French mandate (cadastral schemes), and aerial images of the city of Latakia (fig. 3), confirm that the courtyard dwelling was the predominant prototype of residential architecture in cities of the Syrian coast (Ahmad, A.2013).



Figure 3: Latakia, Aerial photograph of Sabbaghin area 1930, The figure shows the spread of the courtyards within the urban fabric of the city, (Directorate of Cadastral Affairs).

5.1. Courtyard dwelling in the Syrian coast area - historical study

The dwelling courtyard dates back to the beginning of the seventh millennium BC in the Levant, Anatolia. The courtyard in the Anatolian area was discovered at the site of Catal Huyuk (fig.4), dating back to the Neolithic 7000 BC. It is one of the first agricultural communities, with no streets, consisting of essentially identical houses, adjacent to each other. The interior courtyard is located in between different size houses. This information is based on evidence from archeological exploration consisted of nine level. The houses are accessed by openings in the roof, Courtyards from 15% to 32% of the area of one level. There are many views on the function of these courtyards; some considered them as unspecified areas within the neighborhoods with no specific function and can be used as a garbage collection place, others consider it spaces to ensure air and light traffic or used as workshops. Some have identified the yard as sheep barns. One courtyard is shared by a group of houses that are likely to belong to relatives (Aydin, O; Gasco, G; Certinturk, N. 2014).

The courtyard prototype was found in dwellings dating back to the third and second millennium BC in the cities of Ur and Babylon in Mesopotamia. Dwelling courtyard dwelling was the dominant feature of houses in that period, the rooms surround the courtyard from all sides and have an angled entrance, so the courtyard is not overlooked by the nearby street (fig. 5).Courtyards were also found in houses of Ugarit in 1700 - 1200 BC (fig.6, 7). The courtyard was either centrally located in the middle of the house or on the edge of some houses that overlook the street or placed in the back of other houses (Yon, M; Callot, O.1997).The house of Flavius Seos in the village of Al-Hayyat-Jabal Al-Arab in southern Syria is an example of the Roman-era dwelling built in 578 CE (fig.8). The house consists of thirteen rooms on the ground floor surrounding the courtyard (Ghassan, A. 2006).

As a result, we find that the courtyard dwelling is a prototype in the Syrian coastal area, its importance lies in the fact that it is a unique architecture that proved its authenticity and values in the face of continuous changes affecting both individuals and society, some houses are still inhabited. The courtyard dwelling derived its characteristics from the nature of the place and the land in which it was found to take advantage of available natural materials in a manner that responds to environmental conditions.



Figure4: left-The interior courtyard between the buildings in Catal Huyuk, sixth level, the seventh millennium BC(During, B. 2001).

Figure 5: right- Dwelling plan in Ur.

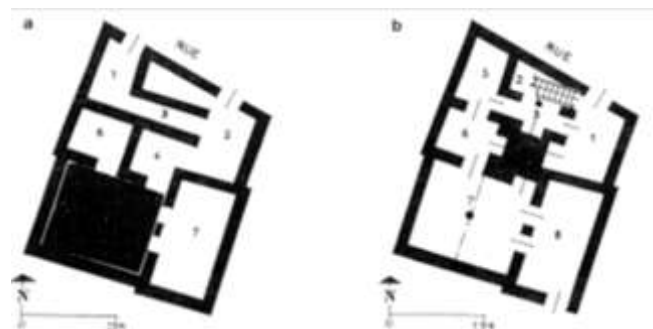


Figure6: Dwelling in Ugarit. a- back yard. b- the same dwelling with the possibility of a central courtyard(Yon, M; Callot, O.1997).

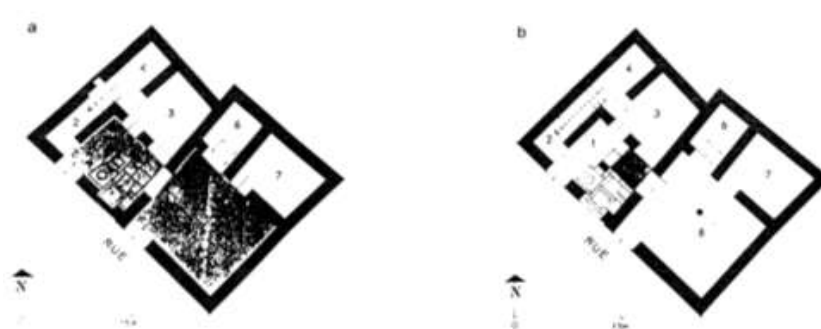


Figure7: Dwelling in Ugarit. a- front yard. B- The same dwelling with the possibility of a central courtyard(Yon, M; Callot, O.1997).



Figure8: The dwelling of Flavius Seos in the village of Al-Hayyat- Jabal Al-Arab, 578 CE(Fisher, G. 2015).

5.2. Dwelling typologies in Latakia

Up till 1920, the courtyard dwelling in Latakia city consisted of two main types: the courtyard dwelling and the central hall dwelling

5.2.1. Courtyard dwelling

It is a house consists of an inner courtyard or a group of courtyards that form a center surrounded by a ring of rooms that have access only towards the courtyard. This arrangement can be either on the floor or on two floors. The courtyard is considered the main source of lighting and ventilation. As houses differ in their size and luxury, some large houses have more than one yard, the spaces surrounding the courtyard vary in size and from a house to another. The ground floor is often used as warehouses and service spaces because of the lack of cellars in the house, a garden is also noticeable and usually located at the back of the house and surrounded by either adjacent buildings or high walls, so it is not overlooked by nearby alleys. These gardens were not uniquely landscaped. In fact, to this day, they are a small orchard of fruit trees and sometimes have a well or a pond for irrigation and to allow better ventilation in order to reduce high humidity (Ahmad, A.2008).

In the City of Latakia, the dwelling consists of a group of spatial features that form spatial relations with other dwelling; these relationships result in special characteristics in which Latakia's dwelling is unique and differ from similar dwellings in other cities (Ahmad, A.2008)These features are (fig. 9):

- **Courtyard:** It is generally defined as the space formed by the placement of a group of spaces consisting of rooms around it. It is spatial space connected to the outer space and does not contain any internal obstacles, directly next to the entrance there is a stone staircase that leads to the first floor.
- **Iwan:** It is a space surrounded by walls on three sides while the fourth opens with a high arch towards the courtyard. The Iwan is, often supported by circular or pointed arches, usually located in the southern side of the courtyard, but it can also be open towards the south, west or east.
- **Riwaq:** It is the most important element, which is located in front of the rooms and opens to the courtyard, it protects the inhabitants of the rains in winter when they move between the residential spaces, many of these Riwaqs are west facing the sea in order to take advantage of the mild summer breeze, often located on two floors. Riwaqs also can be south facing and are so important as they offer the family a shaded space in summer and protect the spaces behind them from the direct sunshine in summer and rain and humidity in winter. In many houses, there are two residential spaces Located behind the Riwaq and are accessed through Riwaq, **together** with the

Riwaq, they form repeated space units in coastal city houses in the 19th century, where this unit can be found on two floors forming a distinctive facade overlooking the courtyard.

- **Rooms:** The rooms are the most important elements of the design that affect the shape and type of the dwelling, located around the courtyard, we can distinguish several forms of this positioning:
 - Rooms around the courtyard located on four sides.
 - Rooms around the courtyard located on three sides.
 - Rooms around the courtyard located on opposite sides or two adjacent sides.
 - Rooms are located around the courtyard from one side only.



Figure 9: Latakia, Bait Al Shuraiqi, Cadastral: Al-Owaina I/1-186. (Ahmad, A.2013).

Notes of Symbol:

1: Entrance. 2: Riwaq. 3: Courtyard. 4, 6, 8, 11, 16, 17: living room. 5, 18: Shop/ carpentry workshop. 7: Iwan. 9, 12: Garden. 10: Vacuum. 13: Corridor. 14: Kitchen. 15: Small Square.

These features can also be arranged frequently on all floors. The identity records of Bait Zureik, Cadastral: Al- Salaybah V/635, Al-Balah Market. refer to a description of the dwelling and its constituent spaces: "*A stone-built property of two floors: Ground floor contains a one-door room on the street used as a coffee shop, living room, firewood storage facility, A hay warehouse, two grain warehouse, and others, two basements, one of which contains a well. The first floor contains ten living rooms, a kitchen, a warehouse, two Iwans, a bathroom, a toilet, a room for firewood storage, a stone staircase and a courtyard, including a wooden staircase.*" (Fig. 10).

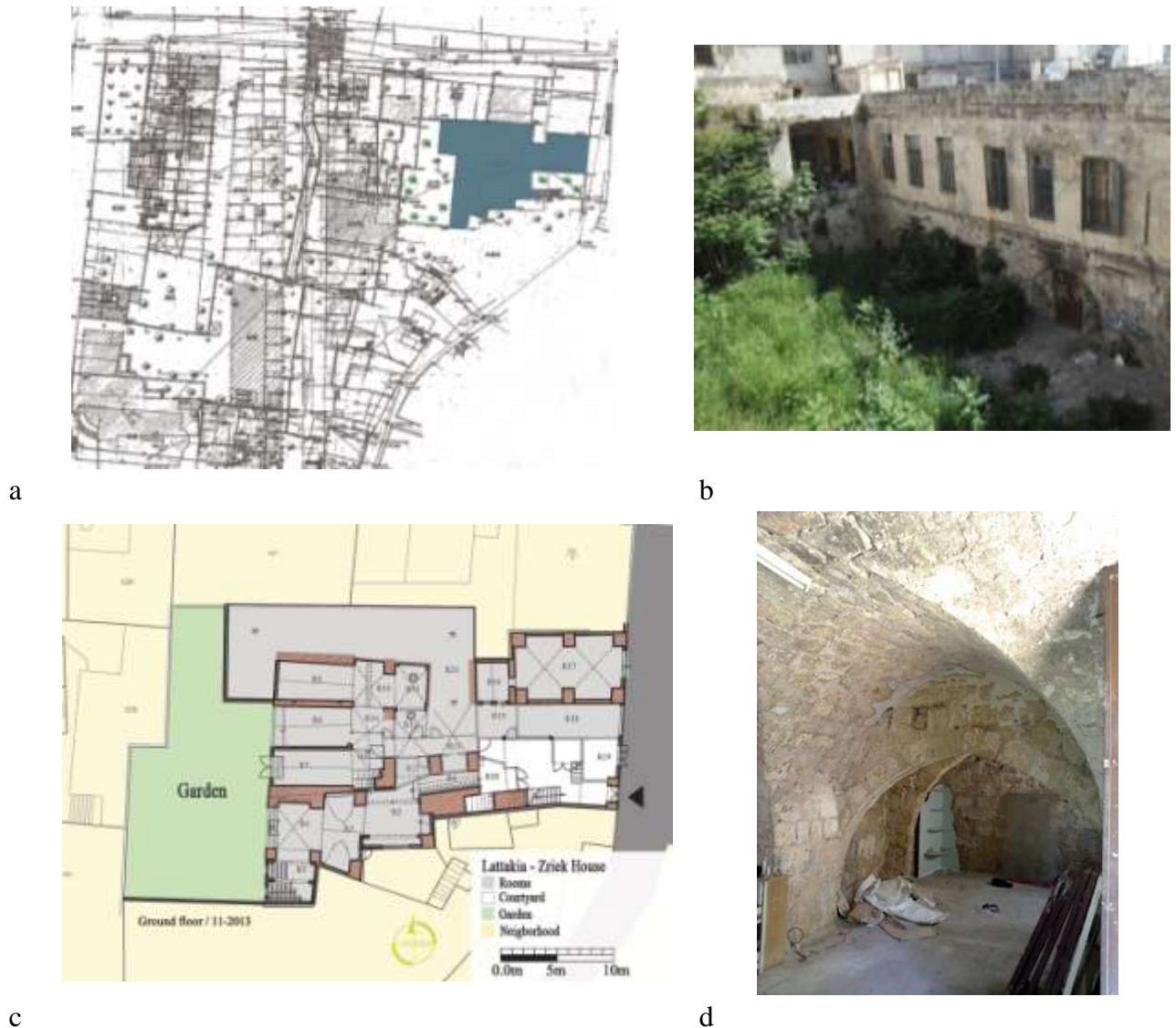


Figure 10: Latakia, Bait Zureik. Al- SalaybahV/635, Al-Balah Market

A: Cadastralscheme. (Salhab, M).

B: Back garden (Karraz, G).

C:Ground floor plan. (Karraz, G).

D: Room No.4 Bait Zureik, (Karraz, G).

The cadastral scheme in the Sheikh-Daher VI, refers to multiple types of courtyard dwelling (fig. 11), The authors note that the real estate No. / 286-237-257 / spaces around the courtyard are located on three sides, U-shaped. While the real estate no. / 184-174-258-270-287 / spaces are located around the courtyard from two sides, adjacent L-shaped. Furthermore, in real estate's no. /183-185-262-260-265-266-286-285-281-255-277/. The spaces are located around the courtyard from opposite sides in parallel fashion. The real estate's no. / 182-214-212-215-263-259-219-220-267-288-280/ show spaces located around the yard from one side only.

As indicated by the cadastral scheme in the area of Al-Owaina I, there are many types of dwelling courtyard (fig.12). For example, in real estate No. /187-176-308-340/, the spaces around the courtyard are completely perpendicular, and the courtyard is the center of the dwelling. The real estate No. / 211-309/, shows the spaces around the courtyard located on three sides, U-shaped. Whereas in real estate No. /208-

210-324-333-338 / the spaces around the courtyard are located on two adjacent sides L- shaped and in the real estate No. /325-330 / spaces are located around the courtyard from one side only.



Figure 11:Latakia, cadastral scheme1930, Sheikh-Daher VI, dwelling typologies (Salhab, M).



Figure 12: Latakia, cadastral scheme 1930, Al-Owaina I, dwelling typologies (Salhab, M).

5.2.2. Central Hall dwelling

The central hall dwelling model (three-arched house) appeared in the middle of the 19th century. This style is found around the eastern shore of the Mediterranean; from Antioch in the north to the coastal Palestinian cities in the south and mainly in the city of Beirut. Syrian inner cities of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Hama amongst others adopted this dwelling. This model became a fundamental symbol of the new local pattern (Davie, M. 2003).

Some architects have conducted a historical study of this heritage pattern and have come up with a set of results; the first result assumes that this style of architecture evolved from the Bronze Age and then was repeated over time and was influenced by features from Venice, this style continued until it reached its known form in the nineteenth century. The second result is based on the principle that this art is developed from the Bedouin simple tent design to the rural house. Nevertheless, the most credible result is that this pattern evolved from courtyard dwelling through roofing of courtyard with tiled roof. Until 1840, however, the dwelling with the courtyard or what is known as Dar was the dominant one in the area, which often includes the Ewan.

The central hall with its simple initial form takes a cube shape and is built with stones with a triangular, triangular, tiled roof. The house consists of two floors; the ground floor consists of a rectangular central hall that opens up directly to the entrance to the house. The rooms are located at opposite sides surrounding the central hall and are not connected with each other. The lounge is also connected through a back door with a garden. The first floor consists of a central lounge, with the rooms arranged in a similar manner as the ground floor and directly overlooking the exterior with three arches.

The cadastral plans in Al-Sheikh Daher VI (fig.11), and Al-Salaybah V (fig.14), refer to the spread of this type of dwelling on the outskirts of the Old City or in the empty real estates, which were built in the late Ottoman period, characterized by their tiled roof (fig. 13) and their backyards. For instance, Bait Abu Saif in Sheikh Daher VII/136, and BaitSubhi Al Taweel in Al-Salaybah V/651.(fig. 14), each property has a separate two-story dwelling; the first floor is accessed by a stone staircase from the backyard. Both floors have a central hall with spaces around.



Figure 13: Latakia, Aerial photograph of Alkalaa area 1930, The figure shows the spread of the central hall dwellings, and the tile roof, (Directorate of Cadastral Affairs).

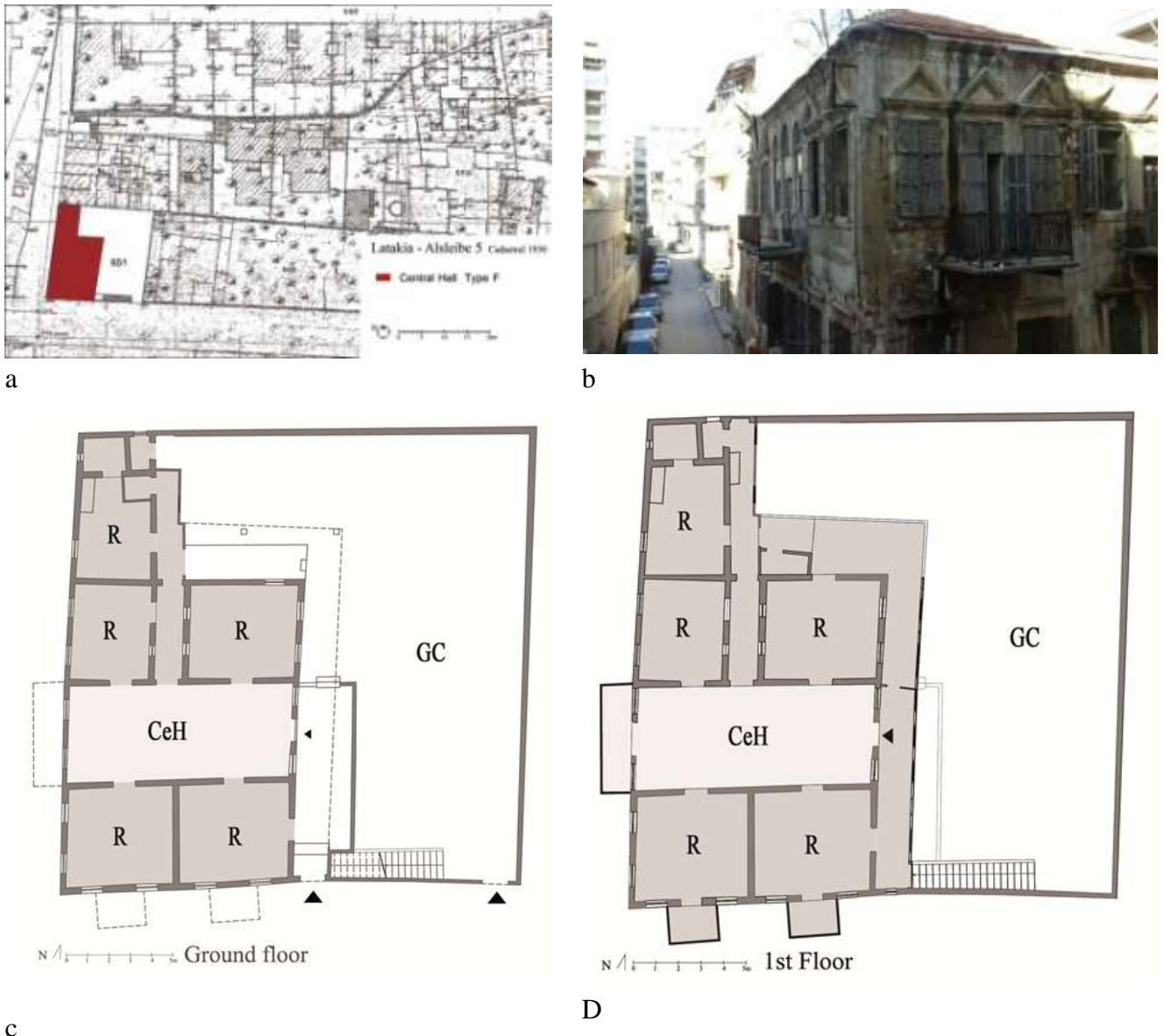


Figure 14: Latakia, , Bait Subhi Al Taweel,Al-Salaybah V/651.

a: The cadastral scheme 1930 (Salhab, M).

b: Southwest housing facade.

c: Ground floor plane.

d: First floor plane.

Notes of Symbol:

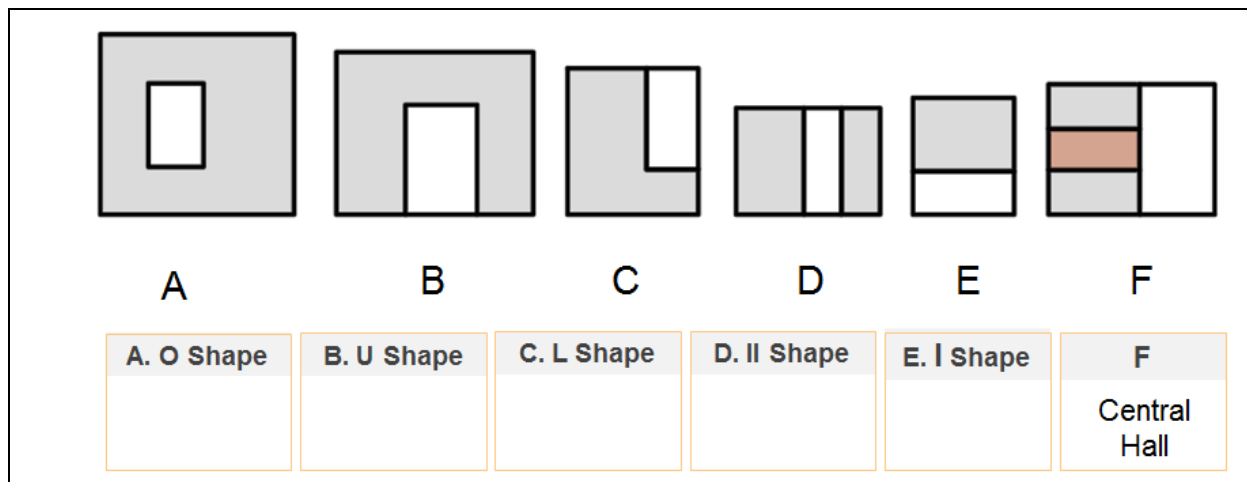
GC: Courtyard. R: Room. 5, CeH: Central-Hall.

6. Classification of old dwellings in Latakia

The authors observe that the main types of the courtyard dwellings are determined according to the courtyard and surrounding space as illustrated in the following table:

Table 1: dwelling courtyard typologies (Salhab, M).

Type	Characteristics	shape
A	Central courtyard with surrounding spaces from all sides.	O- Shape
B	Courtyard with surrounding spaces on three sides.	U- Shape
C	Courtyard with surrounding spaces from two adjacent sides.	L- Shape
D	Courtyard with surrounding spaces on opposite sides.	II- Shape
E	Courtyard with surrounding spaces on one side only.	I- Shape
F	Central hall dwelling.	

**Figure15: Basic dwelling types (Salhab, M).**

7. The language of traditional dwellings in Latakia

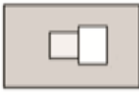
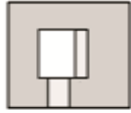



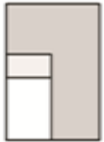





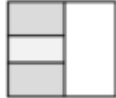

The traditional language of dwelling in the Old City is determined by identifying the main residential typologies, and then analysis of each of the previous types according to their constituent vocabulary, spatial relationships that connect these vocabularies with each other's. Through the field study for the models of traditional dwellings, which still exist in the neighborhood of Latakia, the study sample which was selected included different residential types, with different spaces in different neighborhoods. The vocabulary of the traditional residence consists of: courtyard, rooms, Iwan, Riwaq, entrance, stairs, garden, and the terraces on the upper floors.

The sub-types for each major type were determined by the authors through field visits and literature review, and based on their main constituents, and thus the language of old dwellings in the city of Latakia are determined by thirteen types (table 2):

Table 1: The language of traditional dwellings in Latakia (Salhab, M).

Main type		sub-types	
A	Central courtyard with surrounding spaces from all sides.	A4	A courtyard dwelling with rooms surrounding the courtyard with Iwan.
		A5	A courtyard dwelling with rooms surrounding the courtyard with Iwan and Riwaq.
B	Courtyard with surrounding spaces on three sides Courtyard with surrounding spaces from two adjacent sides	B1	Courtyard with surrounding rooms on three sides.
		B4	Courtyard with surrounding rooms on three sides with Iwan.
C		C1	Courtyard with surrounding spaces from two adjacent sides.
		C2	Courtyard with surrounding spaces from two adjacent sides with Riwaq on one side.
D	Courtyard with surrounding spaces on opposite sides	D1	Courtyard with surrounding spaces on opposite sides.
		D2	Courtyard with surrounding spaces on opposite sides with Iwan.
		D3	Courtyard with surrounding spaces on opposite sides and a Riwaq on opposite sides.
E	Courtyard with surrounding spaces on one side only	E1	Courtyard with surrounding spaces on one side only
		E2	Courtyard with surrounding spaces on one side only with Iwan.
F	.Central hall dwelling	F6	Central hall dwelling with a backyard on the ground floor.
		F7	Central hall dwelling with a front yard on the first floor.

Table 2: The language of the Traditional Dwelling in Latakia- A dwelling Backyard with central Hall (Salhab, M).

Type	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A				A4	5A		
							
B	B1			B4			
							
C	C1	C2					
							
D	D1	D2	D3				
							
E	E1	E2					
							
F						F6	F7
							

8. Conclusions and Suggestions

8.1. Conclusions

This research study indicates the following results:

- 8.1.1.** The courtyard dwelling is a prototype in the city of Latakia, which was found as a result of meeting the environmental, spatial and social needs of the inhabitants. Some of the traditional dwellings still populated until now.
- 8.1.2.** The old dwellings in the city of Latakia are classified according to the plan organization and the special relation among its vocabularies, but not according to the climate and the land's nature. The previous classification didn't consider the chronological order. Thus, the main types of the courtyard dwelling are six while the sub-types are thirteen determined by the spatial relations of the constituent parts of the dwelling.
- 8.1.3.** Latakia has an identity that distinguishes it from other cities. This identity consists of the interaction of the physical dimension, which consists of a natural environment and built environment, with individuals and all associated human behavior, culture, customs, traditions, beliefs and values.

8.1.4. The identity varies from one society to another. Human intervention is the main influence on the place, the environment plays a key role in influencing people.

8.2. Suggestions

The author proposes the following procedures:

8.2.1. Preserving traditional dwellings is essential. It is very important not to demolish them and replace them with buildings that are not connected to the local environment, the author encourages their restoration and periodic maintenance.

8.2.2. Consider traditional housing as an important part of the urban fabric that characterizes the city of Latakia and expresses the identity of the place, and to benefit from its vocabulary in shaping the future architecture.

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