Architectural Heritage in the city of Hebron, and the Rehabilitation of the Historical Centre

1. Hebron is located in the heart of southern Palestine, 35kms. South of Jerusalem. It is considered to be the second oldest city in Palestine and is the site of the tomb of Abraham. For this reason the city is of religious significance to Jews, Christians and Muslims.

2. The Old City of Hebron

The historic centre of Hebron is situated in the south-east of the modern city and this is now considered, with its surrounding old quarters, the centre of Hebron. The layout of the old centre was designed to be defensive, and the unusual walls of the old city were formed by joining them to the exterior walls of the outermost houses. Entry to the city was by means of passage through the ground floor level of some of the houses. These main entrances were arranged with big gates and defensive recesses. This arrangement was repeated inside the city to close some quarters at night. Moreover, all the streets were labyrinthine to make it easier to surprise anyone attacking the city.

The whole city appears as one big building as heights of individual constructions are approximately the same; only the mosque's minarets reach into the sky, making it very difficult to see the quarters of the city from above. The main market street goes through these big buildings and it is the principal axis of the city. Side streets giving access to the residential building were
labyrinthine, and they were many small closed paths. The appearance of roofs indicates the buildings' structures and the size of the streets was human in scale, although this feature was lost by widening after the introduction of cars.

3.1. Chronological Growth of the City

The pressures within the old city of Hebron, including the scarcity of land and the growing population, made expansion beyond the city walls necessary. The first groups daring to establish settlements outside the security of the city walls were religious institutions and persons in a good economic and commercial situation. Naturally, these settlements needed their own protection and hence were built as compounds. Near the end of nineteenth century, al shallalah and Bab Al Zauieh compounds were built on the main road, on the route towards the north-west. The arrival of the first cars and buses in this area at the turn of the century led to a further expansion. Business also expanded, thereby increasing the pressure to develop outside the old city. As is often the case in walled cities, the expansion first took place around the main entrances to the city. Commercial building were constructed outside the principal entrances of the north, these structure often being attached to the city wall, end screening it from view from the north. Expansion then continued along the historic routes from Hebron, principally the northward-bound road leading to Jerusalem and eventually to the Mediterranean ports, and also the westward-bound one leading to Beersheba and to Gaza port.

3.2. The Coming of Modern Times:

The years following the First world war brought further growth. With the new occupation came an increase in commerce and in the general level of business activity, which also attracted trade and trades from surrounding village and indeed from outside Palestine. The British brought modern town planning and an orderly bureaucracy. They initiated a series of measure aimed at organizing and protecting the heritage and controlling development. Through the British initiative, several architects and city planners of the time were brought to Palestine to draw up plans, develop guidelines and design building, not only in Hebron but in cities and village throughout Palestine. By the late of 1930s Hebron's north-east and north-west sectors were also well established. The area centre around Bab Al Zauieh
and Ein Sarah street was given impetus by the construction of shops which served to expand that zone commercially. Under military occupation the old city has suffered from a lack of attention to its infrastructure, and lack of assistance to maintain its buildings. This neglect has been combined with frequent military closure and curfew orders. What was once a vibrant and historic city centre is in danger of becoming a slum.

In addition, Hebron was the first target of Jewish civilian settlement following the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Over the past twenty five years the life of the old city has been disturbed by ideologically motivated Jewish Israeli settlers who have occupied buildings by extra-judicial and often violent means. Faced with daily harassment from the settlers, and a deteriorating economic and physical situation many of the original Palestinian inhabitants are 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.

4. **The project objectives**

The main aim of the project is to reverse the process whereby the old city becomes a slum and / or is gradually demolished and built over without respect for its architectural heritage.

**The project has undertaken to:**

1. Survey and document the old city to establish the present condition of its building and its inhabitants.
2. Draw up plans for the renovation of the building of the old city in accordance with their historical Islamic architectural style.
3. Draw up plans for the renewal of the economic, social and cultural life of the city, so that it may once again be a vibrant city center.
4. Implement selected small pilot conservation and
The first stage: surveying and documentation

5. Project Introduction:

Suq Al wakala building is considered one of the waqf buildings of profit Ibrahim. It was used to receive the visitors of merchants from the surrounding village to spend the season of commerce so they sell their goods in the ground floor and sleep in the first floor of the building.

Suq Al wakala was built on several phases the first was between 550-600 Hijri during the crescent invasion of Hebron. The ground floor was built during this phase. It consists of the main entrance in addition to several spaces surrounding an internal court these spaces were used as shop sell several goods.

The second phase was built during the Othoman rule. Between 1130-1150 Hijri during the rule of Rajab Basha, the ruler of Sham district who ordered to build a mosque over the existing building on the western side and add more rooms on the northern, southern and eastern sides.

Later, the building was used as commercial and residential space. New spaces were also added using concrete blocks to meet the new needs.

Now a days, the building is abundant except some rooms like the pray room and ablution room in the first floor and 3 shops on the ground floor that are used to sell traditional goods.

The project aims to protect the cultural and urban heritage of the old Hebron City, reveal its historical details, rehabilitate and also providing the essential needs and services for the area

5.1. Location:

Suq Al wakala building is located in the old city of Hebron, to the south of the Sawakneh neighborhood and to the east of Qazazin neighborhood on the Qasaba street (Qazazinst.) that links Ein Alaskar area (The northern western entrance of the old city) and the Abraham mosque close to what is called square of the Suq (Eskafiyeh Suq).
The importance of this building stems from its closeness to main entrance of the old city like (Khosq al far) and Al Khan (Suq Al Laban) entrances.

5.2. The goals of the project:

1- The main goal:
   To converse the cultural Heritage of the old city of Hebron and to foster its main landmarks historical archeological buildings. In addition, it's aims to rehabilitate these buildings and to provide essential services for the development of the area.
2- Other goals:

- Job creation.
- Creating an infrastructure for tourism
- Encourage the projects that serve the old city.

5.3. Research obstacles:

1- The existence of colonial nodes on the surrounding roofs.
2- The lack of accessibility to the project location due to the closure of the main street that leads to the project by the Israeli military.
3- The existing of abundant historical buildings attached to the project negatively.
4- The difficulty of reopening of several shops since their owners have moved away 15 years ago and their current location is unknown.
5- The existence of a metallic mesh that covers the Qasaba Street and that blocks the façade of the building preventing taking a photo of the façade.
6- Unconvience because of the residents and pedestrians.
7- As the building was abundant for several years, it was full of dogs, insects in addition to dead animals and bad abhors.

![Metallic mesh that covers the Qasaba Street](image1)
![The existence of colonial nodes](image2)

![Accumulation of waste and dirt](image3)
![The growth of weeds and grasses](image4)

5.4. The steps of surveying:

1- We had made several exploring visits for the building to come up with detailed photos for all the internal and external parts.
2- Accurate measurement of the building had been made in order to draw architectural plans and section in addition to drawing the main elevation and several architectural details of doors, windows and detailed section of the covering materials.
3- Studying the development of the building through the different historical phases and understanding the changes that had taken place on the form of the building.
4- Studying the surrounding area on architectural and social levels.

6.1. The composition of the building

The building consists of an open court surrounded by spaces of 2 floor height. The ground floor include 12 shops the merchants used
for selling their goods six of these stores open to the court and the other 6 opens on the Qasaba street directly.
The first floor was used as a hostel (sleeping area) for the merchants coming from outside of the city. It was then converted into offices related to the shops on the ground floor level. This floor was divided into 3 parts, each has its own court surrounded by attached rooms.
The first part consists of 6 rooms and a bathroom distribution on a corridor. The second part consists of a central court surrounded by 4 rooms 3 of them to the south and one to the north. The visitor can reach to it through 3 stairs to the eiwan then to the room. A bathroom is also added to this part using concrete blocks. The 3rd part consist of 6 bedrooms arranged around a central court that is opened to the main court in addition 2 toilets were added recently using concrete blocks, in addition ablution room and a pray room that still in use the building façade is a model for the old city building that is constructed using the Tobzeh stone the façade has small scale doors and decorated windows with decorated steel protections and stone pieces (Kamt, Alaqa, Kalb) and other ornaments that are traditionally used in the old building.

Panorama image shows the entrance to the building of the inner courtyard.

Panorama image shows the inner courtyard of the building from the entrance.

The building façade suffers from several problems:
1. The growing of the grass and putrefaction.
2. The use of several materials like stone and concrete blocks.
3. Visual disturbance by the pipelines.
4. The corrosion of the metallic features of the building.

6.2. The building materials

Traditional Arab building materials have been used in this building and those are stone, lime, clay and pottery. Different kinds of stone have been used as the main material in the walls and vaults, both raw and untreated, and lime mortar been as a material to bind together the walls and joints.

a. The Facades
The external facades are built of raw stone, laid irregularly. Treated stone which has been made smooth by the use of a serrate hammer has been used in the second floor and the surrounds of apertures. Treated stone, laid regularly, can also be seen in the façade dividing the rooms from the terrace with a stone cornice in the wall at the level of the floor. Two systems can be seen in the apertures. The first is the ceiling of the main door and several of the interior doors and small windows, and the other where the roof resembles a dome, "part of a dome", with mosaic decoration on the two sides. Mosaic and artwork can also be seen on the ceiling which opens onto the skylights on the first floor. The windows, both external and internal, are protected by metal bars.

b. The ceilings
This building is an example of the Arab system of vaulted ceilings, made up of intersection vaults composed of flexible bricks (royal bricks) to form the ceiling using the lime mortar as bonding material for the bricks and the plaster of the ceiling and the walls. Several embellishments can be seen in the vaults of the big rooms in the first floor. The four vaults intersect to form the shape of an upturned dish.
c. The floors
The floor are different kinds nowadays, but former time they were of stone flags. These remain is several rooms, but in others there are new floors of mosaic tiles without skirting boards in the first floor and there are also black and white cement tiles. And on the roof there are concrete floors.

![Stone tiles of the courtyard](image)

d. The steps
All the steps are stone, many of these are steep, and some of them have balustrades but others no protection.

6.3. Metal and woodwork
Some of the window frames are newly built of metal and others are still of wood. All of them have protective realigns of metal with some embellishments. Several of the windows have large spaces between their frames and the protective railings. The doors are all old wooden doors with a one or two leafs. Circular patterns of ornamentation can be seen on the facades of the front doors. The cupboards are made of old wooden drawers or wooden panels, or glass panels in a wooden frame, or mirror panels in a wooden frame. The shelves are made of wood and glass has been used in some of the shelves.

6.4. Methods of construction
The methods employed in this building are the system of load-bearing walls where the weight is transferred from the intersecting Arab vaults to the buttresses of the columns and inside the walls in such a way that all four joints make up one ceiling, a pattern which
is repeated throw out the building but with different heights and sizes. Thus the weight it transferred from the walls and the columns to the foundations of the walls which stand on the block of stone visible in the floor of the existing basement. There are no spaces in the walls other than the apertures for the doors, the windows, and the cupboards. The ceilings of these apertures in the form of half circles, or domed, because the arch bears the existing pressure better than any other form, any other form, and therefore apertures can be made without any noticeable influence on the walls or the distribution of the load.

6.5. The problems the building face

- a. Water, the storage and flow of water, and the resulting damp.
- b. The old sanitation system, the remaining brick channels, the sewage system.
- c. The external electrical connections, striping of the wiring.
- d. The doors, windows, and cupboards which are made of wood and broken.
- e. The plaster work which has deteriorated and flaked in places.
- f. The general cleanliness of the buildings, and the different types of flooring.
- g. The pointing (kuhla) on the walls.
- h. The steps and the balustrades.

These points have to be taken into account in the course any maintenance work for the building with special attention to the stability of the structure.
7. The second stage: The New Function and Drawings of the Project.

7.1 The New Function.

Suq al wakala building has its own special historical value, that's why "Hebron Rehabilitation Center" (H.R.C) focused on rehabilitating and planning to reuse it as a (Guest House) to cover the H.R.C needs to have a rest place for its guests.

Palestine Polytechnic University (P.P.U) -Which had a major part in rehabilitating and conservation projects to protect the cities cultural heritage- had the honor of restudying the project and designing it according to suggestions and terms set by both P.P.U and H.R.C, and the project contained many main functions, such as; Restaurant, Coffee shop, Entrance Hall, Lectures Hall, Bedrooms and the other building utilities.
7.2 Drawings to the project.

**Existing Ground Floor Plan:**
The ground floor include 12 shops the merchants used for selling their goods six of these stores open to the court and the other 6 opens on the Qasaba street directly.

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**Key map**
- Space 1,2 stores
- Space 3 shop sells Miscellaneous
- Space 4 shop sells upholstered furniture
- And the rest of the spaces are not used
The Existing First Floor Plan:
The first floor was used as a hostel (sleeping area) for the merchants coming from outside of the city. This floor was divided into 3 parts, each has its own court surrounded by attached rooms.

Key map
Space 1 Ablution room.
Space 2 Toilets.
Space 3 Tank room.
Space 4 Prayer room.
Space 5 Store.
And the rest of the spaces are not used.
Proposed Ground Floor Plan:
The proposed ground floor include 4 opens on the Qasaba street directly, restaurant, toilets for men and women, coffeeshop, lecture hall, manager room, reception and external seats.
Proposed First Floor Plan:
The proposed furnished first floor include 11 bedroom, toilets for men and women, prayer room, ablution room and external traditional seats.
Proposed furniture Section B-B

Proposed Furnished Section E-E
The northeast corner of the building

The southeast corner of the building
Traditional Tools used in the project

Lighting Units used in the project
8. The third stage: Implementation and estimation of cost

Having studied the architectural plans and the documentation of the building, priorities have now been set the changes which will allow for the required building use. Studies have also been made for the preferred methods of conservation. The security of the building and the safety of the workers during process is paramount. Detailed plans for the implementation of the work with use of support frames, scaffolding and wooden moulds have been drawn up.

Specific plans have been drawn up for the elements of construction and the methods of treatment and conservation. The total cost will be 743240$ (US).

References: