

Research Article

# Temporal and Cultural Significance of the Nablus Clock Tower: An Architectural Analysis

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## Abstract

The renowned clock tower of Nablus serves as a prominent testament to the city's rich historical and cultural legacy. This article presents a structural analysis of the Nablus Clock Tower, examining its temporal and cultural importance within the broader regional context. By investigating its history, evolution, and functional role, the article draws on archival sources, historical documents, and architectural plans, tracing the tower's journey from its inception to its contemporary state. The discussion not only explores Nablus's historical background but also outlines the influences and events that culminated in the construction of the Clock Tower. The study further examines the clock tower's practical role as a timekeeping structure, a communal gathering spot, and a symbol of urban development. Through comparisons with contemporaneous clock towers that share similar architectural characteristics, the research highlights the distinctive features that set the Nablus Clock Tower apart. The fusion of elaborate design elements and unique cultural elements, together with the innovative integration of the tower into its surrounding urban environment, has elevated the tower into both a distinguished object of public landmark and a pivotal point of cultural interaction. This examination ultimately illuminates the historical and architectural significance of the Nablus Clock Tower, emphasizing its profound cultural resonance. By sitting the tower within the broader temporal and cultural framework of the region, this work enriches the understanding of Nablus's multifaceted heritage, providing new insights that enhance the appreciation of the city's cultural layers across time.

## Keywords

Nablus, Clock Tower, Cultural Heritage, Architecture

## 1. Introduction

Nablus Clock Tower, an Important Symbol of Local Culture and Ottoman Modernization It was one of scores of clock towers built across the empire as part of a broader effort to harmonize Western technological advances, such as standard timekeeping, with ancient traditions. Ideally placed in the center of Nablus—one time a crucial Palestinian city—the clock tower was not just meant to show the hours, it served as an expression of Ottoman control over and influence on the

region. The tower itself is a mix between Ottoman and European architecture, which is representative of the coexistence between both cultures throughout Nablus. It is an elemental yet elegant mix of Renaissance, Baroque, and Islamic aesthetics, comprising three levels; a square base with turrets at each corner surmounted by a huge octagonal section richly embellished with intricate stonework covered in elaborate carvings. In the decades since then, the clock tower has be-

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come much more than city infrastructure. This holds a very rich cultural significance for the folk of Nablus because it reminds them of their endurance through various historical shifts, as well as symbolizing communal identity and development [1]. The tower has served as a rallying point for public events, an aid to navigation, and is a popular destination for locals. But it has aged well, undergoing several renovations to protect its distinctive architectural elements and keep it a relevant part of the city as time marched on. Its construction was within a socio-political context where the efforts had been to modernize and centralize the empire [2].

The construction of clock towers in significant urban centers like Nablus was the Sultan's way of showing authority, and at the same time assisting in the processes of development and modernization, as well as acting as a reminder of the Sultan's empire. In the late Ottoman era, however, nationalism was on the rise and the clock towers were also used for some form of control [3]. In this way, the Clock Tower of Nablus continues to exist as a significant feature in the city's narrative past and present, considering its beauty in architecture and complicated significance within the Ottoman Empire.

The marble inscription located at the south entrance of the Nablus Clock Tower (Figure 1) indicates that the tower was erected in 1901 by Sultan Abdul Hamid II to commemorate the 25th anniversary of his accession to the throne. Sultan Abdul Hamid II governed the Ottoman Empire for nearly 33 years, from 1876 until 1909. During his reign, numerous clock towers were constructed across the empire. A total of seven such towers were established in the cities of Nablus, Nazareth, Jaffa, Haifa, Acre, Safed, and Jerusalem. The clock towers in Nablus and Haifa are noted for their identical designs [3]. In 1922, five years after the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate, the Jerusalem clock tower was dismantled.



Figure 1. Inscription in Arabic on the entrance of the clock tower.

The Nablus Clock Tower is located at the heart of the main square in the Old City, adjacent to the An-Nasr Mosque. The area where the clock tower stands was originally known as the "Door of the Saraya" due to its proximity to the Ottoman

government palace. However, following Nablus's administration by British forces in 1918, the area's name was changed. The clock tower survived the devastating earthquake that struck Nablus in 1927, although local vendors reported that the upper sections, which collapsed during the earthquake, were subsequently restored [4]. The restoration and rehabilitation of the Nablus Clock Tower commenced on December 23, 2012, under the auspices of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), with technical oversight provided by the Nablus Municipality's engineering team [5]. The project, which adhered to contemporary conservation and restoration standards, was successfully completed within three months.

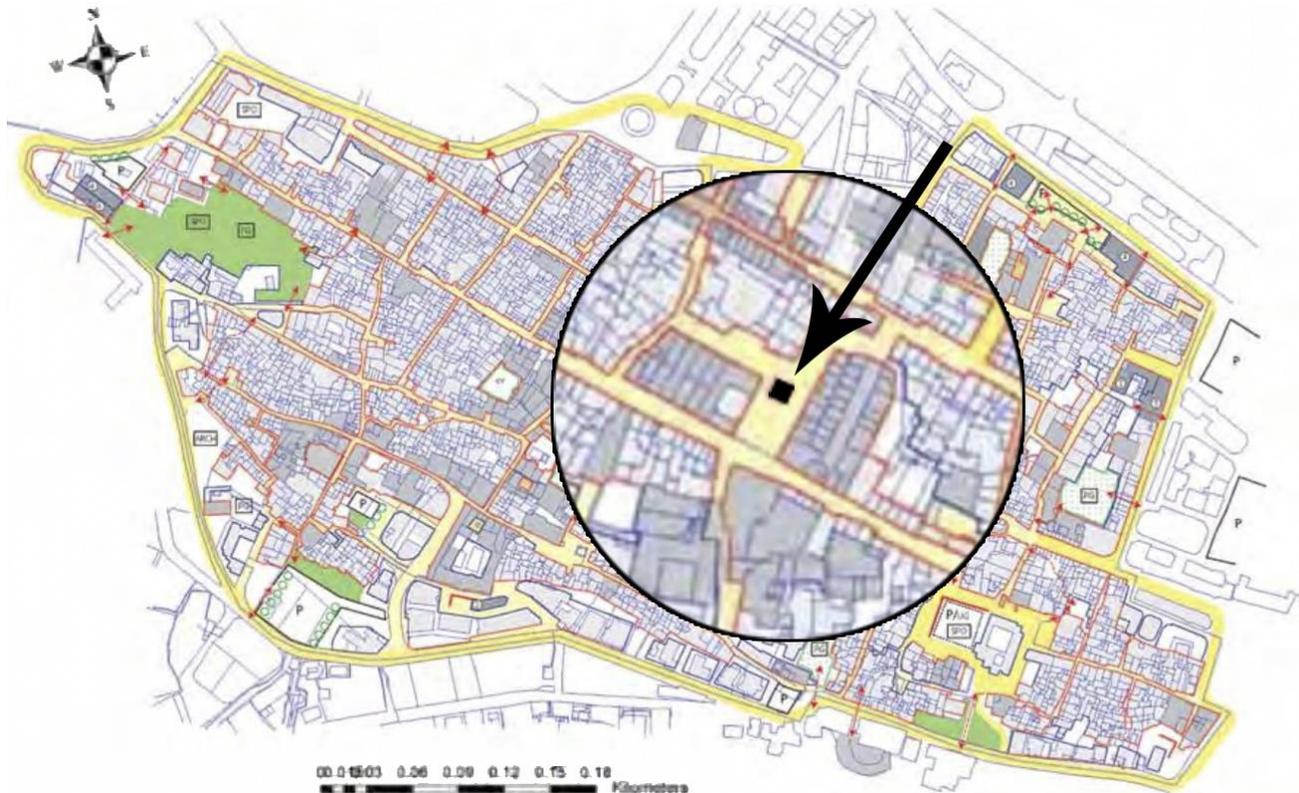
## 2. Materials and Methods

The Nablus Clock Tower has witnessed several key historical events that reflect the tumultuous history of the region:

1. Ottoman Era and the Symbol of Modernity: Upon its construction in 1901, the Nablus Clock Tower symbolized modernization and the Ottoman Empire's efforts to consolidate power and unify its diverse territories under central timekeeping.
  2. British Mandate (1917-1948): During the British rule in Palestine, Nablus and its Clock Tower were under British control. This period was marked by a lot of political and social changes, with conflicts between different groups of people and between the local people and the British government [6].
  3. Jordanian Rule (1948-1967): After the 1948 Arab Israeli War, Jordan took control of the West Bank, including Nablus [7]. During this time, which was relatively stable, the Clock Tower remained an important symbol for the city, even though there was still conflict in the area.
  4. Israeli Administration (1967-present): Since the Six-Day War in 1967, West Bank was administered by Israel. Nablus, which hosts the Clock Tower has people and continues to have resistance even after that time [8]. They say the tower has seen and documented the riots and protests that have from time to time occurred in the city.
  5. Palestinian National Authority Control: Following the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, Nablus came under the administration of the Palestinian National Authority. The Clock Tower has seen periods of restoration and has been part of the efforts to preserve Nablus's cultural heritage amidst ongoing political instability.
  6. 21st Century Restorations: This structure has in the past received several renovations to have the correct structure together with promoting its historical aspect as a tower. This proves that people both locally and internationally are concerned with preservation of cultures and artifacts in zones of hostility.
- In all these most dramatic incidents, the Nablus Clock

Tower remains as a paramount emblem of city spirit and tenacity. It has survived adapting and volatile eras, more than

marking time, it has witnessed history in the making.



*Figure 2. Master plan of the Old City of Nablus showing the Nablus Clock Tower.*

## 2.1. Architectural Analysis

The Nablus Clock Tower has a harmony of imperial Ottoman style and European style based on orient and occident adopting technique mixture between Renaissance, Baroque, and Islamic architecture [8]. The fact that these styles have mixed shows cultural tendencies of the period as well as underlined that the tower's Neoclassical design really embodied modern Ottoman of the city. The importance of the city history and the significance of the architectural solutions of the building thus are reflected in the clock tower.

### 2.1.1. Ottoman Neoclassical Style

The Nablus Clock Tower is an iconic representation of Ottoman Neoclassical architecture style that emerged in the late Ottoman Empire and was heavily influenced by European Neoclassical trends. This architectural style was frequently applied to public and symbolic buildings, including clock towers, government buildings, and other monuments that represented the empire's modernization and political aspirations.

#### (i). Ottoman Neoclassicism as Imperial Proclamation

In the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries internal restructuring and pressure from European states put the Ottoman empire through radical political and social change [9]. Architecture, and particularly the design of a public building played a major role in these reforms, especially in the empire's endeavor to give a more modern, centralized and united look. Specifically, Ottoman Neoclassical style was originated from Europe's Neoclassical style, but it was inspired with the Islamic and Ottoman ornaments, symbols of empire. This Syncretism was possible so that the empire could project an image of modernity while at the same time negotiating its own cultural difference. The symmetrical façade of the Nablus Clock Tower is a hallmark of Neoclassical architecture, emphasizing balance, order, and proportion—key elements in both European and Ottoman Neoclassical design. The clock tower's rectilinear form and the use of horizontal cornices visually emphasize its stability and structure, characteristics that align with Neoclassical principles of grandeur and monumentality.

The Nablus Clock Tower contains the Middle Eastern structural influences of the castle that cannot be unnoticed in the architectural features of the Ottoman Neoclassicism.

When we talk about the Neoclassical Ottoman clock tower in Nablus, it is often thought of as a unique, grand, and excellent example of the type of clock tower the Ottomans built worldwide. The different combinations of strictly classic elements form a historic synthesis with the neo-Byzantine motifs of the Nablus Clock Tower and so the building is characterized as a neoclassical building that is synchronous with that period.

- 1- Arches: The rounded and pointed arches of the windows and all kinds of openings are one of the distinctive characteristics of Ottoman Neoclassicism. Used both for aesthetic and practical reasons, the arches reflect the Neoclassical movement's love of grandiosity; the pointed arches of the façade are stylized in accordance with the traditional Islamic architecture of using such elements in religious and public buildings. In the Nablus Clock Tower, the arches which are posed on the sides of the structure surround the clock face, and the placement of the definite arches also (the repetitive systematically) emphasizes the unity of the structure and the verticality of the tower.
- 2- Symmetry: It may be stated that the tower is constructed in such manner as to be symmetrical – such was the fashion in Neoclassicism which valued the principles of order. Well-coordinated positioning of windows, balconies and the clock faces on all round of the edifice also represent this symmetry which was classical Greek and Roman influence revived during Neoclassical period.
- 3- Cornices and Horizontal Lines: The white, thick, horizontal layers whose positions are high account of the tower create a visual separation between individual levels. –common for Neoclassical architecture are the means that architects use to create a structure with a broken vertical column but keeping its grand scale. These objects erect a sense of equilibrium and make it possible to stick the tower to the earth's surface while it is tall, a nearly impossible thing to do with the help of a single thing.
- 4- Domed Roofs: Despite the fact that it is not fully observable in the image, a large number of imperial clock towers featured domed roofs, which were a symbol of the merger of the two architectural styles, European and Islamic [10]. Domes were the most striking part of the Ottoman public architecture, and they were in places like mosques and civic buildings and were often the object in the construction of the structure. While the Nablus Clock Tower only uses straight lines, the presence of domed roofs in similar Ottoman clock towers shows that the designers took inspiration from the same architectural pronunciation.

## (ii). Neoclassicism as the Sign of Modernization

The Neoclassical style, which was the actual style in the Ottoman Empire, and included the Nablus Clock Tower, was not only an ephemeral style; it also signified that the empire

wanted to appear progressive in contrast to Europe's Enlightenment values [11]. Clock towers are particularly significant as symbols of modernization on behalf of newly constituted civic communities as they compiled with prospectively the most important change in urban pragmatic, commercial, and social organization – the regulation of time. The clock mechanism itself, which was sometimes imported from Europe expressed the technology that the Ottoman Empire wanted to incorporate in the city and public sphere.

The verticality of the Nablus Clock Tower is another element that can be traced back to the Neoclassical principle of grandeur. By drawing the eye upward, the tower conveys a sense of monumental importance, projecting power and authority, which were key aspects of imperial architecture. The clock tower also stands as a marker of civic pride, situated in a public square where it would have been visible to all inhabitants of the city, reinforcing the empire's presence in the daily lives of its citizens. The Nablus Clock Tower is a perfect example that illustrates a versatility of the Ottoman perception of Neoclassical architecture as the form was able to assume its symbolic and functional role locally, while being relevant to the empire at large.

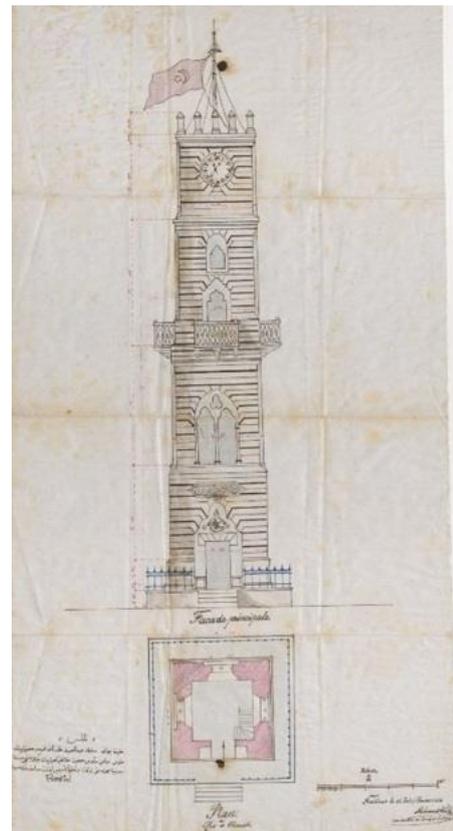


Figure 3. Plan and main elevation of the clock tower.

### 2.1.2. Palestinian Culture Architecture

Nablus Clock Tower is a unique structure that is saturated with the features of the general Ottoman architecture and

district regional Palestinian architectural features as well. Such local elements, especially the use of local cut stones, add to the integration of the tower into the urban environment and its ability to harmonize with traditional architecture of Nablus and the regions around it. Regarding this perspective, the tower can be understood as displaying imperial Ottoman ambitions that were set alongside regional architectural traditions that were contextualized by materials as well as environmental conditions of Palestine.

### **(i). Locally Sourced Stone as one of the Regional Adaptations**

The most characteristic local architectural feature of the Nablus Clock Tower is the stone from the region which was used in its construction. Because stone formed a significant part of the local building material resource base primarily due to limestone deposits in the territory of historical Palestine, stone form a unique characteristic of the built environment of Palestine for centuries [12]. The practical consideration of material availability was considered while constructing the clock tower; however more fundamentally, the use of limestone blocks in the construction of the tower represents some sort of continuity with the construction technique used in antiquity. Stone as a material in Palestinian architecture was concerned with issues of robustness, climate adaptation and appeal [13]. The decision to use local stone in the clock tower is deliberate to build a structure that would fit the old structures in Nablus most of which have been erected with stones. This is the notion where local material can be viewed as an adaptive whereby locates the clock tower within the regional sphere in a material and, thereby, symbolic sense. It denotes an architectural culture where structures were not only built to act as more imposing edifices, but also serve to blend into the growing urban fabric to avoid offsetting any orderly pattern of construction.

It is in this light that we find that incorporation of local stonework in the construction of the Nablus Clock Tower conforms to architectural practice that was carried forward from the Ottoman, pre-Ottoman and even ancient architecture in Palestine. Stone has been a common building material in Palestinian architecture since times of Canaanites and Romans and use of the similar material in construction of the clock tower is continuity of this tradition [14, 15]. It may also be noted that sustaining the artefacts of material culture underscores the tower's functions as a symbol of the Ottomans' conception of modernity, on the one hand, and as holding a continuing relevance in Turkey's – and the wider Mediterranean region's – architectural fabric. The use of local stone allows the tower to fit into the existing urban fabric better, thus meeting the tower's more civic function. Clock tower could be placed in the central city square, and the decoration makes this object part of the city, where people see the stone constructions in everyday life. This perception of community ties the element of recognition of local material and therefore the tower becomes a representation of

both imperial power and pride of the region.

### **(ii). Material and Color Palette: Cities as Part of the Urban Fabric**

Another impressive feature of the clock tower is the color, and the grain of the stone used to construct the building, so it creates a good visual rapport with the environment. Such a color of the stone is characteristic of limestone that is often employed in the construction of Palestinian cities, especially in the case of Nablus city. Another functional role of this color is the ability of the clock tower to blend into the array of historic structures which dominate the vicinity; many of the existing edifices are clad in similar kinds of stone. The material selected – pale stone – is as much driven by an availability factor as it is a means of signaling a desire to be integrated into the urban fabric [9]. This integration is made complete by the rough texture of the stone. While other well-known clock towers — such as those found in imperial monuments or palatial buildings of Europe — boast smooth stone finishes, Nablus Clock Tower has exposed its façade in a rough-sawn, unvarnished country stone characteristic of the buildings of Nablus and surrounding districts. It is for this reason that there is a rugged appearance, owing to the construction methods in which the cut-stone technique was used as many buildings as possible under construction in Palestine held architects which utilized traditional techniques that involved dressing the stones on site and these were learned through apprenticeship by the constructors. The rather unsophisticated character of the stonework also draws attention to the engineering aspects of the constructions in a region which required effective, let alone cheap, materials and techniques for construction, not to mention the challenges posed by the climate and geology of the area.

### **(iii). Climate and Environmental Considerations**

The decision to use stones in the construction of the Nablus Clock Tower is also consistent with the site conditions and climatic factor in Nablus. Stone is a very efficient building material in Mediterranean climate especially in Nablus that experiences hot summer and moderate winter thus requiring structures with efficient temperature control. It will also be appreciated that different types of stones will have different properties, such as the property of limestone to act as a heat sink or mass storage for heat during the day and release the heat at night thus creating naturally moderated interior environment [16].

Also, seismic benefits of stone use make considerable sense. All around Palestine there is considerable seismic activity and structures of stone especially those built with selected forms of traditional stone masonry are more resistant to minor quakes and ground movement. Stone masonry is a considerable and interlocking nature which deals with the structural Vigor of the clock tower so that it stands upright even where there are seismographic activities. This is not only evidence to proclaim practicability of the stone con-

struction, but also to the overall empiric experience of local builders who knew how to apply requirements and demands of the architectural setting to the actual conditions and peculiarities of the region [14].

Concerning the architectural inspiration, possibly the stone of local origin and the regional construction methods determine approximately one fourth of the Nablus Clock Tower. While the tower is a creation of Ottoman Neoclassical architecture, the use of materials and adjustment to contextual proprieties are keys to its effectiveness as a public building. By continuing the use of stone native to the region to both integrate both the concept and the materiality of the tower in terms of visual and structural homogeneity, and by giving the stone itself imperial alchemy to thereby cement them into urban fabric, the practice thereby avoids the creation of an alien structure that is merely an imported appendage of the Ottoman administrative presence but rather becomes of the built environment fabric of the city.

### 2.1.3. European Influences on the Nablus Clock Tower

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire experienced internal and external pressures to reform the institutions and design the cities according to the European progress in the aspects of civic architecture and public utilities. The overpowering evidence of the kind of architecture that defines the Nablus Clock Tower is that of the Ottoman Neoclassical architecture but the incorporated evidence of the European kind of architecture is found to be 15-20% [17]. Tanzimat and Hamidiat Reforms were reform movement of political, social cultural and architectural reformation in the period of Abdul Hamid II in Ottoman Empire in 1876-1909 [4]. These improvements were intended to transform the empire and make the empire more resemble Europe with reference to culture and political structure. Among the empire's most visible phenomena of this modernization process it was possible to point out the differences in urban constructions where new buildings of civic structures, clock towers, and public places which reflected European architecture statements were built in the empire's cities. European architecture was instrumental in these reforms because the Ottoman Empire wanted to look modern. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture styles such as Beaux-Arts and Eclecticism that were imported from Europe were adopted especially for new public buildings which were functional but decorated [18]. Some European influences were incorporated in the style of the Nablus Clock Tower most by the manner in the ornamental stones, pilasters and the design of the clock face itself.

#### (i). Modern Ornament and Beaux-Arts Architectural Design

The designs on the clock face and the designs of stones used in the construction of the Nablus Clock Tower bear the

hall marks of Beaux-Arts architectural style, predominant in Europe in the 19th century. Beaux-Arts style that was based on neoclassical architects but using more embellished design paid a lot of attention to aesthetics, specifically balance, molding and more notably, ornamentation [18]. These elements were used as a rule on the facades of civil structures to convey both the monumental and elegant character of public architecture. In the Nablus Clock Tower, this influence is best experienced in the circular shapes depicted in the window style around the clock. Linings around these windows are also made from stones and again include ornaments of a European flair of work. This is a departure from the gross, almost pragmatic stoneware associated with structures of purely Ottoman or local Palestinian architectural styles, which introduce the elegance of the Europeans for the sole purpose of raising the metaphorical and aesthetic standards of the work, with the tower in focus.

The actual clock faces which are part of a tower are already typical with other European tower clocks of the era but not just mere utilitarian features as all of them are designed to also serve as decoration. The addition of the Roman numerals, these clock hands and the stone carving is evidence of how the Europeans view functionality with aesthetic appeal. The clock tower is here employed in this function and, as in European examples of similar structures, is both instrumentally practical as an object for the measurement of time and architectural and designed – the structure is clearly symbolic of local municipal authority and perceived status.

Moreover, historical European designs pilasters, a classical architectural element, are among the many Western influences you see in the Nablus Clock Tower, as they are a pilaster, a classical architectural element that was very much in use in European Renaissance and Baroque architecture [19]. Pilasters, which are rectangular columns attached to the wall, help to establish the balance of the building between a sturdy structure and artwork. As for Nablus Clock Tower these pilasters are sparingly used but still grab the attention of the observer, serving as the horizontal layering and respect for the vertical lines that are present in the building. The application of pilasters in this context reflects the Ottoman Empire's desire to adopt and adapt European architectural languages while maintaining its own distinctive style. The dual functionality of these pilasters—both structural and decorative—is emblematic of the way European Eclecticism influenced Ottoman public architecture during this period. The Nablus Clock Tower thus becomes a hybrid structure, combining Ottoman architectural principles with European neoclassical elements in a way that was characteristic of the empire's approach to modernization.

#### (ii). Eclecticism and Blended Architectural Styles

This use of European ornaments in the Nablus Clock Tower fits into the protagonists of the Eclecticism style that dominated the European and Ottoman architecture of the late 19th century. A liberal or free style supposedly granted an

architect the liberty of selecting certain features of numerous historical styles for a particular culture and combine them to form a building. The mixture of the European architecture motives such as pilasters and the stony ornaments with the Neoclassical Ottoman motives including the arched windows and symmetrical façade structures was the result of the ability of the Ottomans to absorb the European shapes transforming them according to the Ottoman cultural and political experience in the given period. Eclecticism was particularly suited to the Ottoman Empire's objectives during this period, as it allowed for the flexibility to incorporate Western ideas of modernity while still maintaining a connection to local traditions and Islamic architectural heritage. This blending of styles in the Nablus Clock Tower can be understood as part of the empire's broader effort to reconcile its identity with the pressures of modernization and Westernization, while still asserting its cultural sovereignty.

The practical and symbolic benefits with regards to European Influence When architectural features of the European styled Nablus clock tower were added aesthetic functions as well, for it represented how the Ottoman Empire was trying to interiorize more European values and assert its willingness to belong among the more advanced countries of the world. In addition, outwards on structure, courts were European inventions and their intersection into ottoman cities represented the embodiment of measurement of time which was key to new governance, trade and everyday living towards the empire [20]. The clock itself, which was presumably a European settlement, was not just a useful accessory but rather a means of pharmacological warfare – the colonization of the Ottomans' mind by the image of modern Europe, and its technologies, fashions and lifestyles. Incorporating those European effects, Nablus Clock Tower was saying that the empire is assertive in being regarded as one of the modern and developing powers on the international arena.

The Nablus Clock Tower exemplifies the interplay between Ottoman and European architectural styles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries [16]. The tower's decorative elements, including intricate stonework, pilasters, and the detailing around the clock face, reflect the Ottoman Empire's engagement with European trends as part of its broader efforts to modernize. On the other hand, retaining a very Ottoman identity with local materials and Ottoman ensured construction as a building created modernization policies of the empire in a way that was ambivalent. The Nablus Clock Tower casts light on how Ottoman and Western architectural types interacted with each other in the late nineteenth and early twentieth nineteenth centuries.

#### 2.1.4. Islamic Architectural Features

Construction of Nablus Clock Tower owes a harmony of different architectural designs that are typical of the last age of the Ottoman Empire. There's still a remembrance of the Islamic architecture to these designs, which, due to their general subtlety compared to those of the Ottoman Neoclassical and

European Eastern Tower design, are still influential on the overall form and design of the tower. Arches with points and verticality articulation are features that are directly indicative of contemporary Islamic architecture.

#### (i). The Importance of the Pointed Arch in Islamic Building Design

This point gives importance to the pointed arches as it is one of the common principles in the construction of Islamic buildings. Within Islam, the pointed arch constructed embodies the principles of practical building and beauty. It was used by and turned into one of the architectural masterpieces in Muslim physical structures, including mosques, madrasas, etc. [21]. It was appreciated because it could transfer weight more efficiently than a rounded arch, hence permitting construction of taller and more beautiful buildings. During the construction of the Nablus Clock Tower, this architectural style is clearly captured by the pointed arches which have been used in both the windows and the balconies. Although not the most striking elements of the tower, the arches remain as fascinating scaffolding of an Islamic built form that was highly revered in and out of the Ottoman Empire particularly in public and religious edifices. These two-dimensional fenestrations serve to offset the flat walls of the building in a circular progressional composition that assists the eye in the vertical direction, thus, emphasizing the height of the tower.

The pointed arches also have a use, beyond that of function. The pointed arch in Islamic architecture is often central in depicting the achievement of ascendance in physical and spiritual domains, thus evoking the viewer's gaze to the skies and offering intermediary space to the purists and the public [21]. The Nablus Clock Tower, unlike the recent model towers, considering its a civic structure, however, these arches bear a cultural and spiritual meaning which is in line with the Islamic ethos that espouses verticality as opposed to radial centeredness elsewhere.

#### (ii). Emphasis on Verticality: A Connection to Islamic Minarets

Islamic architecture is characterized using verticality, which is also seen as the minaret. A minaret is one of the essential elements of the mosque. It serves two functions instead of just one. It provides both a practical purpose, namely a high spot from which the call would be given, and a symbolic one, to signify the spiritual ascension of Islam. One of the characteristic features of Islamic architectural design is verticality which is most clearly expressed in a form of the minaret [22]. It is reflected in the Nablus Clock Tower more than the buildings nearby, the clock tower looks like an Islamic minaret. The full, slender form of the clock tower not only visually and spatially connects the Islamic tradition of verticality but also plays a role as a substructure of the modernizing urban landscape. Furthermore, you can see the clock tower is not only a reference to Islamic architectural princi-

ples, but it is also used as a symbol of Ottoman Empire's authority and the integration of Islamic cultural heritage into its modernizing urban landscape.

Besides, the tower of the clock's manner of construct with its tiered sections and the slow tapering echoes the arranged structure of minarets which often increases in steps before touching the ball end or cupola. This sequence further emphasizes the clock tower's multiple functions where it not only provides a functional public structure but also blurred lines. It uses Islamic architecture forms spiced with a sense of urban elements to induce the feeling of civic pride.

### **(iii). Islamic Design in the Windows and Balconies**

The Nablus Clock Tower has arched windows and balconies which are also a part of the traditional Islamic architecture. Recessed arches are used along with the design of the windows, and this is a way in which Islamic architectural practices are reflected, as these were frequent in both religious and secular buildings. The windows together with these recessive openings not only provided structural stability but also shaded interiors, which were the answer to the extreme heat of the Middle East [22]. In the case of the Nablus Clock Tower, the arched elements are used to work with light and shadow and the building can be seen as one of the main Islamic architectural aesthetics. The patterns of light and shadow, which were created, were changing along the day and the characterized the towers as Islamic buildings. The relationship between architecture and light is captured through this move. The dynamic interplay is one of the things that can be seen because of diminishing the visual hit of the tower's stone face, which can showcase the artistic and subtle appearance despite being a massive structure.

### **(iv). Decorative Elements: An Islamic Inspiration for Subtle Ornamentation**

The decorative elements of Nablus Clock Tower mainly represent an Ottoman Neoclassical and European style, but there are discreet Islamic decorations that must be considered. The simple geometry of the arches and the repetition of forms along the facade can be seen as nods to Islamic geometric design, which employed repeating basic shapes together to achieve intricate graphic patterns rich in texture. Over patterns and along surfaces in Islamic architecture, ornamentation is far more than just decorative; it is used often too as a direct statement of the wider order of the universe itself, with geometric vocabularies becoming representative not of boundaries or finishes but centuries instead to unendingness and Divinity [23]. Even though this was no minaret devoid of tilework or arabesque patterns typical of mosques, the appearance to balance proportions and symmetrical geometry answered to the Islamic principle mandating cohesion and order in design. Rather, this unobtrusive approach to incorporating Islamic design principles grounds the tower in its specifically Nabulsi cultural surroundings – resonating with a local population who already venerated it – while simulta-

neously interpreting into its form part of the wider Ottoman modernization narrative.

Importantly, the use of Islamic architecture in the Nablus Clock Tower was not a unique event but part of an emerging dating to at least its incorporation into Ottoman civic architecture. In the Ottoman empire, public works like schools, mosques, markets and clocktowers were commonly built in a style that contained Islamic architectural imagery while including European design elements and neoclassical aesthetics [22]. The combination of styles enabled the Ottoman Empire to design cities in a contemporary way while preserving their heritage without giving up on their tradition, it was beneficial for creating new landscapes with cultural substance and modern utility. The Nablus Clock Tower is a classic illustration of this mingling of architectural styles. Simply by applying forms familiar to Muslims, both in terms of arch form and the vertical emphasis characteristic of Islamic architecture, through the height of its clock tower, the Ottoman Empire was able to produce a building with an impressive visual presence that signified abundant cultural significance uniting design together.

### **2.1.5. Functional Design in the Nablus Clock Tower**

Though the Nablus Clock Tower enjoyed a rich underpinning of symbolic value and architectural style in its study, it was technically functional due to other elements that brought life to the design, albeit this aspect is far less discussed while doing an analysis on architecture. The 19th and early 20th centuries saw public clock towers incorporated into Ottoman cities and other European civic spaces. These towers were both functional timekeepers for city dwellers and expressions of state power and modernity. The Nablus Clock Tower accomplished these things through its bells and iron railed balconies that served as ledges, both utilitarian and ornamental.

#### **(i). The Utilitarian Role of Clock Towers in Public Life**

Towers like the one at Nablus were built as more than just architectural or symbolic value, but also having a practical function in daily life within the walls of a city. In the days before personal timepieces such as wristwatches were common, public clocks were necessary to help regulate daily routines. The clock itself, which would have been placed in the top of the tower so it could chime regularly throughout the day to signal key moments for work (starting and finishing), prayer times, and public announcement [20]. The clock, with a bell system probably imported from Europe and installed in the Nablus Clock Tower, was more than just a technological achievement: It was an instrument for urban planning. The clock tower, by ticking away time in the public square, was an essential component of civic government and helped normalize timekeeping in the city. This was crucial especially in the Ottoman context since cities started being more integrated into the connections of global trade and communication systems were becoming modernized.

These changes in clock regulation and urban planning associated with this development of standard time took form around the construction and exhibition of the clock tower provided the people of Nablus with a visual and an audio focal center connecting them to shifts in time required by broader imperial rules.

### **(ii). Small Balconies with Iron Railings: Practical and Symbolic**

The small balconies with iron railings, visible in the design of the Nablus Clock Tower, offer a functional space for maintenance activities or public announcements. In Ottoman and European clock towers, such balconies were often used to access the clock mechanism for repairs or to make public proclamations. The presence of these balconies on the Nablus Clock Tower reflects both European and Ottoman traditions of using clock towers as multi-functional civic structures. The balconies may have provided a platform for municipal officials to make announcements to the public, thus reinforcing the clock tower's role as a central element of civic life.

Moreover, these balconies served a secondary decorative purpose. The iron railings, although functional, were often embellished with decorative details, aligning with the broader architectural trends of the time, which combined functionality with aesthetic considerations. The use of wrought iron in the railings reflects European influences on Ottoman architectural design, as iron became an increasingly popular material for both structural and decorative purposes in the late 19th century. This dual purpose of the balconies—practical access points for maintenance and decorative elements that enhanced the building's aesthetic—demonstrates the interplay between function and form in the design of the Nablus Clock Tower.

In the design of the Nablus Clock Tower people can perceive some small balconies with iron railings that might be utilized for maintenance activities or public announcements. While in the clock towers of the Ottoman and European eras these suspended facades could have been the passages to the clock's works and announcements platform. This was a way to link the design of the clock tower to European and Ottoman traditions and it was a mechanism for using it as multi-functional civic structures [1]. Moreover, the balconies were probably parts of municipal buildings which helped municipal officials to talk to the general population and, consequently, this also supported the role of the clock tower as a key part of the town's social infrastructure.

These balcony structures also had the additional function of serving as a decorative element. The iron fences, though primary, were mostly dressed up with architectural details, which corresponded to a broader architectural trend of the time that united utility with aesthetics. On the other hand, the use of wrought iron on the railings can be interpreted as the thrust of European styles into the then booming world of Ottoman architecture as iron found significance as a building

material in both the structural and non-structural periods in the late 19th century. The utilization of the balcony for two purposes—as structural points for maintenance and as decorations as they added to the building's appearance—manifests the give and take principle upon which the structure was based.

### **(iii). Marking Time and Civic Organization**

As well as practical timekeeping, the Nablus Clock Tower dictated public life. The role of the clock tower as a public timekeeper coordinated activities for Nablusians, and in turn became instrumental with modernization throughout daily life in the city. Bells and chimes of the clock mechanism announced a regular cadence through the day, it ticked off time at final hours in city. It was part of the broader role of clock towers across the Ottoman Empire that public timekeeping assumed growing importance as cities modernized and entered European and global trade networks [3]. In the Ottoman Empire, clock towers such as the Nablus Clock Tower were commonly placed in public squares around important urban centers so that they could be seen and heard by the populace. This heart further accentuates how disciplining and administering time are central to civic life and in a context of nation-building at the height of urban development. In this sense, the Nablus Clock Tower was not only a practical tool for regulating time but also a symbol of the modern state's control over public life, aligning with the broader efforts of the Ottoman Empire to modernize its cities and centralize its authority.

The functional design of Nablus Clock Tower plays a lesser role in its overall architectural impact which is essential to understanding the building's dual purpose. Clock towers are not just a symbol of modernity, for example, the design of the clock face is very practical. It provides a clear and visible time display, and the décor combines elements of European Neoclassical and Ottoman design. Incorporating functional elements such as iron railings, clock mechanisms and bell systems into a building that remains a symbol of imperial power and city pride. It reveals the dual role of public architecture in the integration of the Ottoman Empire. This creates a structure that is both useful and visually impressive.

The Nablus Clock Tower was part of an architectural initiative common to the Ottoman Empire in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century to reform the cities by constructing functional and representational structures. Clock towers, especially, were also viewed as important generators of modernity throughout urban Ottoman society as well as instruments of time-telling, city identity, and sociability. While these towers were designed for function these towers embody the empire's efforts to become a modern empire while still embracing its Islamic and architectural roots.

Necessary and utility qualities of the Nablus Clock Tower, its shutters like the clock, balconies for announcements, and

the clock mechanism were organoleptic since time and announcements of administrative decisions were crucial for the organization of life in the city. Nonetheless, the quality of its function was always subordinate to symbolic and aesthetic pursuits, which were designed to speak of Ottoman imperial might, progress and cultural dominance. One of the characteristics of Ottoman public architecture, again, is the formal, aesthetic focus, or, in other words, formalism as an architectural approach that is built in the framework of a functional architecture that does not aim to perform solely the apparent tasks.

## 2.2. Assessing the Similarity with Other Clock Towers Built at THE Same Time

The Nablus Clock Tower, as with every other Clock Tower that was put up all over the Ottoman Empire within the early

20th century, has similarities and differences to other Clock Towers constructed during that period.

1. Jaffa Clock Tower: It is a symbol, situated in Jaffa, Israel. Constructed in 1903, it forms part of seven clock towers that were constructed in Palestine during the ottoman reign to mark the 25th anniversary of the reign of sultan Abdul Hamid II [24]. Stating at the northern gate of Jaffa it was one of the symbols of the process of modernization in the Late Ottoman Empire.
2. Izmir Clock Tower: It is an architectural significance located in Konak Square, Izmir City of Turkey. Commissioned in 1901, the building was constructed by the Levantine French architect, Raymond Charles Pàre to celebrate the Sultan Abdul Hamid II silver jubilee [25]. Clock was a gift of German Emperor Wilhelm II – representing the fact that Ottoman Empire and Germany were allies at that time.

*Table 1. Comparison with other clock towers from the same period.*

Description	Nablus Clock Tower	Jaffa Clock Tower	Izmir Clock Tower
Architectural Style and Design	It features a blend of Ottoman Neoclassical style with local Palestinian influences, using stone masonry typical of the region.	It shows a similar neoclassical influence but incorporates more decorative elements, such as multi-colored stone to enhance its visual impact.	This tower is a more ornate example of Ottoman architecture, featuring a unique blend of Moorish revival style with rich decorative tiles and a distinctively shaped roof.
Materials Used	Primarily uses local stone, reflecting the common building practices of its geographic area	Uses a combination of local sandstone interspersed with imported marble, showing a slightly higher degree of material diversity.	Extensively cut stone and decorative tiles, likely sourced both locally and from other parts of the empire, showcasing a richer, more diverse material usage.
Technological Aspects	The clock mechanism was likely imported, as was standard practice; the rest of the construction used traditional building techniques	Both also featured imported clock mechanisms from Europe, reflecting the Ottoman reliance on Western technology for precision instruments.	
Cultural and Symbolic Significance	Serves as a marker of Ottoman administrative presence and influence in Nablus, doubling as a community focal point.	Acts as a landmark in a key urban center, symbolizing the modernization of the city under Ottoman rule.	Stands as a significant cultural symbol in Izmir, representing the city's importance and the empire's modernization efforts
Functional and Community Role	All these towers functioned as timekeeping devices crucial for organizing the daily life of their respective cities. They were typically placed in central locations to serve as meeting points and symbols of modern urban identity.		



*Figure 4. Nablus Clock Tower.*



*Figure 6. Izmir Clock Tower.*



*Figure 5. Jaffa Clock Tower.*

### 3. Results

The Clock Tower in Nablus is of utmost cultural significance, and in many ways represents the past as well as the present and future of the city. In the beginning, it offered a way for people to know what time of day it was and schedule their businesses, prayers and transportation accordingly before everyone had personal watches or digital devices. The tower played a key role in structuring the daily rhythm of urban life and quickly became a hub for social and cultural gatherings. The area surrounding the tower hosted festivals, religious celebrations like Eid and Ramadan, and even political demonstrations, establishing it as a focal point for both social and political engagement. Moreover, the clock tower's construction symbolized modernity and westernization within the Ottoman Empire, reflecting the empire's embrace of Western technology and its endeavor to project political loyalty to Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Economically, the tower contributed to the coordination of market activities, aligning business hours for traders and customers, thereby supporting commercial development in Nablus. It also served as the venue for various cultural and religious events, reinforcing its status as a landmark of shared communal values. As a prominent meeting place, the tower became a point of reference for locals, often used for posting community announcements and facilitating social interaction, making it an integral part of Nablus's urban culture. Today, the clock tower is a major cultural and tourist landmark, attracting visitors interested in

the city’s Ottoman past and architectural heritage. While it symbolizes Nablus’s historical ties to the empire, it also represents the city’s modernization and transformation into a vibrant, dynamic urban center. With local legends as well symbolic revelations for modernization and communal representation, the tower consistently becomes a link between the

new with bibliophiles, photographers, and screenplay writers who still have it in high regard. The Nablus Clock Tower is therefore not only a symbol of the past, but also an essential part of the city landscape that connects its history with its reality today.

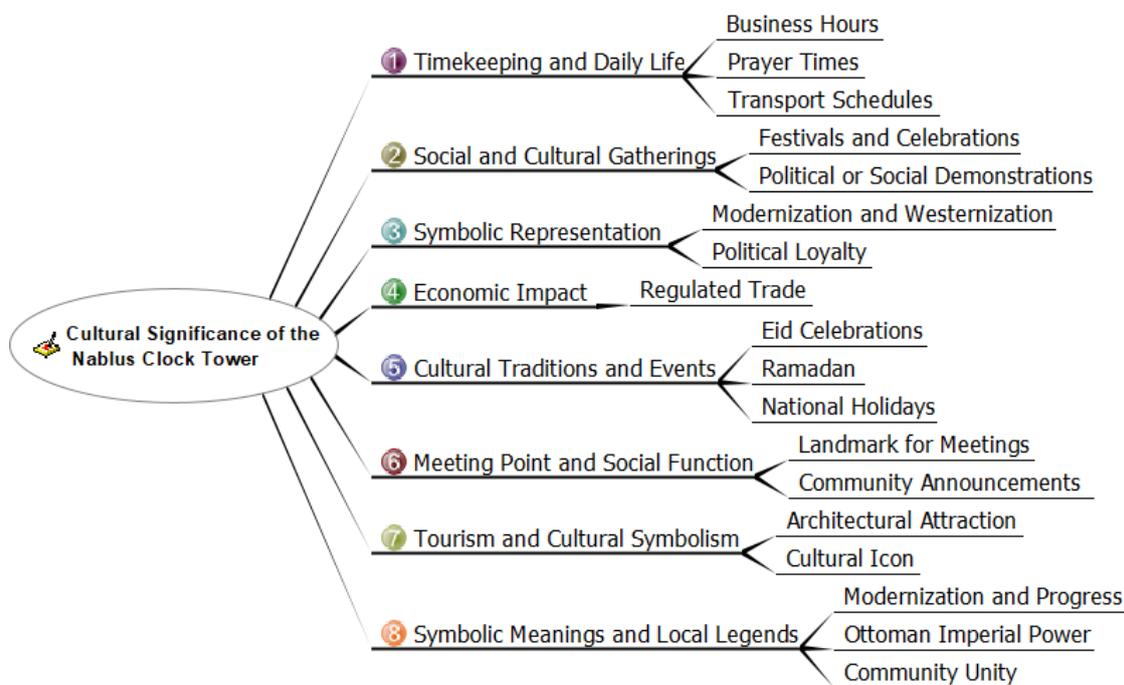


Figure 7. Cultural Significance of Nablus Clock Tower.

#### 4. Discussion

The Nablus Clock Tower plays a key role in drawing tourists, as it blends the historical, architectural, and cultural value of Nablus, making it an inseparable part of the city’s appeal, which is rooted in its rich history and active local culture. The tower reflects Nablus’s connection to the Ottoman Empire, which is why the city is considered a significant cultural and historical center that has evolved through various political periods. It offers visitors the chance to experience and engage with the city’s long history, capturing the blend of Ottoman and local architectural styles that showcase the empire’s influence on the region’s development. While it incorporates local styles to connect with its surroundings, it also commands attention as a symbol of the Ottoman presence in Nablus during that era. Even though its design may be simpler compared to other historic clock towers, the Nablus Clock Tower’s unique style continues to attract those interested in the region’s architectural legacy. The clock tower, located in the heart of Nablus, is considered one of the city’s most important landmarks and serves as a starting point for many city tours, making it a must-see attraction. Through these tours,

visitors learn about the history of Nablus and the tower’s role in it, as they explore the surrounding old marketplaces, narrow streets, and modern infrastructure. This landmark serves as a crucial point that highlights Nablus’s growth and strategic role during the Ottoman period, connecting the city’s rich past with its present development.

The Nablus Clock Tower has become a true historical and architectural symbol, not just for artists, but as a central part of Nablus’s cultural fabric. The surrounding area frequently hosts cultural events and art exhibitions, transforming it into a popular destination for tourists looking to experience authentic local life. This one-of-a-kind structure captures the essence of the city’s cultural and architectural heritage, inspiring both local and international artists and photographers. Their works often highlight the tower and are used to showcase Nablus’s rich history through various media and publications. The clock tower, with its deep historical roots, also breathes new life into the local cultural scene, solidifying its role as a vital part of the city’s identity.

In addition, the clock tower operates as a meeting point for people to socialize and strengthen the local community, locals and tourists come together to take part in conversations that delve into the daily life and habits of the people of Nablus. Through this interaction, the guest’s experience will be en-

hanced by being introduced to a country where aliens interact the best with the residents. The significance of the clock tower goes beyond the realm of the tourism industry. It also provides the learners with great explorative opportunities in topics that include Ottoman footprint in the city, possible construction of the buildings, and the way people lived in the city. Moreover, The Nablus Clock Tower is also key to the economic development of Nablus. Tourists coming to the tower usually stay in hotels, eat, and do some shopping, thus the city's businesses are being supported and the cultural heritage gets conserved as well. This economic benefit is not only the backbone of the local tourism industry but also a driver of infrastructure development and services that are indispensable in creating Nablus as an attractive and sustainable tourism destination.

The Nablus Clock Tower is not just a relic of history, but it is also the city's identity and one of the major players in the tourism industry. The historical site has also got a multi-faceted character. It is not only a place of history but also a home to the bustling city life, hence becoming one of the most preferable and versatile spots in Nablus, attracting a wide variety of tourists from history lovers to those who want pure cultural contact.

## 5. Conclusions

The Nablus Clock Tower, which rises above the rest also known as the architectural landmark, is not just the proof of Ottoman imperial dreams of power-breakthrough and the local Palestinian identity, but it is more than just that. By incorporating the two different architectural styles, that of European Neoclassical as well as Islamic, the tower symbolizes the contradictions of the modernization during the Ottoman Empire. This clock tower has performed as both an instrument of public time regulation, a meeting spot for socializing, as well as an icon of passive resistance during the times of political upheaval, and, therefore, it has become a part of the cultural heritage of Nablus. Based on the outcomes of this investigation, it is possible to say that despite the political issues that have come and gone, such as the dominance of the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate, as well as the ongoing Israeli administration, Nablus Clock Tower remains to be a driving force of modernization as well as a sign of regional continuity and identity. The contribution of this analysis is that it enables deeper understanding of how buildings can not only represent but can also be the carriers of the socio-political tensions of their own time, and in addition, it emphasizes once more the strong cultural power of the Nablus Clock Tower in the urban structure of Palestine.

## Abbreviations

TIKA Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency

## Author Contributions

Ziad Shehada is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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## Biography



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## Research Fields

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