

**Urban Conservation based on the International Cooperation
-A case study of the *Qanawat* south area, Damascus-¹**

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Abstract

Though many historic cities exist in the Middle East and the North Africa, little has been written on the issues about urban conservation in this area, except for some pioneer works². In this discussion paper, I introduce an example of the actual conservation project which has been carried out by JICA in Damascus, capital of Syria. For the target area of the *Qanawat* south, I and Syrian counterparts examined two methods which will be generally available for historic research on heritage buildings and quarters: analysis of documents and field surveys. The results reported to show how they should be used in combination for practical assessment of historical value of heritage buildings and quarters.

The first way of the field survey is at the quarter level. Based on the years of construction shown in the plaques of some monuments in a quarter, it is possible to infer the age and the characteristics of the quarter. The second way is at the house level. Collection of traditional architectural vocabulary and measurement of residential spaces of traditional houses should be carried out. The results of the survey may provide useful guidelines for inhabitants and craftsmen to appreciate the value of traditional houses.

Keywords: *French colonial urbanism, JICA, International cooperation, Gyoji Banshoya, Architectural vocabulary*

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Question

Historic city is a cultural achievement which was gradually formed by inhabitants. In developed countries, conservation of historic city seems generally acknowledged as a method of community development that does not depend on a huge exploitation. On the other hand, no sufficient countermeasures have been taken in developing countries because most of native stakeholders are still interested in development. Here we may focus on so-called international cooperation, but urban conservation for historic cities where inhabitants actually live is still minor major, except for some government-based conservation projects of monumental heritages .

In this discussion paper, I take an example of the conservation project which has been carried out by JICA in Damascus, capital of Syria. Since a Japanese planner *Gyoji Banshoya* (1930-1998) elaborated the master plan of this city in 1968 which is still active today, Japanese international cooperation in Damascus has been continuing as one of the rare cases that Japanese architects and planners are working in the Middle East. The example reported here is the latest technical project “Damascus metropolitan area urban planning and development project”, which started in the September 2009 and will accomplish in the august 2012³. One of

the principal objects of the project is to suggest a conservation plan for a heritage area of *Qanawat* south⁴.

This paper reports the actual working process of the project of which target area is *Qanawat* south. Though the origin of *Qanawat* south dates back to the Roman age, the effort for urban conservation has not been well organized, partly because the area is located outside of so-called the old city registered as the world heritage site. For example, the master plan of 1968 indicated of redistribution of traditional quarters, while some conservation laws have been restricting the regeneration of the area. Moreover, there is not yet any consensus among all the stakeholders about the historical value of the quarter; they still wonder why the area should be conserved and not be freely developed, what and how we should do for the conservation.

What important for this kind of international cooperation project is to promote communication among the stakeholders and make a collaboration work with Syrian counterparts. The purpose of this paper is to examine the research question about which kind of methods and resources are available and significant in order to make suggestions about urban conservation in the area.

1.2. Target area and contents of the paper

The word “*Qanawat* (قنوات)” is the plural of *Qanat* (قناة) that means “channel”. According to Jean Sauvaget, the channel appears already in the age of Roman Empire to express an artificial branch of the *Barada* river. The quarter called *Qanawat* occupies the right bank of the *Barada* river in the southwest side of the old city just outside its wall. The target area called *Qanawat* south is located in the south of the *Bab Srijeh* street, and divided into various quarters called hay (حي) in Arabic: *Qasr Hajjaj*, *Bab Srijeh*, *Bab Jabieh* and *Souk Sinanieh*, but today it is not easy to distinguish their definitive areas.

As indicated above, the definition of the *Qanawat* south area is still vague, so only some fragments of information about these quarters may be used in assessing the historical value and the history itself of the *Qanawat* south area. Also, the historical value of the area depends on the value of individual buildings and residential quarters, and thus detailed field surveys need to be carried out for the assessment to complement literature surveys on its history.

In this paper, the history of the target area is first outlined based on a limited literature survey of readily available resources⁵. Second, some preliminary field survey of the area is reported to show possible approach and methods applicable to suggest a conservation plan based on the communication between Syrian and Japanese collaborators.

2. History of urban formation

In this section, the possibility of literature surveys for clearing the history of the *Qanawat* south is shown introducing some limited resources collected and used here. One of the most reliable sources of information is a set of works by Jean Sauvaget, a French historian and the founder of the Syrian Administration of Art and Archeology (Fig.1).

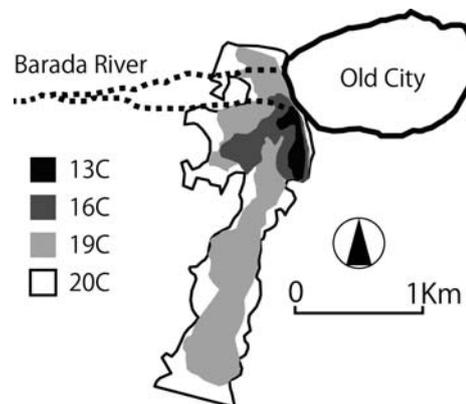


Fig. 1. History of Urban Formation Described by J.Sauvaget⁵⁾

2.1. Urban formation during 13th century

According to Sauvaget, a small quarter was formed centering around a sheep market in front of the *Bab Jabieh* gate in the 13th century. This small quarter of *Bab Jabieh* links the *Souk Midkhat Pacha* of the old city almost directly to the *Qanawat* south area. The *Bab Srige* street extending from the *Bab Jabieh* gate of the old city constitutes the northern border of the *Qanawat* south area, which used to connect to Tyr and all the way to Egypt.

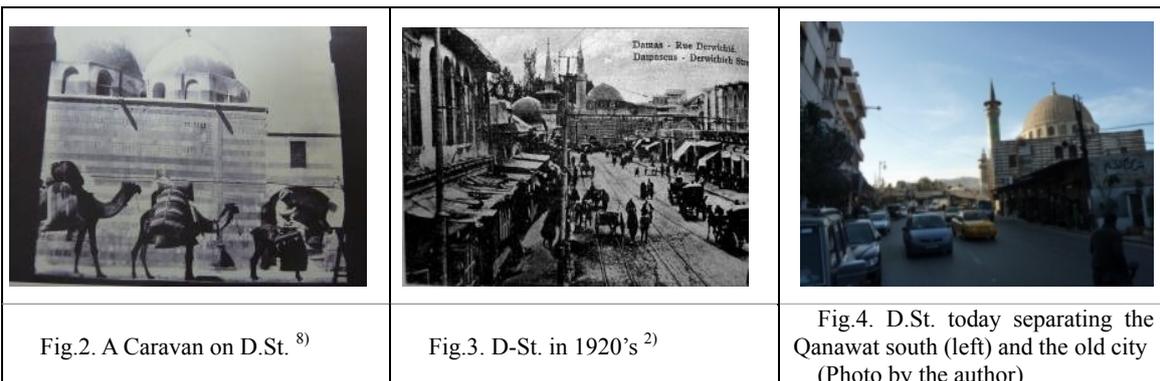
2.2. Urban formation during 16th century

After the Mamlouk dynasty was replaced by the Ottoman Turkey in 1517, Damascus was ruled by the Turkish governor called *Wali* or *Pacha*⁶. The Ottoman Turkey was famous for their organization of bureaucracy, and the area of *Qanawat* was chosen as a residential area where the Turkish elites dwelled. At this time, the *Qanawat* south area was called in two ways: the east part was called *Qasr Hajjaj* (castle of *Hajjaj bin Yusuf al-Thaqafi*, a military commander of the Umayyad Empire) and the western part was called *Sweqa* which means a small souk (market) connecting to a gate of the old city. Probably, the area used to be characterized as a residential area with markets where the agricultural products from the southern Syria and the Mediterranean were exchanged.

After this age, some resources in Arabic become available, describing works of Pachas and other important persons. Based on these Arabic resources, it is possible to learn some aspects of the quarters¹⁾. In 1591, the *Sinan Pacha* constructed a Turkish style mosque at the eastern end of the *Bab Srige* street and named it the *Sinan* mosque. The *Sinan Pacha* was so influential that the souk around the mosque was also called *Souk Sinanieh*.

2.3. Urban formation during the 19th to 20th centuries

In the 19th century, the early urbanization of the area had almost finished and the new suburbs of *Midan* appeared extending some 2km to the south of the *Qanawat* south area. The suburbs were important as a link from Damascus to Horan and further to Jordan. It was also a caravan road to Egypt and Hejaz.



In the 20th century, the modern *Darwishieh* street (D.St.) was constructed at the same time with the demolishing of *Hariqa* quarter. Consequently, the city walls in front of the street caused the quarters of *Qanawat* south to be separated from the old city.

Some photos are available which show an aspect of the area during this age. Fig.2 shows a caravan going on the D.St. in front of the *Darwishieh* mosque in the north-east of *Qanawat*. Also, the area from *Bab al-Jabieh* to the Gate of Egypt was called *Sekeh* which means a railroad,

because there was a tram way passing through the area as Fig.3 shows. The extensive suburbs developed along the *Darwisheh* street. As the traffic on the D.St.increased significantly in recent years, the separation of the *Qanawat* south area and the old city has become decisive(Fig.4).

3. Actual Situation of Conservation Efforts

3.1. History of heritage administration

Though the area is outside of so-called the old city of Damascus which was designated as a world heritage site, it was recognized as a heritage site from the age of French mandate. A survey on the history of heritage administration was carried out as part of the previous JICA study⁷. In the *Qanawat* south area, 11 historic monuments were designated in 1964 under the authorization of the Department of Antiquity, the Ministry of Culture (MoC). The designation was based on the law enacted in 1963. According to the law, all the buildings of 200 years old or older are subject to be registered. For the registered buildings, changes of the interior and exterior by reconstruction and rehabilitation are restricted; the traditional architectural style and construction methods must be applied in principle for the restoration. Governmental supports for the maintenance of registered buildings are stipulated by the law, but no any subsidy or guidance for people interested in restoration or repairing work has been provided so far⁴).

Because the master plan of 1968 by *Michel Ecochard* and *Banshoya* was strongly influenced by CIAM (Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne) policy⁸, the *Qanawat* south area was partly a subject of "*Zones Remembrées*" to be redistributed and reformed into modern quarters surrounded by road(Fig.5). In fact some of buildings are destroyed and reconstructed according to the zoning for land redistributions. On the other hand, the law of historical protection area was enacted in Syria under the authorization of the Department of Antiquity, MoC. It was revised in 2004 and determined for the *Qanawat* south area in 2006 (Fig.6). So the relation

between the master plan and the conservation law is partly inconsistent. The method of restoration of buildings is the same for the case of registered monuments, and confined to the traditional one as is the case with the registered buildings. For the area, the protection area was determined with 6.4 ha or 23.1% of the total area covering (1) *Qasr Hajjaj* (2) *Bab Srigesh street*, and (3) district around the *Teirouzi* mosque and hammam.



Fig.5. The master plan of 1968 (Qanawat south area)¹⁴

3.2. Example of Teirouzi Hammam restoration

An example of the restoration of historic monuments was provided by the *Teirouzi Hammam*. This *hammam* (public bath) constructed in the 15th century is one of the traditional hammams surveyed and described by *Ecochard*, a French architect working for the Department of

Antiquity at that time and a disciple of Sauvaget⁶⁾.

The restoration work undertaken at the beginning of 2000's was finished in 2009, and it opened to public. The fee is relatively expensive as a public bath, but the equipment has been totally renewed principally in the traditional way. With the *Teirouzi* mosque located just beside the hammam, this protection area has been revived as the most important and beautiful historic site in the depth of the *Qanawat* south area.

4. Field Survey for Preliminary Assessment of Historical Value of *Qanawat* South

4.1. Methods and subjects of the survey

One of the problems in assessing the historical value of the *Qanawat* south area is the fact that almost the entire quarter is made up of residential areas (Table.1). The roads are composed mainly by traditional narrow lanes and some streets widen by developments of apartments penetrate the area. Buildings are generally old and decrepitude, but should be conserved and repaired because some physical evidences of the history are found.

Table 1. Actual land use of the *Qanawat* south area¹⁵⁾

Land Use Category	Area (m2)	Share(%)
Residential	139,547	48.2
Commercial	19,901	6.9
Mixed commercial at the ground floor	28,184	9.7
School	9,740	3.4
Government	3,181	1.1
Religious	8,372	2.9
Cemetery	2,951	1.0
Hammam	974	0.3
Service	1,672	0.6
Collapsed or ruined buildings	23,469	8.1
Sub-Total	237,911	82.2
Roads and others	51,625	17.8
Total	289,616	100.0

Physical evidences which show the date of construction clearly are almost totally lacking⁹⁾. The only exception is the monuments such as mosques or *hammams*; each mosque or *hammam* usually has a plaque showing its name and the year of construction or foundation. According to the plaques, it is possible to guess the age of formation of built-up areas respectively around these monuments. Though the age of formation is one of the most essential factor, the historical value of urban space cannot be determined only by its age. However, we didn't have any other factors at least in the field because of the lack of physical evidences. It should be noted that this research is limited to provide one of the basic data, in order to discuss about the historical value considering together the result of literature surveys.

In this section, the results of the field survey conducted at two levels are reported: quarter level for the confirmation of the historic value of the quarter, and residential level for a detailed survey to seek typical style and composition of traditional houses.

4.2. Field survey at the quarter level

Some results of the field survey are reported focusing on the age of some mosques, and the historic value of the quarter is assessed based on the results. The method adopted here is simple. First, photos of the plaques of all the objective monuments are taken, and then arranged in order (Table 2). Second, the monuments are plotted on a plan of the area (Fig.6). The survey at this time was limited to the mosques along the D.St., and in *Bab Srijeh* and *Qasr Hajjaj*.

Some mosques have only the years by the Hijira calendar, so they were converted into the Julian calendar with a web converter. For reference, Fig.6 also shows whether the age of the

Table 2. (Re-)Construction Date of Mosques along the D.St., Bab Srijeh and Qasr Hajjaj

No.	NAME(Arabic)	NAME(French or English)	YEAR (Julian=Hijira)	Over 200years
1	جامع الدرويشية	Mosquée al-Darwichiya	1574=982	○
2	مدرسة وجامع السيبانية	Masjid-Madrasa al-Syabait	1515 [#] =921	○
3	جامع السنانية	Mosquée as-Sinaniya	1590=999	○
4	مسجد العجمي	Masjid al-Ajjami	1348 [#] =749	○
5	مسجد ودار القرآن الصابونية	Masjid dar al Quraan al Sabunieh	1463= 868	○
6	زاوية الهنود	Masjid Rautie al-Hawi	2002=1423	×
7	جامع عمر بن الخطاب	Jamia Yurnaibun al-Hutab	1962 [#] =1382	×
8	مسجد عز الدين ابو حمرة شئ	Masjid Aiz al-dinabhamura	1989 [#] =1409	×
9	مسجد العنابي	Masjid al-Ainabi	1818 [#] =1233	△
10	جامع السعدية	Jamia as-Salhdieh	1242 [#] =640	○
11	جامع زيد	Masjid Saidnazaid	1969=1389	×
12	جامع حسان	Jamia Hasan	1965=1385 [#]	×
13	مسجد الزيتونة	Masjid al-Zaitouna	1681 [#] =1092	○
14	جامع النقشبندي	Jamia as-Naqshubundi	1565 [#] =972	○

■ Darwish Street ■ Bab Srijeh ■ Qasr Hajjaj

[#]=Year calculated by a Hijira and Julian date converter (Date of Survey:2010/3/3)

(http://www.islamweb.net/ver2/engblue/date_converter.php)

construction is older than 200 years.

From the Table 2, the dates of construction can be arranged by century as follows: four each in the 16th and the 20th centuries and one each in the 13th, 14th, 15th, 17th, 19th and 21st centuries. Excluding the four mosques built after the 20th century, the mosque construction seems to be concentrating in the 16th century, when the Ottoman Turkey conquered Damascus.

Needless to say, mosques are the most important facilities in the Islamic world. When people start to live together and make a small community, they build a mosque. As far as a community is a Muslim community, therefore, the date of construction of their mosque corresponds to the formation of a quarter, or at least a community. Of course, mosques being buildings, some of them have been reconstructed. It should be noted that a plaque may show the year of reconstruction after the original construction some decades or even some hundred years earlier. In such cases, the year of reconstruction does not correspond to the age of the quarter. The result of this survey is still limited to be a hint around the age of the area.

However, it can be assumed that a built-up area around a monument had been formed at least around the age shown by the respective plaque. Based on Figure 2, the relationship between the mosques and the streets may be inferred. For the *Darwishieh* street, it is almost indisputable that the street and the quarter along the street were formed by the 16th century because all the mosques were opened in 16th century or earlier. For *Bab Srijeh*, while many new mosques were found along the street, the existence of the *Jamia as-Salhdieh* (No.10) attests the fact that there was a quarter around it in the 13th century. In *Qasr Hajjaj*, there are also mosques constructed in the 16th and 17th centuries, which indicate the formation of the quarter during this period.

The survey conducted at this time is limited in coverage and scope, and further surveys should be undertaken covering other monuments and quarters. Still, the results indicate that the possible historic value of the *Qanawat* south area can be attested by some indirect but quite concrete evidences.

4.3. Field survey at the residential level

The survey at the residential level covered two traditional houses. The two houses are known by people for their hugest sizes of the area, that probably means the houses have not been divided or destructed and spatial composition may still remains.

In general, the habitants of the area have a pride to live in this historic area, but they are confronted with the problems such as lack of knowledge, technique and money for conservation. At the same time, some of them complain that they cannot reconstruct their old houses because

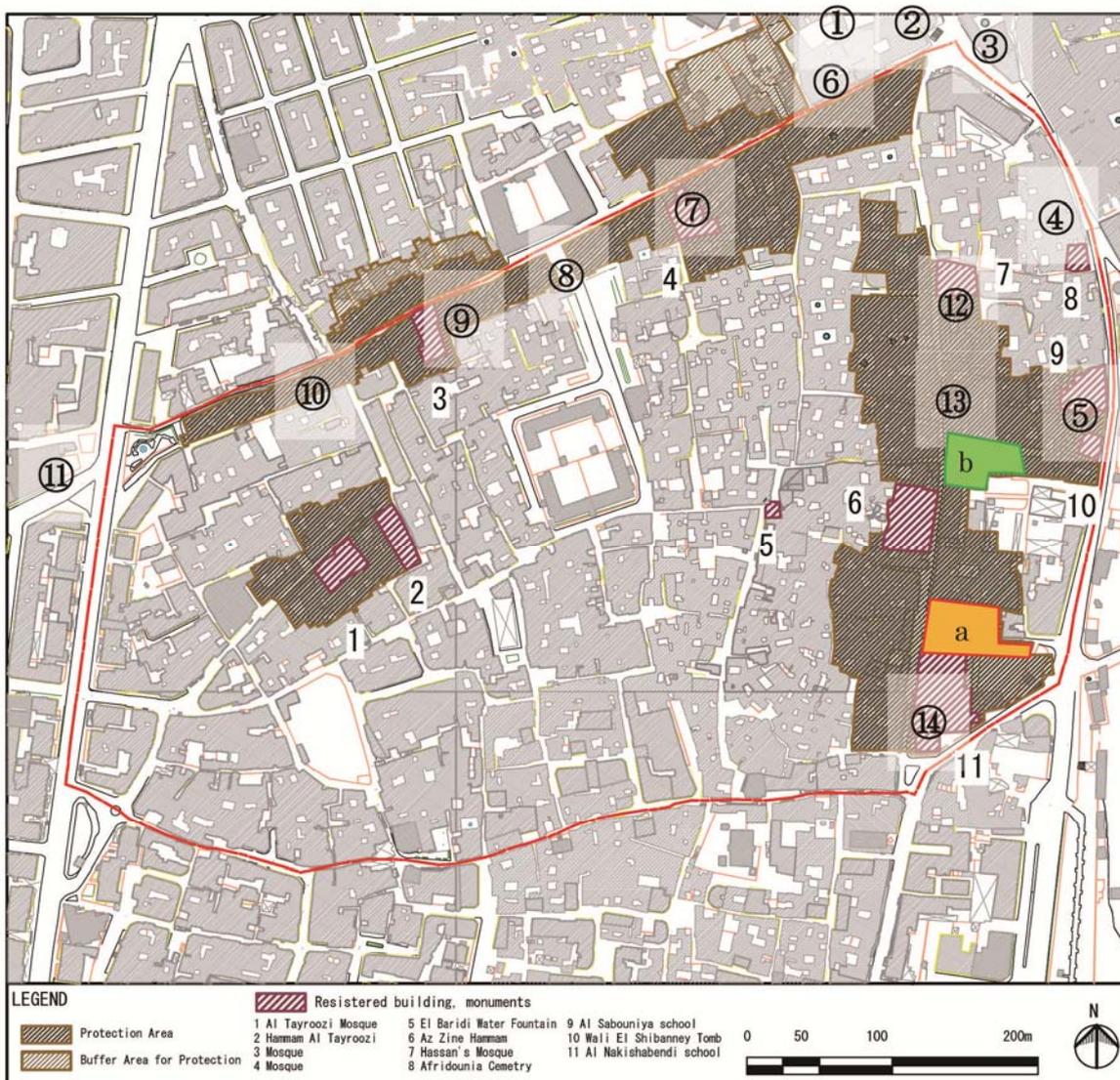


Fig.6. The Actual Situation of Target Area (inside the red line) and the Location of Mosques Surveyed ①~⑤Darwish Street ⑥~⑪Bab Srijeh ⑫~⑭Qasr Hajjaj

a= House of Mr.Abdel Razaq b=House of Hiba

*The plan was made by the author using base map provided by JICA project ¹⁵⁾.

of the protection law. What important here is to encourage them to know the detail of houses.

In order to find any resources which are regarded as historical elements of houses such as spatial composition, structure, materials and decoration etc., a method was adopted or tested here; collection of architectural vocabularies in Arabic for traditional style components of such houses. As for supplement, measurement of residential spaces for various purposes also tried.

In general, the method of architectural vocabulary is regarded as an attempt to follow the architectural history, which depends mainly on description of physical spaces by words. In addition, the method will be interesting and significant from the viewpoint of consensus building among Japanese specialists, Syrian counter parts and inhabitants, because this method is based on language which is an essential tool of communication.

The two houses selected as examples here are called the house of Mr.*Abdel Razaq* and the house of *Hiba* (Fig.6¹⁰). The vocabularies we found through this survey will be referred in the following sentences with describing the spaces.

4.3.1. Case 1: House of Mr.Abdel Razaq

The house of Mr.*Abdel Razaq* is located at the south end of the *Qasr Hajjaj* street. It is a two-story house with the ground and the first floors. The house is situated behind the *Naqshubundi* mosque(No.14) constructed in 1565. An entrance opens directly to the mosque. Probably the house used to be related in some way with the mosque, but it is now in private possession of Mr.Razaq. The owner guessed the age of the house is 300 years old, and talked about his own experience of using the door during the resistance against the French mandate.

The composition of the courtyard was typical of the area. That is, orange, lemon sometimes called lemon paper, and *Keppado* trees are found as the standard elements of courtyard gardening of the area (Fig.7)¹¹. In the center of the courtyard, there is a fountain(Fig.8). The material of the floor is basically stone: *Mchaqqf* (marble) or *Mezzaui* (stone from Mezze), and black stone from the southern Syria.

Beside the courtyard, there is an *Iwan*, which is a space of major significance in the Middle East (Fig.9). According to a brief measurement survey, the size of the *Iwan* was as follows: the width is about 5m, the depth is 6m, and the height is about 6m. It is quite popular space in the area being used during summer as a kind of living room equipped with sofas along the walls. The rooms also exhibit a traditional style of the area. The wooden floor is raised from the ground level for about 50cm and carpeted in order to avoid the coldness. The windows are of bow window type, and a small basin was often put there. On the walls, bookshelves called *Yuk* or *Kotbieh* are established engraving the walls. The process of manufacturing the ceilings of a room is also traditional; it is made of multi layered clothes of cotton.

In the house, there is furniture considered as the heirlooms. For example, a dresser is huge and splendidly decorated. The shellwork is traditional of Syria, and the relief on the top of the dresser shows design of the moon, the sun and swords.

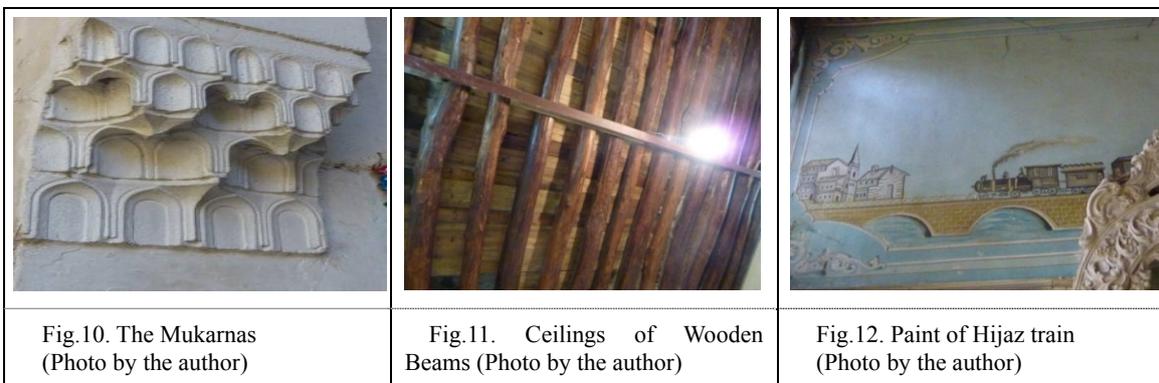


4.3.2. Case 2: House of Hiba

The *Hiba* house, named after its owner, is located in the middle of the *Qasr Hajjaj* street, close to the house of Mr. Abdel Razaq. The entrance of the house is very small, but it has a long corridor filled with orange smell till the courtyard.

The house has also a courtyard and a fountain in the center. Various trees of fruits and flowers are planted, and a huge *Iwan* is provided in the depth of the courtyard. On the pillar of the *Iwan*, there is a small *Mukarnas* (Islamic sculpture seems like a honeycomb: Fig.10).

The ceiling of a room is structured with wooden beams (Fig.11). On the top of the walls, some paintings are drawn. A painting depicts the port of Istanbul showing some ships with the Turkish flag, while the other painting is a sketch of the *Hijaz* train that connected Turkey to Madina in Saudi Arabia via Damascus (Fig.12). It seems that the paintings imply some relationships of the house with Turkish culture.



5. Conclusion

Compared to the old city of Damascus where UNESCO's strict preserving policy based on sufficient information is applied, the *Qanawat* south seems not enough cared; the former is regarded as more monumental and the latter is more popular. It means the *Qanawat* south can be activated as a historic-residential area with some physical intervention based on the collaborative work of Syrian counterparts and Japanese specialists. With limited surveys here, a method called "collection of traditional architectural vocabulary" was found to be possible answer of the research question of the paper to make suggestions for urban conservation.

Collection of traditional architectural vocabulary may provide useful resources of conservation projects such as Islamic spatial composition, structural components and traditional facade elements. Based on these resources, a hypothetical possibility is that we prepare some important guidelines for inhabitants and craftsmen to appreciate the original state of historic city. Moreover, through this kind of process to collect the vocabulary, the communications between the members of JICA Expert Team for the Project, Syrian counterpart experts and inhabitants may be facilitated. This is a kind of international cultural exchange, to which the project should contribute.

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1 This paper was firstly published as a discussion paper (without peer review) of the proceedings of the 8th ISAIA, Nov.9-12, 2010.

2 For example, there are some historical researches concerning to urban conservation under French mandate 13). However, most of French scholars seems not to be interested in the situation of post colonial age. Though some pioneer works appears today 10)11)12), the question of how to conserve the old cities in the area is still open.

3 The official name of the technical project is “The project for Urban Planning and Development in Damascus Metropolitan Area in the Syrian Arab Republic (UPD-DMA)”. The WEB site is <http://dma-upd.org/>. The Syrian organizations which are counterparts of the projects are the Ministry of Local Administration (MoLA), Damascus Governorate and Rural Damascus Governorate.

4 The author is a member of JICA team.

5 The summary of history mentioned above is a result of analysis on some resources which refer to the *Qanawat* south in French1)2)5)6)11), Arabic3)8) and English9)10). These sources are available in some libraries and old bookshops in Damascus. For example, the library of L'IFPO (Institut Francais du Proche-Orient), and the institutes of Germany and Denmark are most important. There are also the library of the University of Damascus, and the National Library of the President Asad. As for book shops deal with Arabic documents, they are concentrating along the streets near the *Qanawat* station.

6 *Pacha* is the highest rank of *Wali* assigned by the Ottoman ruler in Istanbul to those accomplishing something significant

7 The previous study is “The study on urban planning for sustainable development Damascus metropolitan area in the Syrian Arab Republic”, which was carried out from 2006 to 2008 with almost same Syrian counterparts of the actual project.

8 Michel Ecochard, who was a collaborator of Banshoya in 1968 plan, was a planner influenced by CIAM policy. His works in Morocco in 1940's was based on a modernist concept called "Habitat for the Greater Number". The master plan of 1968 was criticized by UNESCO because it contained some modern road plans cutting the old city. This is an important point to understand the history of modern urban planning in Damascus.

9 In fact, the style of housing sometimes implies that they were constructed in the 19th century. Also, there are a few cases that construction date is exhibited in decoration. However, it is very rare and vague so can't be a basis of research.

10 The plan was originally from the JICA previous study 4), which I added some information based on the field survey.

11 Also, there are flowers called *Ackedenia*, a kind of fruits, Jasmine, and Green paper.