The Sabil of Sultan Abdul Hamid



The Sabil of Sultan Abdul Hamid in Gaza: The Last Ottoman Fountain

The **Sabil of Sultan Abdul Hamid**, also known as the **al-Rifa'iyya Sabil**, is an Ottoman public drinking fountain in the al-Daraj quarter of Gaza's Old City, overlooking al-Wahda Street near Qasr al-Basha. It was built by Bahram Bey ibn Mustafa Pasha in 976 AH (1568 CE), renovated by Rif'at Pasha Al Radwan in 1861 and again under Sultan Abdul Hamid II in 1318 AH (1900 CE), whose name it bears. It is the only one of Gaza's four Ottoman fountains still standing. It was restored and brought back into use in 2014 after decades of neglect, and during the genocide war on Gaza UNESCO listed it among the sites whose damage it has verified. This guide covers the fountain's history and architecture and its place in the life of the city.

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Quick facts

The Sabil of Sultan Abdul Hamid at a glance

Arabic name	سبيل السلطان عبد الحميد

Other name	Al-Rifa'iyya Sabil
Location	Al-Daraj quarter, al-Wahda Street, Old City of Gaza, near Qasr al-Basha
Built	976 AH (1568 CE), by Bahram Bey ibn Mustafa Pasha
First renovation	1278 AH (1861 CE), Rif'at Pasha Al Radwan
Second renovation	1318 AH (1900 CE), under Sultan Abdul Hamid II
Out of use	During the First World War
Last restoration	2014, with Turkish support
Distinction	The only survivor of Gaza's four Ottoman fountains
UNESCO	Among the sites in Gaza with verified damage (2026)

The name

The fountain was first known as the **al-Rifa'iyya Sabil** after Rif'at Pasha Al Radwan, who renovated it in the 19th century, and later as the **Sabil of Sultan Abdul Hamid** after its renovation under the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II in 1900. In Islamic architecture a *sabil* is a charitable structure providing free drinking water to passers-by, built as an act of ongoing charity.

Location

The fountain stands in the al-Daraj quarter of the Old City of Gaza, overlooking al-Wahda Street, near al-Zahraa Secondary School for Girls and **Qasr al-Basha**, and close to the Great Omari Mosque. It lies at the heart of the historic city, once a trading station linking Asia and Africa.

History

- **976 AH (1568 CE):** Bahram Bey ibn Mustafa Pasha built it in the Ottoman period, when Gaza was a major station on the trade routes between Asia and Africa, to supply water from a nearby well to

residents, traders and travellers.

- **1278 AH (1861 CE):** Rif'at Pasha Al Radwan renovated it, and it became known as the al-Rifa'iyya Sabil.
- **1318 AH (1900 CE):** it was renovated under Sultan Abdul Hamid II and took his name.
- **First World War:** it fell out of use and was neglected for decades, until it looked like "a hole in an abandoned wall".
- **2014:** it was restored and water flowed again.
- **2023–2025:** it was damaged during the genocide war on Gaza, according to UNESCO.

Architecture

The fountain is a recessed niche in the wall crowned by a pointed arch, flanked by honeycomb-like muqarnas vaulting. Openings in its façade once held reed pipes that drew water from the basin so people could drink. Since the 2014 restoration it is reached by a short flight of steps and has three taps. It was returned to its original beige colour, and its Arabic inscriptions are legible once more.

Fountains in the life of Gaza

Four public fountains were built in Gaza during the Ottoman period to provide water for the city's people, traders and passing caravans, and the Sabil of Sultan Abdul Hamid is the only one still standing. It was part of the fabric of the Old City, beside the seat of government at Qasr al-Basha, the Omari Mosque and the markets, and a witness to the Islamic tradition of charity and service to passers-by.

The 2014 restoration

In 2014 the fountain was restored with Turkish funding of about $30,000 from the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), working with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in Gaza. The work proceeded in three phases. First came a

site study, a structural assessment, cleaning and damp treatment. Then water pipes were extended to the fountain and a backup well was dug. Finally, steps were built so passers-by could reach the taps. The restoration preserved its original architectural appearance and used as little cement as possible because of restrictions on building materials, and a French archaeologist meant to oversee the work was unable to enter Gaza because of the blockade. In June 2014 clean water flowed from it for the third time in its history.

The fountain and the genocide war

During the genocide war on Gaza most of the Old City around the fountain was destroyed. Neighbouring Qasr al-Basha suffered extensive destruction in December 2023 and its collection was looted, and the Great Omari Mosque was destroyed on 8 December 2023. In its assessment of 25 March 2026, UNESCO listed "Sabil ArRifaiya" among 164 sites in Gaza whose damage it had verified, while the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities counts 226 of 316 sites destroyed or significantly damaged. In a city whose people were deprived of clean water during the war, this fountain, built more than four centuries ago to quench the thirsty, remains a powerful symbol.

Frequently asked questions

Where is the Sabil of Sultan Abdul Hamid?

In the al-Daraj quarter of Gaza's Old City, on al-Wahda Street near Qasr al-Basha and al-Zahraa School.

Who built the fountain and when?

Bahram Bey ibn Mustafa Pasha built it in 976 AH (1568 CE). It was renovated in 1861 and again in 1900 under Sultan Abdul Hamid II.

Why is it called the al-Rifa'iyya Sabil?

After Rif'at Pasha Al Radwan, who renovated it in 1278 AH (1861 CE).

Is the fountain still working?

It was brought back into use in 2014 after a Turkish-funded restoration, but it was damaged during the genocide war on Gaza, according to UNESCO.

How many Ottoman fountains did Gaza have?

Four, and the Sabil of Sultan Abdul Hamid is the only one still standing.

Conclusion

For more than four centuries the Sabil of Sultan Abdul Hamid gave water to the people of Gaza, its traders and its travellers, and it survived neglect to flow again in 2014. Today, amid the ruins of the Old City, the last of Gaza's Ottoman fountains stands as a witness to a city that knew the meaning of generosity, waiting for water to run over its stones once more.

Sources

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