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THE OLD CITY OF HEBRON: CAN IT BE SAVED?

PATRICIA SELLICK

On 25 February 1994, a Jewish settler gunned down twenty-nine Palestinians at prayer in the Haram al-Ibrahimi in Hebron. That the killings took place in the mosque enclosing the tomb of the Prophet Abraham, revered by both Jews and Muslims, is symbolic: rather like the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, the Haram al-Ibrahimi (sanctuary of Abraham) polarizes rather than unites the two peoples that hold it dear. The killings are, assuredly, the most dramatic consequence of the Jewish-Palestinian conflict in Hebron. But there is another consequence of that same conflict that receives scant attention—the serious deterioration of the old city.

This deterioration has long-term implications for the Palestinians, since the old city of Hebron forms an important part of the Palestinian and indeed the Muslim heritage. It is one of the four holiest cities in Islam, along with Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. It is also an extremely well-preserved medieval Muslim town that has undergone remarkably little change in the last two centuries.

Since 1967 the old city of Hebron has been a contested space: for Jewish Israelis the old city is a site to be built upon, for Palestinians it is a built form embodying their *turath* (collective memory, heritage, or culture). The collective memory of Jewish Israelis is not embodied in the buildings of the old

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city, which are Islamic, but in the fact of Jews returning to Hebron. The settlers are oriented to a past that is inseparable from themselves; the Jewish Israeli narrative in Hebron is therefore discontinuous and monopolistic. By contrast, the prism of material culture reveals a narrative of Palestinian political life that is continuous and complex.

These two narratives have been brought into critical opposition since Hebron's old city became the target of a plan by Jewish settlers, backed by the Israeli state, to "Judaize" it. Under military occupation—with prolonged closures and curfews and daily harassment by settlers who have occupied buildings by extrajudicial and often violent means—the old city has progressively declined from a bustling market town to a melancholy and deserted place, streets sealed off with cinder block, razor wire, and concrete-filled oil drums. The old city's infrastructure has been deliberately neglected, its buildings allowed to deteriorate. Faced, too, with a worsening economic and physical situation, many of the Palestinian inhabitants of the old city have moved to safer areas. Those remaining are now in desperate need of support to make their homes habitable and to resist the aggressive efforts of the settlers to demolish and replace entire quarters of the old city.

The Old City and Its Depopulation

The road from Jerusalem to Hebron climbs some thirty kilometers before dropping suddenly into the wadi where the old city was built. At the head of the wadi is the site of the tomb of Abraham, from whom the town took its Arabic name: Khalil al-Rahman, the Friend of God. It was the Mamluks, who ruled Palestine from 1250 to 1517, who built the massive square masonry shrine around the tomb in 1320, and it was at this meeting place of dry valleys and the gentler slopes rising from them that the Mamluk town flourished. Viewed from above, the old city is a harmonious whole of domes and flat roofs of the dun-colored local stone; once inside, one finds a fascinating assemblage of closely packed houses, vaulted arcades, winding passages, external staircases and inner courtyards, markets, *khans* (inns), *zawiya*s (Sufi hostels), hospices, mosques, schools, and public fountains. While the interest of the old city to the student of Islamic and Arab architecture is inestimable—one historian has described Hebron as an "open research file" for a medieval city¹—the scale remains intimate.

Much of the Mamluk town survives: many of the buildings mentioned by the fifteenth-century traveler Mujir al-Din in his book on the people of Hebron were catalogued in 1987.² There are also significant buildings from the Ottoman period (1517–1917), as well as some of mixed Mamluk and Ottoman ancestry. The old city has no walls per se, its perimeter being formed by contiguous buildings broken by five gated entrances. Ottoman and even Mamluk buildings spill outside the confines of the old city into the neighboring quarters, where the same traditional architecture and building patterns of narrow streets and passages prevail.

Today, much of the old city is abandoned. The population figures speak volumes: in 1967 there were 7,500 Palestinian inhabitants in the fifteen quarters comprising the old city. By 1970 the population had declined to 6,000, by 1985 to 1,620, and by 1990 to 1,501.³ A recent survey found that a mere 270 buildings in that square mile of densely built houses are still inhabited, and that much of the space even in these was not in use: 40 percent of the upper floors, and 80 percent of the ground floors, lie vacant.⁴ The abandonment and advancing decay, added to the lack of infrastructure, make the old city particularly vulnerable to the settlers' aggressive efforts at Judaization. This article focuses on the city's decline, and then examines efforts by Palestinians to rehabilitate this vital part of their heritage.

Internal Dynamics

A number of factors are responsible for the dramatic decline of the old city since 1967. Certainly, the external factors—most notably the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the occupation of 1967—dwarf all others. But the internal dynamics of Hebron's political culture have also played a role. The poverty of the old city has become self-perpetuating and immobilizing; the outflow itself has had a demoralizing effect.

People with higher incomes rarely visit the old city: when a class of twenty fee-paying students aged 16 to 24 was questioned in July 1989, only two had visited the old city within the last twelve months.⁵ Those who still live there are primarily from the lowest income groups. A survey of the 270 families remaining in the old city showed 20 percent of the household heads unemployed, 31 percent working in transport or crafts, 17 percent in services or entertainment, and 14 percent in agriculture or trade. Ten percent were housewives. A mere 2 percent were in professional fields.⁶

Equally significant is the low level of amenities revealed in the same survey. Of the 270 inhabited units of the old city, 255 have no running water, 236 have no bath facilities, 83 do not have private toilets, 50 have no kitchens at all while 33 have shared kitchens, and so on. The significance of this poverty of amenities interacts with certain aspects of Hebron society, particularly the status of women. Because the marriage system is patrilocal, with the husband providing the house to which the bride moves, young women attach considerable weight in their marriage choices to the kind of house their future husband will provide, and in particular the amount of domestic work it will require.⁷ Few people choose to live in an old house, especially if they have to bear the brunt of pedestrian access only, no separate kitchen or bathroom, and unhealthy dampness. And while it is acceptable to pay male labor for such jobs as replacing plaster and whitewashing, paid female domestic help is unheard of in Hebron. The daily round of cooking and cleaning

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therefore falls almost exclusively to the women of the household. Moreover, although women have the right to succession in Islamic law and share inheritance rights with their brothers, in the old city they have little access to the decision-making fora—e.g. the *diwan* (meeting place) of the *hamula* (clan) or the *waqf* administration—except informally through their male relatives. As long as they cannot be instrumental in changing their environment, the women use the leverage they do have to leave the slum environment for newer quarters.

While the *waqf* system—the traditional Islamic system of religious endowments wherein the income of an endowed property is used to support designated public works or charities such as mosques, public fountains, soup kitchens,⁸ and so on—has the potential to serve as a revitalizing force, certain of its aspects also contribute to the old city's vulnerability to out-migration and physical deterioration. The *waqf* system in Hebron, reputedly one of the oldest in the Islamic world, dates back to the seventh century when, according to tradition, the Prophet Muhammad himself conferred the land on which Hebron was built to one of his companions, Tamim al-Dari.⁹ Members of the Tamimi family still recite the story of the origin of their land,¹⁰ and the names of the ten families invested with service in the Haram al-Ibrahimi resonate not only within the town, but also among the Palestinian diaspora. The *waqfiyya* (*waqf* document) for all the land of the two villages of Dura and Kufir Birik (Bani Na'im) was engraved in 1215 in stone in the Haram al-Ibrahimi.¹¹ Muslims in Hebron have continued to set aside land or property as *waqf*, and indeed virtually the entire old city consists of *waqf* property, a major feature of which is that it cannot be sold, mortgaged, bequeathed, or altered.¹²

Many of the properties in the old city are *waqf dhurri*, a type of *waqf* collectively owned by a particular family or clan and dedicated to that family's use in perpetuity: entitlement to revenue is shared among the eligible beneficiaries. But the members of the *hamula* with wealth have tended over the years to move out of the old city, waiving their claims to shared residential use of the *waqf* property in favor of their poorer relatives; as a result, the wealthier family members frequently like to think of themselves as having "subsidized" the poorer members, who in turn have a strong sense of their own rights as family members to the use of the property. This arrangement seems sustainable only if the property remains undesirable and there is a low level of upkeep. Other types of *waqf* property are usually leased under arrangements going back many decades, so the rents have become symbolic. Thus, whether as the result of a legal anomaly or a voluntary decision by the holders of family *waqf*, much of the old city's housing brings in virtually no revenue. The effect is a general reluctance to invest in property improvements.

Another internal factor that should be mentioned as contributing to the city's depopulation is Hebron's distinctive tradition of migration. Migration for the people of Hebron is not merely a recourse but a badge of identity that

is highly valued. By 1912 all the commerce in the town of Karak, now in Jordan, was in the hands of Hebronites. The town of Beersheba in southern Palestine was first populated by traders from Hebron, and large numbers of people moved from Hebron to Jerusalem and Bethlehem during the Mandate period.

In the 1950s economic opportunities in the Gulf opened up. Migration to the Gulf, temporarily halted in the mid-1950s, resumed after 1967 before being dramatically reversed following the 1991 Gulf war. There has also been a longstanding flow of people from Hebron to Jordan, which increased in the early and mid-1960s when economic incentives favored the East Bank over the West Bank. A wider diaspora can link Palestinian retail outlets strung out like beads from the village of Bani Na'im to Hebron to Jerusalem to Amman to Manaus, in Amazonas State, Brazil.

Israeli Policies and Settler Activities

Without question, the defining event in the modern history of Hebron was the *nakba* (catastrophe) of 1948, which deprived Hebron of some sixteen villages of its hinterland even as it brought some 70,000 refugees into the city. But it was not until the 1967 war and subsequent occupation that the old city became an arena of direct conflict between Palestinian and Israeli interests. As noted earlier, the population of the old city of Hebron declined by some 80 percent between 1967 and 1990.

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Needless to say, the sharp population drop for the old city has entailed a redistribution of the city population overall. In 1967 about one-fifth of Hebron's population lived within the old city, and another one-fifth within the adjacent quarters; 81.8 percent of the population lived within the municipal boundaries.¹³ Today, the majority of the population of 87,000 lives outside the city limits in suburbs built on agricultural land. The growth of these suburbs is part of a Palestinian nationalist endeavor to protect Palestinian land threatened with Israeli confiscation by building on it.¹⁴

In assessing the factors contributing to the decline of the old city of Hebron, it is difficult to separate the impact of direct Israeli state policies from settler activities. On 10 May 1968, less than a year after the 1967 war, seventy-three Jews led by Rabbi Moshe Levinger occupied the Nahir al-Khalid Hotel in the center of town. They were persuaded to leave only after reaching an agreement with the authorities allowing them to camp within the compound of the military government. Several months later, in October, the government began building on the outskirts of town the residential settlement of Qiryat Arba, whose population has grown to over 5,000 today.

There is general agreement among the various researchers who have focused on this issue¹⁵ that the development of the Hebron settlements depended upon the transfer of powers from the Palestinian-controlled

municipality to the Israeli authorities. In May 1980, two months after the government officially decided to authorize Jewish residential settlement in the heart of the city, the popularly-elected mayor, Fahd Qawasima, was deported. His deputy, Mustafa 'Abd al-Nabi al-Natsha, assumed Qawasima's functions as mayor, only to be dismissed by the occupation authorities in July 1983.* The appointment of a Jewish mayor—Zamir Shemesh—for a wholly Arab town was significant. More significant is the fact that Shemesh was also Custodian of Absentee Property, which ensured that the Israeli authorities had control over both absentee property and the property of those present in the town. The Israeli government also appointed all four members of the Hebron Municipal Council, three of whom served on the vitally important Planning Committee.

While the settlers cannot operate without the at least tacit cooperation of the government, they do have their own agenda and priorities. Rabbi Levinger, the most active proponent of the settlement movement in Hebron, expressed the following vision for Hebron:

This town will become yet again a Jewish city. Tens of thousands of Jews will be living here within the next 10–20 years.¹⁶

The disjuncture between myth and historical record is accommodated by the settlers' two-track ideology and strategic pragmatism. On the one hand, the settlers have created and cultivated a collective memory of a mythic Jewish past for Hebron. On the other hand, they have resuscitated claims to specific properties in the old city, and in particular property abandoned by the Jews between 1929 and 1936.

In fact, the Jewish presence in Hebron during the past millennium has not been extensive. Of the four towns of significance to Judaism—Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias, and Hebron—the Jewish population in Hebron was the smallest and poorest. Ottoman statistics for the Hebron district in 1884–85 showed 436 Jews out of a total population of 41,155, a figure which in 1911–12 had risen to 721 out of 56,444.¹⁷ Arthur Ruppin, head of the Jewish Land Office in Palestine as of 1908 who compiled (somewhat exaggerated) population statistics for the Zionist Organization, put the Jewish population of the Hebron district at 1,000 in 1915¹⁸; the British Mandate government's census of 1922 counted 430 Jews in the city of Hebron, whose total population at the time was 16,577.¹⁹ On the eve of the 1929 Arab riots in Hebron that followed the Wailing Wall disturbances, the Jewish population had reached 700 out of a total city population of 18,000, according to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Most left after the troubles, but a number of families returned in 1931; all were evacuated by the British in April 1936 after the beginning of the Arab Rebellion of 1936–39.²⁰

* Following the February 1994 Hebron massacre, Mustafa al-Natsha was allowed to resume his functions as mayor, albeit with considerably reduced powers.—Ed.

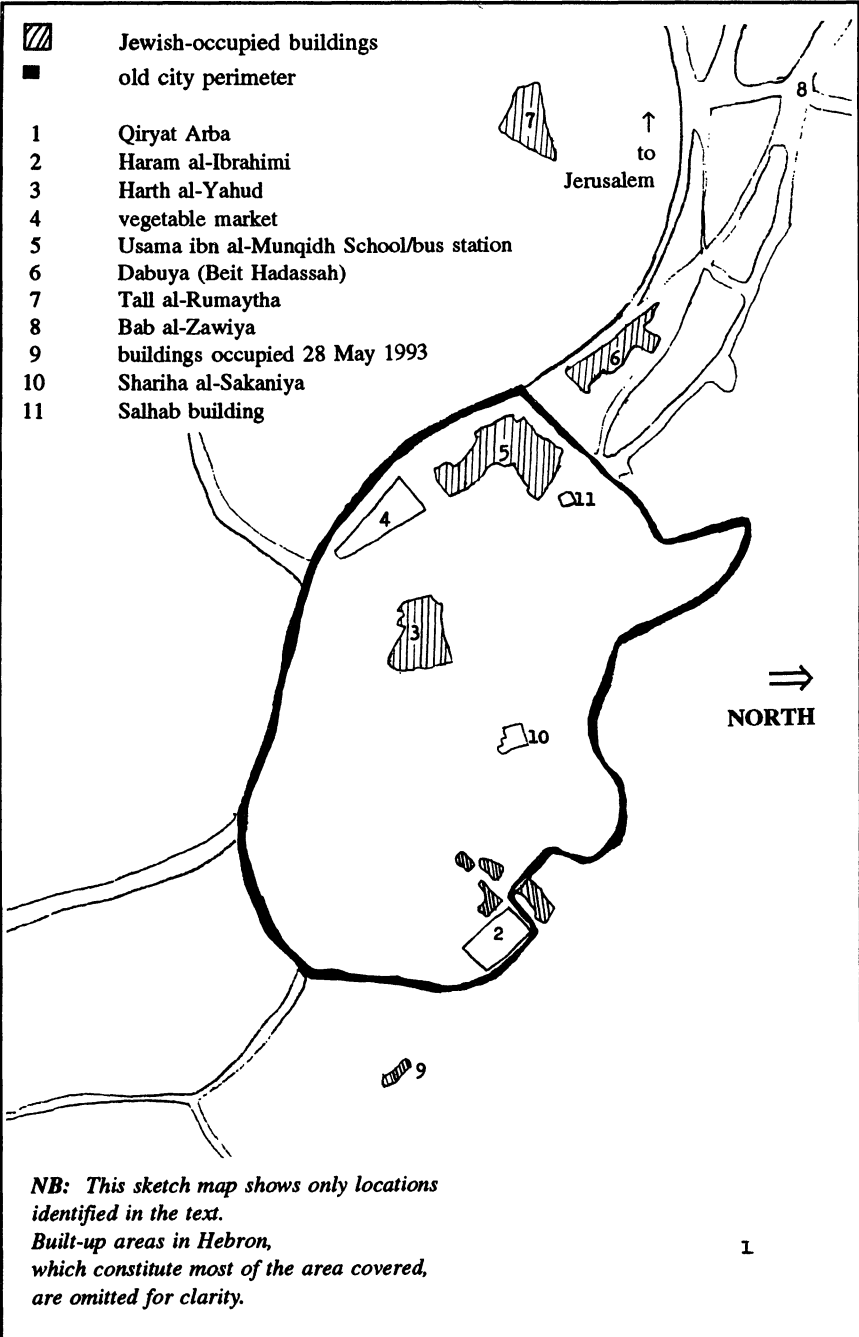
In terms of property ownership, titles of property abandoned by Jews in 1936 were officially registered under the name of the Jordanian government's Custodian of Enemy Property in 1950. After 1967 this function was transferred to the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property; at stake were forty-four titles which had been officially leased to thirty-two Arab tenants.²¹ There is, however, some question as to whether the properties were all actually owned. The *mutawalli* (manager) of the Tamimi *waqf* in Hebron, Anwar Khatib, former Jordanian governor of the District of Jerusalem, claimed that much of the property occupied by the Jewish settlers in Hebron itself is Tamimi *hikr* (*waqf* property under long leases) and produced evidence in the form of receipts of annual payments up to 1936, when the Jewish occupants left. The Objections Committee, the body appointed by the Israeli military government to look into disputed cases of land acquisition, refused to accept such receipts as sufficient proof.²²

Whether the Jewish properties were owned or leased, they were the focus of settler moves into the old city. In 1974, renovations began on the Avraham Avinu synagogue of the Kniset Ibrahim, also known as Harth al-Yahud. This was followed in May 1979 by the occupation of Dabuya (called Beit Hadassah by Jews) right outside the old city by a group of Qiryat Arba women led by Miriam Levinger. Next, in July 1983, the settlers took possession of the Usama ibn al-Munqidh School adjacent to the bus station, with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) occupying the latter building at about the same time. The following year, in August 1984, Tall al-Rumaytha, not far from Dabuya in an old quarter outside the old city perimeter, was occupied.

The settlement pattern, which emerges clearly on the sketch map showing locational sites accompanying this report, was spelled out in a master plan for Hebron published in 1984 by the Committee for the Renewal of Jewish Settlement in the City of the Patriarchs.²³ The plan calls for regaining possession of Jewish property abandoned in 1929-36 and then Judaizing the old city by the gradual displacement of the inhabitants. As can be seen from the sketch map, the settlement sites are islands that can be linked up to form a continuous swath from Tall al-Rumaytha to the Haram al-Ibrahimi, with the buildings occupied on 28 May 1993 now to be linked to Qiryat Arba. From the map, one might speculate that a strategic interim goal of the master plan is to bisect the city, making movement by the Palestinians more difficult. What the map does not convey is the actual impact of the settlement buildings, which are quite different in size and style from the old city buildings that surround them.

The 1984 plan focused on former Jewish property. A change in settler "policy" was signaled in a news item reported by Israel Radio on 6 July 1993: thirteen homes in the old city of Hebron had been bought (or rather, their leases had been bought) through Arab middlemen. The radio report

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noted that the money had been raised at annual fund-raising dinners in France and the United States.²⁴ In this regard, it is worth mentioning the Hebron Fund, a charitable tax-exempt foundation incorporated in New York in 1982 with the purpose of acquiring real estate in the occupied territories, particularly Hebron. Specifics concerning the fund's operations are not public, but there is little mystery concerning its goals. On 20 May 1990, speaking at the fund's third annual fund-raising dinner at the Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel in East Rutherford, New Jersey, the Scranton-born mayor of the Jewish enclave in Hebron, Rabbi Yechiel Leiter, said (in the presence of special guest speaker Richard Perle, former U.S. assistant secretary of defense, and guest of honor Miriam Levinger):

Until now I came to you as a dreamer, today dreams become reality. . . .
The ramifications are self-evident, are so momentous, are so historic. The second largest city in Judea and Samaria can be Jewish.²⁵

True to the intentions of the 1984 master plan for Hebron, the occupation of each site has been followed by a virtual emptying of the immediate neighborhood. In the formerly densely populated Palestinian residential and commercial area around the Dabuya (Beit Hadassah), only one house—the al-Attal house immediately behind Dabuya—is still inhabited. Its courtyard is directly overlooked by the settlers living less than three meters above; plastic roofing had to be installed as protection against the rubbish thrown down, and the family no longer uses the courtyard. The windows on one side of the house have been permanently shuttered against stones and verbal abuse. Similarly, the neighborhood around the Harth al-Yahud has seen the Palestinian population drop from twenty-five families in 1967 to only three (including one tenant family) in 1993. The Yusuf Sharabati house, which adjoins the site, has been bulldozed from three sides in 1982, 1987, and 1990.

It should be noted that the restoration of the synagogue initially involved little opposition from the Palestinians, who hoped it would deflect Jewish attention from the Haram al-Ibrahimi housing Abraham's tomb. But religion was apparently only a pretext: in 1986 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported major underground excavation and construction at the Harth al-Yahud. Work continued at a slower pace during the intifada (much of it with Palestinian labor), but accelerated after the Gulf war. The windows of the houses looking onto the construction have been sealed by the IDF, which guards the site, but from the rooftops a crater at least fifty meters across and ten meters deep could be seen: the remaining Palestinians living in the surrounding houses complain of worsening cracking in their walls, and observation showed that the underground excavation extends directly below their houses. By July 1993, the settlers' new four-story housing complex involving at least 200 units had been completed, visible from the Sharabati house.

The Israeli-appointed and controlled municipality, for its part, has contributed to the erosion of the physical (and hence social and economic) fabric of

the old city through a judicious mixture of neglect and action. The power to withhold permits for restoration work is extensively used. The municipality also issues demolition orders for buildings it deems unsafe. Following a heavy snowfall in winter 1991, for example, the municipality served demolition orders on a number of buildings in the old city. The orders were contested by the Hebron University Graduates Union (UGU), but in the meantime the properties stand vacant and their condition is worsening.

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As a result of settler activities and advancing decay, the old city has become the most fearful part of town: in addition to the hazard of unsafe buildings, there is the fear of being trapped inside the old city when the authorities without warning seal some or all of the five gated entrances, leaving visitors at the mercy of IDF or settler violence or the small but growing numbers of Palestinian collaborators, drug dealers, and burglars who find shelter there. The permanent sealing of certain entrances and many of the small passages linking main streets to facilitate control has cast a pall on the area.

Commercial Decline

These developments have, quite obviously, affected not merely the residential but also the commercial and administrative role of the city. Up until 1948, Hebron was the capital of the district with the largest number of villages of any district in Palestine, and as such was an important market town. The building of Jewish settlements in the district since 1967 has made access to Hebron difficult, severing the web of ties binding village and town. Meanwhile, the traffic of goods and labor was increasingly being diverted to Israel, where growing numbers of Palestinians from Hebron's hinterland came to be employed as day laborers. Still, Hebron long managed to maintain its role of district magnet. Every Saturday, when those who worked in Israel had their day off, the old city of Hebron would fill up. When they came into the market, the more devout men from the villages would pray in one of the old city mosques.

The occupation of the bus station by the IDF in 1983 forced villagers to disembark further from the old city. Thereafter, with the old city accessible only to pedestrians, the commercial center began shifting up Shari'a Shallala to Bab al-Zawiya. Nonetheless, the animal market, slaughterhouses, and tanneries in the old city continued to be active and the vegetable market still contained much local produce, though the vegetable market was severely disrupted by the construction works undertaken in the Harth al-Yahud in the mid-1980s. Meanwhile, with the "thickening" of the Jewish settlement area between Dabuya, the Usama ibn al-Munqidh School, and the bus station, settler confidence became sufficient for noisy celebrations of the Jewish festival of Purim at Bab al-Zawiya, and for Rabbi Levinger to return to Bab al-

Zawiya to harass Palestinians within hours of his 30 September 1988 shooting to death of Kayid Salah, a shoe-shop owner, in front of IDF witnesses.²⁶ Increasingly, then, Shari'a Shallala too became a no-go area.

The intifada dealt a further blow to the commercial center of Hebron. The shopkeepers suffered from curfews as well as from general or half-day strikes and days of mourning. Villagers began setting up and making do with their own shops and services, avoiding journeys to town. The prolonged closure by Israeli order of all Palestinian educational institutions also contributed to the suspension of traffic between Hebron and the villages. Israeli punitive and security measures during the intifada involved among other things the sealing off of yet more streets in the old city, leaving doctors' and dentists' clinics cut off from their patients, shops cut off from their customers, and workshops with no access for delivery.

At the end of 1990 the ICRC reported that the closure by the Israeli authorities of the road between the Harth al-Yahud and Dabuya to Palestinian traffic threatened the economic base of the shopkeepers and deprived the people of Hebron of the possibility of living in the old city. The Hebron Chamber of Commerce regularly submits petitions to the military governor, pointing out the decline in economic conditions in the town as a result of IDF and settler activities. Individuals and groups also appeal to the military governor through the Chamber of Commerce. None of these has received a written response, although the ICRC and the Chamber of Commerce sometimes get oral reassurances which may be followed by a temporary improvement in conditions.²⁷

Those Palestinians who want to invest locally are doing so in the comparative safety of 'Ain Sara on the main road to Jerusalem. Entrepreneurs meet with no deterrent from the municipal authorities when they destroy old residential quarters in Harth al-Shaykh, a neighborhood outside the old city that grew up around the thirteenth-century mosque of 'Ali Baka near Bab al-Zawiya, to put up concrete-faced supermarkets. Development in this area has been especially rapid in the last five years because of its prime location on the Jerusalem road near the pedestrian market area and away from the settler zone. Such development has entailed the wanton destruction of buildings that deserve to be preserved. Nor are there any incentives to make sure that the old city benefits from what limited Palestinian investment is going into new housing stock, health, and educational facilities on the perimeter of the town.

Palestinian Plans for the Future

Against the background of the desolate picture just painted, it was an encouraging and unusual sight when, in 1988, Palestinian researchers from the Hebron University Graduates Union (UGU) first approached households in the old city with clipboards and surveying equipment in hand. Motivated by an acute awareness of the importance of the fabric of the old city to Palestin-

ian Arab and Islamic *turath*, and that its further deterioration would be a loss to future generations, the UGU embarked upon a project aimed at reversing the city's decline. Plans for the rehabilitation of the old city were drawn up by a team of architects, historians, and engineers working under the direction of the architect Ghassan Dweik. The first phase of the project was two-pronged: to draw up a profile of the social and economic status of the remaining population of the old city, and to carry out comprehensive architectural surveys of the old city's buildings. Some of the team's findings have been reported above.

Much of the UGU team's access to the old city's houses and the cooperation they obtained from residents was based on the researchers' respect for traditional forms, including lines of communication and allegiance, and on their personal conduct and tact. Cooperation of the local residents was also based on their assumption that improved services would be forthcoming, which in turn depended on access to financial resources. But the Gulf war left the UGU, like other Palestinian institutions, cut off from funds, and by 1993 the architects and engineers, themselves working without salaries, were finding that they were being turned away from some homes in the old city because they were perceived to have failed to deliver on their promises.

As part of its effort to demonstrate to the remaining inhabitants of the old city that improvements can be made to their environment, the UGU team has detailed two pilot projects.

The first is an ambitious renovation of al-Shariha al-Sakaniya, a residential block in al-'Aqaba quarter only a few meters from the Haram al-Ibrahimi. The complex, a 1,000-square-meter *waqf dhurri* property consisting of several levels, is reached by five main entrances, each for a different *hamula*, as well as private entrances to the trade and industrial workshops. Built around a series of lovely small courtyards open to the sky, it is designed in such a way as to assure an immediate sense of privacy and seclusion from the noise and tumult of the street. The proposed modifications to the specific use of al-Shariha al-Sakaniya involve the creation of thirteen apartments.

The second project is the renovation of the Salhab complex, a cluster of buildings that interlock and overlap with neighboring buildings on three levels. It is particularly important because it is situated at the main entrance of the arcades of the old city.

The implementation of these projects would provide not only immediate reassurance to the local inhabitants who have witnessed the continuing decline of their environment, but a training ground for Palestinians in the skills required for the renovation of traditional buildings. Such projects would also serve as a test case for cooperation between the UGU, the *waqf* administration, the inhabitants, and the municipal authorities who continue to control sewage, water, and electricity supplies. But these projects, and future plans for the rehabilitation effort, have been put on hold for want of funds.

In the longer term, mobilizing effective opposition to the multiple forces that have contributed to the deterioration of the old city requires widespread educative efforts aimed at promoting a conscious awareness of the role of one's surroundings in identity formation. It is within this framework that the Center for Palestinian Vernacular Architecture (RIWAQ) is developing educational materials to encourage appreciation of traditional environments and knowledge of traditional skills among Palestinian architects and engineers. RIWAQ is also active in schools and youth groups, promoting discussion and experimentation among young people about what kind of future home they want to live in.

Certain forces can be mobilized in reversing the old city's decline: the local population's highly developed nationalism, through demonstrating the relationship of built form to history and identity; and their religious sentiment, through appealing to the Islamic significance of the city. Indeed, Hebron is almost entirely Muslim, and the town is recognized as having a different tradition from the mixed Christian and Muslim towns in the central West Bank. About a quarter of the 415 Hamas and Islamic Jihad members deported to Lebanon in December 1992 were from Hebron, many of them respected holders of positions in local educational, health, and other charitable institutions. The obligations arising from Hebron's Muslim identity are manifold, embedded in the Arabic language (noted in Hebron for its frequent Islamic references) and in the social values of generosity and hospitality. They are also embodied in *zakat* (alms tax) and the institutions of the *waqf* system. Indeed, even for the most secular of individuals, *waqf* properties (*zawiyas*, fountains, clinics, public baths, and schools) provide a sacred geography for the town, serving as markers and orientation points. Preservation also has in its favor the dedication and determination of concerned individuals, including those associated with the UGU, as well as the tenacity of some of the old city's residents: for the son of Yusuf Sharabati, for example, who has remained in his house for more than a decade through bulldozings and the depredations of armed settlers next door, "The old city is more beautiful than Paris. I have friends from the neighborhood who have left, but they always come back."²⁸

Despite the debate since the February massacre surrounding the approximately 400 settlers in the old city, there is nothing to suggest that they will not continue to benefit from Israeli government protection for the foreseeable future and beyond. Nor is there any reason to believe that their determination to extend their presence will weaken: throughout history, groups in conflict have always tried to appropriate or annihilate material culture, these very efforts demonstrating the power of built form to embody collective memory and to project that memory into the future. Similarly, on the Palestinian side, when the UGU set out to define, protect, and promote *turath* through its

Mobilizing effective resistance to the city's continuing decay requires intensive educative efforts.

project to rehabilitate the old city, it set out to plan the future. The material culture of Hebron's old city is a powerful symbol for the collective and subjective establishment of the identity of the modern Palestinians.

NOTES

1. Nathmi al-Ju'beh, head of the archaeology department of Birzeit University, interview with the author, July 1993.
2. Yunis Sa'id al-Natsha and 'Isa Mahmud Bidun, "The Muslim City," in *Madina Khalil al-Rahman* (Hebron: University Graduates Union, 1987), pp. 72-73 (in Arabic). Mujir al-Din's chronicle, *History of Jerusalem and Hebron*, was translated from the Arabic by Henri Sauvaire, and published by Ernest Laroux in Paris in 1876.
3. Ghassan Dweik, *Al-Taqrir li-Mashru' Tarmim al-Balad al-Qadima fi al-Khalil*, report presented to AMIDEAST, Jerusalem 1992. Further unpublished documentation on the UGU project for the rehabilitation of the old city of Hebron is in the author's possession.
4. *Ibid.* The UGU researchers could gain access only to the inhabited buildings.
5. Author's interview.
6. Survey conducted by UGU. See Dweik, op. cit.
7. Author's interviews with women in Hebron, 1987-93. Among other reasons for refusing possible husbands, women aged 15-25 said that they would not want to live in an old house without modern conveniences.
8. While soup supported by a *waqf* is no longer distributed on the scale it once was, there is to this day a daily queue of children with plastic pails at the soup kitchen.
9. F.E. Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginning of Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 385.
10. The fifteenth-century chronicler Mujir al-Din, in his *History of Jerusalem and Hebron*, op. cit., pp. 227-28, recounts the same story, adding that he personally saw the piece of leather from the sandal of the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ibn Abi-Talib (caliph A.H. 35-40/A.D. 656-61) on which the deed of donation was written. Cited in Peters, op. cit.
11. Najah Abu-Sara and Yunis Amr, *Fi Khalil al-Rahman* (Hebron: Hebron University, 1989), p. 391 (in Arabic).
12. Michael Dumper, *Islam and Israel: Muslim Religious Endowments and the Jewish State* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1994), p. 8.
13. Ghazi Falah, "A Geographical Introduction to Hebron," in *Madina Khalil al-Rahman*, op. cit., p. 35 (in Arabic).
14. *Ibid.*, p. 35. For population of Hebron, see Ziad Abdeen and Hasan Abu-Libdeh, *Palestine Population Handbook* (Jerusalem: PRC Publications, 1993), pp. 89-90.
15. The most detailed account is Ghazi Falah, "Settlement and Judaization in Hebron," in *Madina Khalil al-Rahman*, op. cit., pp. 207-32. See also Romann, *Jewish Kiryat Arba versus Arab Hebron* (Jerusalem: West Bank Data Base Project, 1985).
16. Yehuda Litani, "Hebron and its legacy of hate," *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, week ending 13 June 1987, p. 11.
17. Justin McCarthy, *The Population of Palestine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 50, 53.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
20. Moshe Shapira, "Hebron," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, n.d.), Volume 8, p. 235.
21. Dumper, op. cit., p. 90.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
23. The Committee for the Renewal of Jewish Settlement in the City of the Patriarchs, master plan 1984, 18 pp.
24. *Al-Nahar*, 6 July 1993, 18 July 1993. *Al-Fajr* (Arabic), 6 July 1993.
25. Quoted in Robert I. Friedman, "Making Way for the Messiah," *New York Review of Books*, 11 October 1990, pp. 14-17. See also Robert I. Friedman, *Zealots for Zion: Inside Israel's West Bank Settlement Movement* (New York: Random House, 1992), pp. 34-42.
26. Author's observation.
27. Interview with Hashim Sadiq 'Abd al-Nabi al-Natsha, president of the Chamber of Commerce, Hebron, July 1993.
28. Author's interview.