



*Dwelling on space*  
 representation and safeguarding  
 of its tangible and intangible heritage



# 20th

## Anniversary 2003-2023

# Intangible Cultural Heritage

In occasion of the twentieth anniversary of UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The international Conference is part of the activities of the project "The state as an Artwork, the State and the artworks" funded by Università Telematica Pegaso

Carmine Gambardella  
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*Representation and safeguarding of its tangible and intangible heritage*  
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## **ARCHITECTURE, HERITAGE AND DESIGN | 13**

Serie founded and directed by Carmine Gambardella

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Topics:

**Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in education**

*Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage through education*

**Priority Africa**

*Priority to safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of Africa, one of the most active regions for the implementation of the Convention*

**Living Heritage in Emergencies**

*Living heritage throughout the world is increasingly affected by emergencies, including conflicts and disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards*

**Living Heritage and Indigenous**

*People Indigenous peoples hold a rich diversity of living heritage, the practice and transmission of which contributes to the ongoing vitality, strength, and well-being of communities*

**Sustainable Development and living heritage**

*The notion of "sustainability" in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development echoes the concept of "living heritage" in the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*

## **Dwelling on Space**

International Conference

Naples  
17 October 2023

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**Peer review**

Scholars has been invited to submit researches on theoretical and methodological aspects related to Smart Design, Planning and Technologies, and show real applications and experiences carried out on this themes. Based on blind peer review, abstracts has been accepted, conditionally accepted, or rejected. Authors of accepted and conditionally accepted papers has been invited to submit full papers. These has been again peerreviewed and selected for the oral session and publication, or only for the publication in the conference proceedings.



# International Conference

## Dwelling on space

representation and safeguarding of its tangible and intangible heritage



### Paola Raffa Signs and codes of communities. Identity and transmission of a heritage of knowledge

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#### Abstract

The intangible value of the decorations of the oasis-city of Nefta lies in the strong symbolic meaning it represents for the community and in the power that keeps it in close relationship with the surrounding environment. The aesthetic dimension of architecture takes on social value when it allows the community to develop a sense of social and cultural belonging. Furthermore, they have the strong value of promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

**Keywords:** Intangible Heritage, urban codes, peaceful coexistence, creativity, Heritage of knowledge.

#### 1. Visual codes for cultural diversity

Urban decorations represent a remarkable communication tool for the communities that inhabit a place. They contain testimonies of ways of living and inhabiting.

The decorations produced by the placement of baked clay bricks, on the walls of courtyard houses and on portals in the medinas, of the Jerid Region in Tunisia, are the main means of intercultural expression by multi-ethnic groups who have cohabited peacefully on the borders of the desert for centuries.

The walls of the houses, built in *pisè*, are covered with clay bricks cooked in rudimentary ovens; a technical act, in which the composition of the figurative elements modifies the aesthetic dimension of the places of daily life.

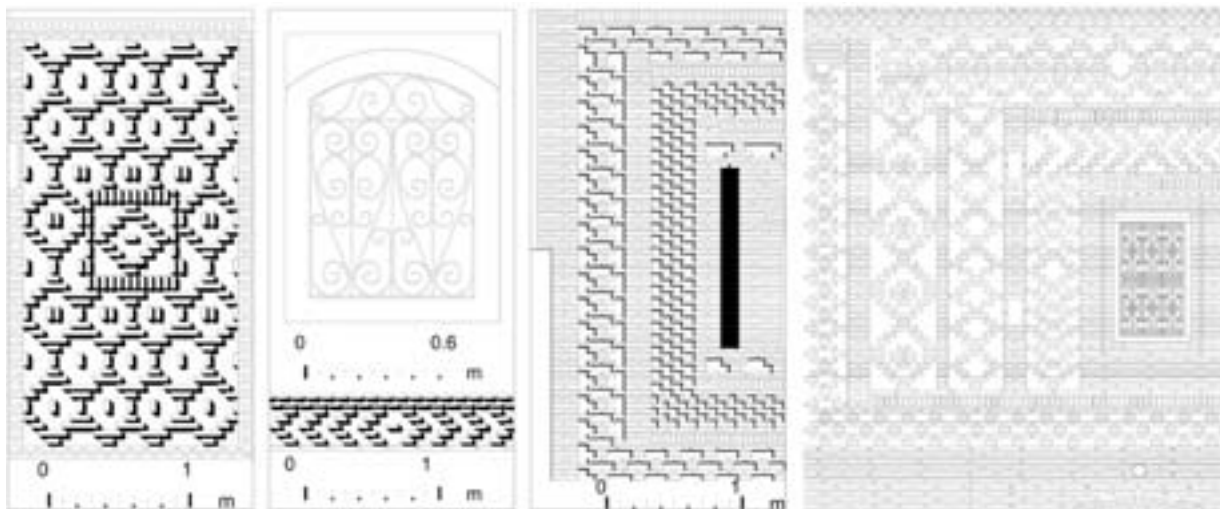
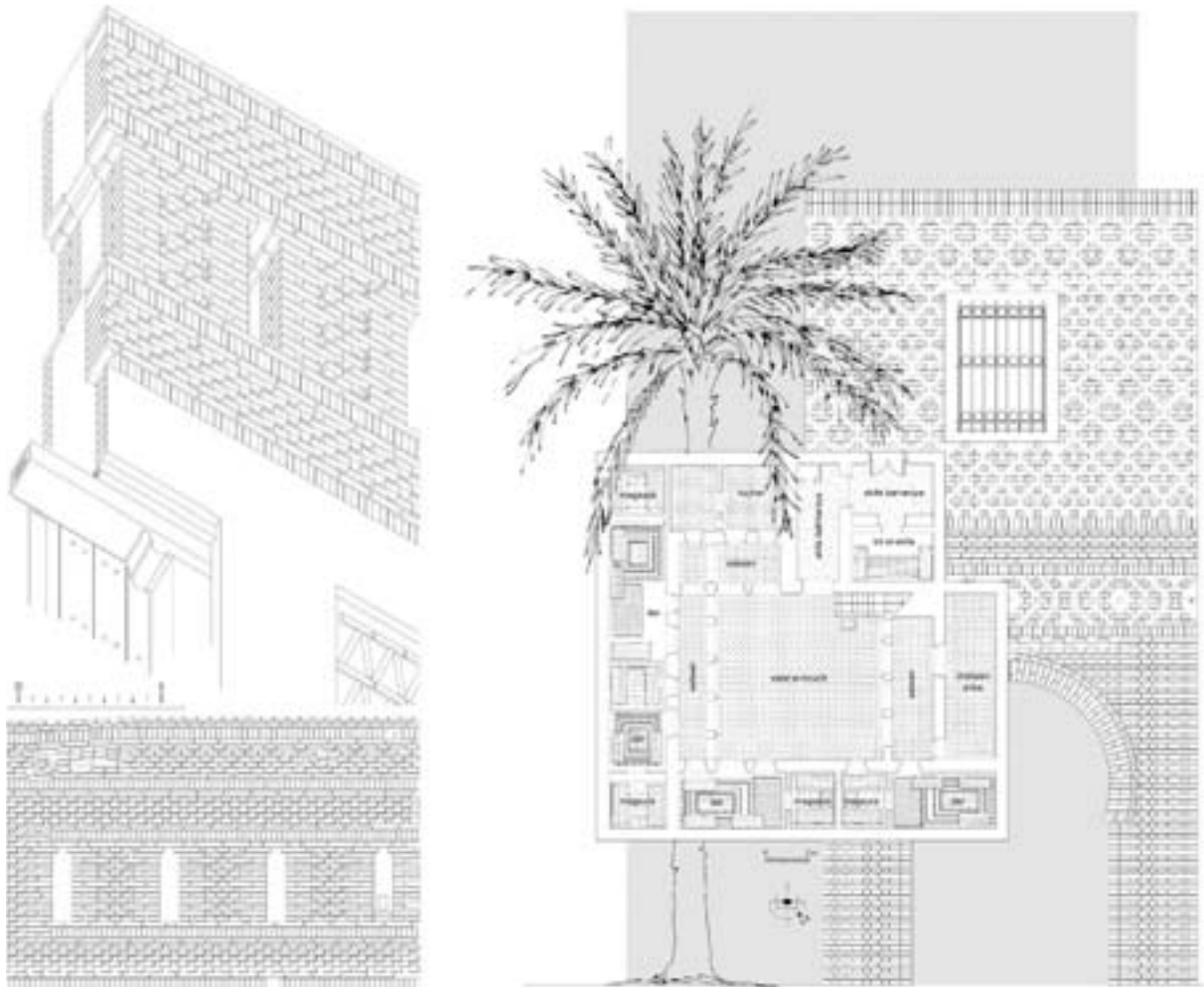


Fig. 1: Decorations of clay bricks placed on the walls of the houses.



**Fig. 2:** Decorations system: techniques and ethics value.

The creation of visual communication system placed on boundary elements, such as the facade of the house or the entrance door, indicates the ability to define borders of peaceful coexistence.

Walking through the streets of the medinas of Nefta and Tozeur means crossing a physical space and a social dimension in which clear religious, economic and ethnic messages are expressed through a repertoire of figures that represent a really codified language.

A universe explored through the graphic description of reality in which the imitative process of the sign retraces existing forms, re-proposing them in an expressive form.

The palimpsest of signs becomes the guardian of the real object. A vocabulary of signs obtained from solid elements and placed in figurative sequences capable of building a visual language through non-verbal codes that combine ancestral symbols and modern life worlds.

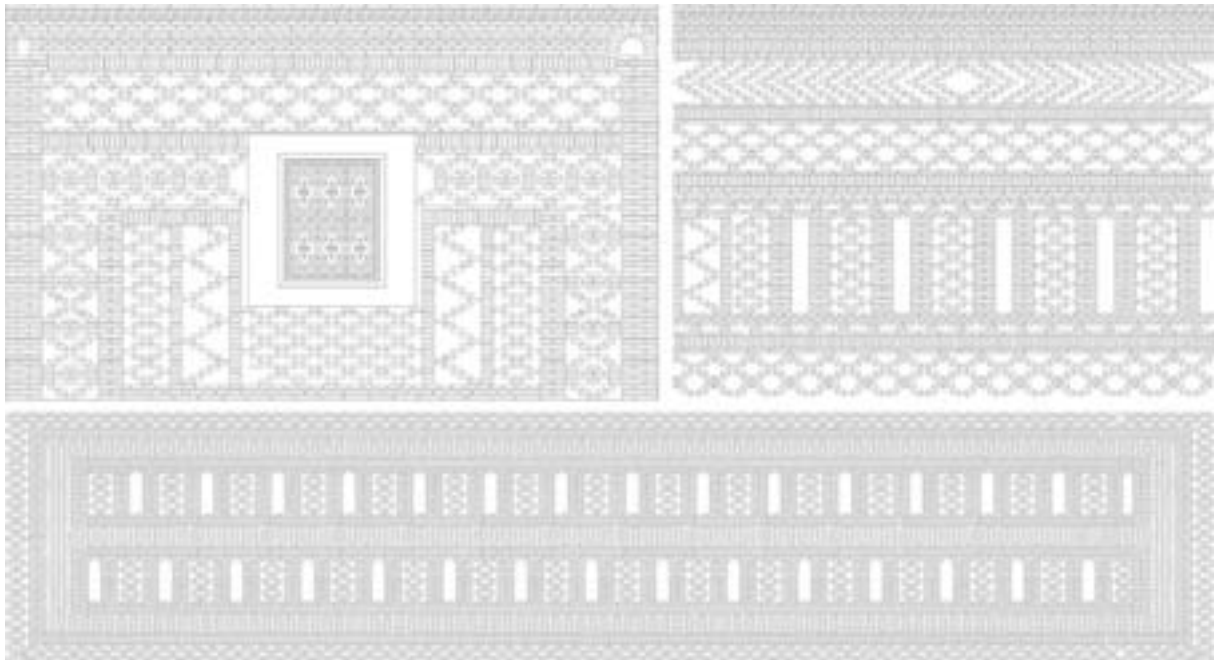
A visual syntax which, through the composition of decorative registers, unifies different languages and expresses the aesthetic sense of the city and the community.

The placement of the brick develops geometric motifs in recurring figures that can be assimilated to regular polygons contained in a circumference. It summarizes cosmic balance as it evokes the symbol of the center, referring to the center of the World.

The representation of the decorations is graphically reproduced according to the modular arrangement of the brick, placed adjacently or ledge. The representation foresees a graphic difference for each lying plane, this to highlight the definition of the decorative motifs, in the alternation of figure and background. The separation between light and shadow is a clear but discontinuous line in which the depths of the facades can be read.

The module of the decoration is the *galéb*, a brick composed of a mixture of clay and sand. It maintains a ratio between the sides of 1:2, the dimensions are 20x10x4.5 cm, and is composed according to the linear patterns in 33 motifs given by the linear combination.

On the facades, the decorations are defined by placing the brick overhanging the surface of the wall, in this way it is possible to compose the figures in linear shapes that are repeated in frames or rows, and uniform textures for the background or as a connection between the figures.



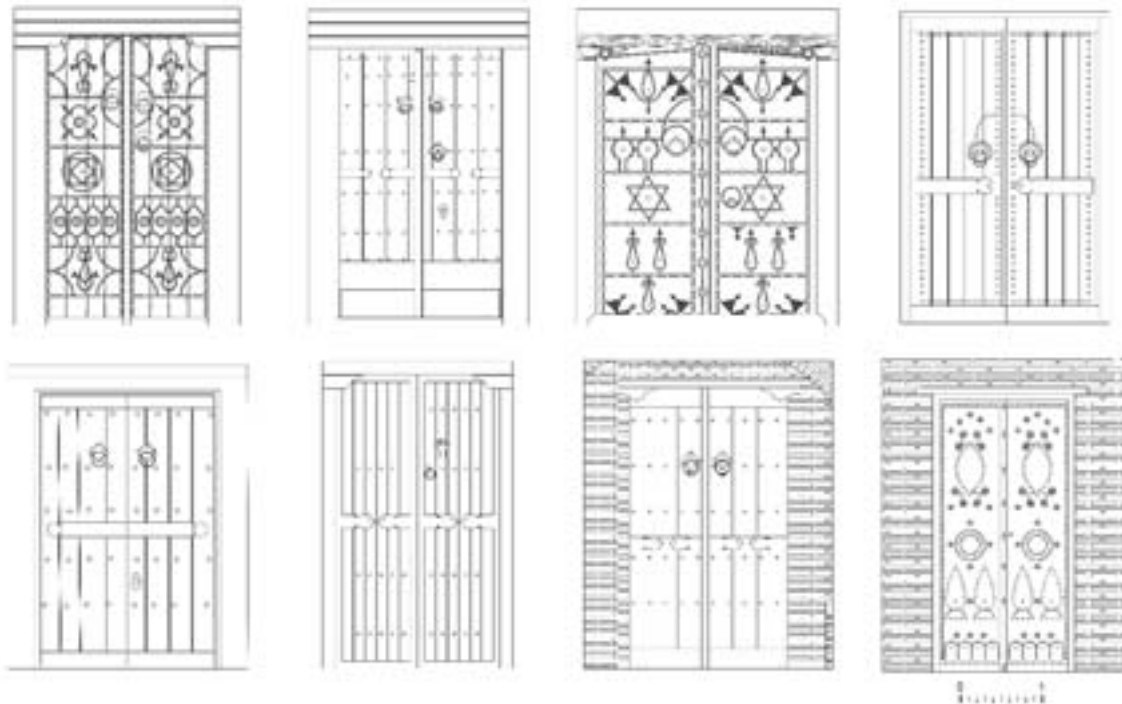
**Fig. 3:** Writings in code: narrative textures of a community.

Each composition, formed by placing the bricks in linear or staggered succession, alternating the position of the long side with the short side, vertically or horizontally, with aligned or staggered joints, is associated with a figure, the most recurrent being the palm tree, the camel, the snake, the nightingale, which depending on the shape of the wall is repeated in rows, horizontal and vertical, framed in frames, in bundles or simply in the protrusion from the wall.

The meanings associated with the decorative motifs represent a kind of moral declaration of the community and which gives the city immense identity value.

It is linked to the symbolism of the desert, the oasis and to religious values.

Every type of decoration denotes the narrative variation of the same genre, the same motif repeated, without variations, to underline the renewal of a ritual. The same motifs are repeated in the weaving of the carpets in which the design is expressed in the chromatic variations.



**Fig. 4:** Decorative studs on the entrance doors.

Even the entrance doors host decorative motifs that reflect expressions of a codified language and which contain a set of social conventions.

On the outside it is adorned with metal studs that design symbolic elements and signs of cultural codes of belonging to the family.

Such as the Star of David in houses inhabited by Jews, or the *khamsa*, a Muslim symbol that protects from wicked events, or the hump of the dromedary or the palm symbols of wealth.

The three iron knockers, in addition to the variety of shapes and sizes, are characterized by the sound they reproduce, the intensity of which is a communication code.

Decorations and carvings are also present in the jambs and architrave. Inside, the frame of the raw wooden boards structures a type of interlocking lock.

## Conclusions

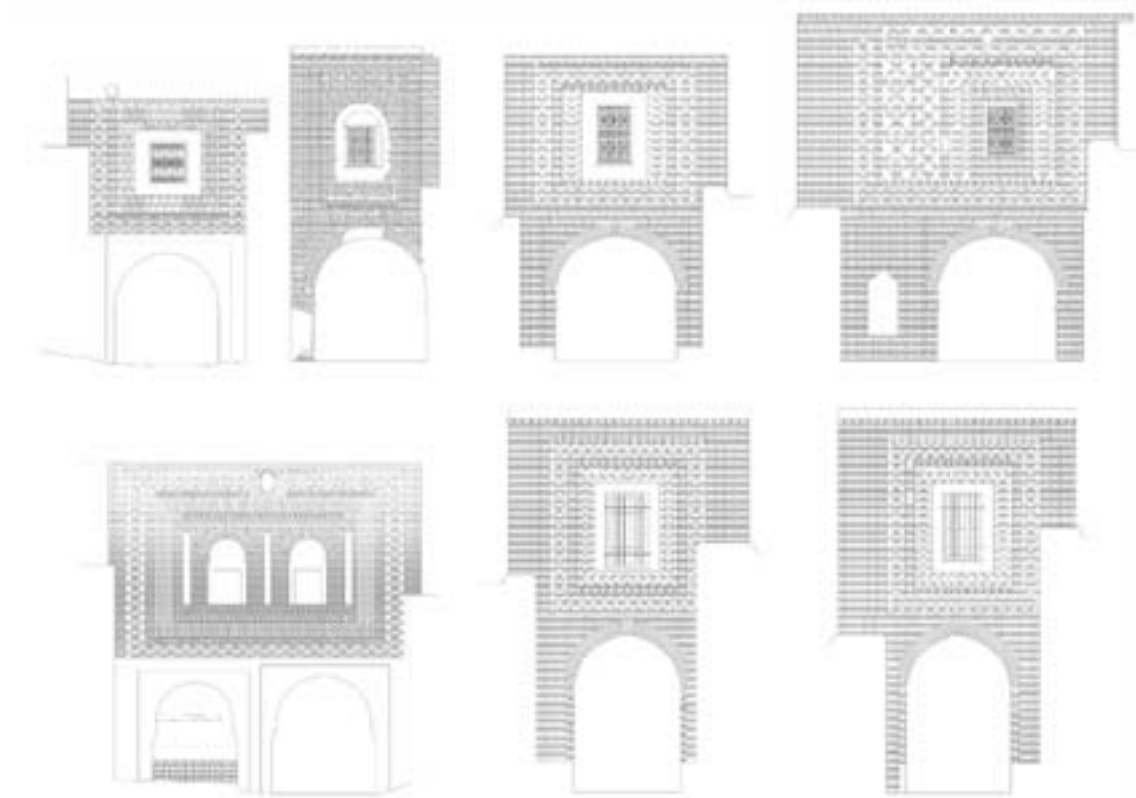
The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage highlights how it is fundamental in maintaining cultural diversity and its understanding helps intercultural dialogue and encourages mutual respect for different ways of life. Furthermore it helps to demonstrate uniqueness and increase awareness of knowledge.

Nowadays, the cultural and natural heritage in the Maghreb is in danger, first of all due to the evolution of social and economic life which attacks the heritage with phenomena of destruction and little care, also as a result of speculation in the service of mass tourism. Climate change is also having serious consequences on the resistance of a fragile and easily perishable heritage.

This work is based on knowledge of the territory and architecture of which the intangible heritage represents an inseparable part. Its main goal was to safeguard a heritage that has now become a ruin in the pre-desert landscape.

Safeguarding the memory of the common good with the awareness that heritage education and its use appear to be the correct methods for enhancing the identity heritage of evolving communities.

Studying traditional architectures and systems does not only mean knowing the techniques for resolving construction episodes but implies knowledge of relationships between society, culture and the economy, closely linked to a conception of the world based on careful management of resources. locals.



**Fig. 5:** Patterns on the urban portals.

The construction of dwelling, villages and oases, for example, imply relationships between social ethics and the way of living and arise from the rules with which a social group organizes its space. The technical-environmental process of balanced exploitation of local resources gives an aesthetic value that transforms the artefact into a monument intended as an asset to be protected.

The intangible value of the decorations of the oasis city of Nefta lies in the strong symbolic meaning it represents for the community and in the power that keeps it in close relationship with the surrounding environment. The aesthetic dimension of architecture takes on social value when it allows the

community to develop a sense of social and cultural belonging. Furthermore, they have the strong value of promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

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