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An approach to risk management and preservation of cultural heritage in multi identity and multi managed sites: Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Abraham's Tombs of the Patriarchs in Al-Khalil/Hebron



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ABSTRACT

Al-Khalil, also known as Hebron, is a settlement hosting different belief groups. Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi or Abraham's Tomb or Tombs of the Patriarchs, names of the same historic sacred site, is the focal point of this settlement. Since this site represents the identity of different belief groups, this condition has indeed initiated conservation problems. In particular, the research puts forward main problems related with the mutually worshipped and used pattern of Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tombs of the Patriarchs. It further seeks to discuss alternative ways of its structure-oriented conservation. Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tombs of the Patriarchs is considered to be a holy site located in Al-Khalil/Hebron. Its history dating back to the Middle Bronze Age, Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tombs of the Patriarchs witnessed Roman, Byzantine, Umayyad, Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman periods, respectively. Above the tombs of Ibrahim/Abraham as well as his prophets and their wives who have religious significance in Islam, Christianity and Judaism; at some point in the Islamic period, a mosque was added and this sacred complex was transformed over time by different civilizations. After the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, the conditions changed for using Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tombs of the Patriarchs. Due to the tensions between Israel and Palestine, the building complex, according to the Hebron Protocol, was divided into two to host Jews and Muslims in 1997. This condition created some problems for the sacred site in terms of its sustainable conservation. Since this kind of a division creates difficulties in studying within the section of the "other" belief group, surveying the building complex as a whole, which is the initial stage of conservation process, is prevented. Thereby, the holistic approach of conservation cannot be applied for this building. Within this context, this research aims to discuss possible solutions for the protection and risk management of Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tombs of the Patriarchs, as well as evaluate the role of international organization related with heritage conservation.

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1. Introduction

This study focuses on the preservation problems of Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Abraham's Tomb, a monument at the centre of Al-Khalil/Hebron, which is a multi-layered historic city inscribed on the World Heritage Tentative List of UNESCO in 2012. The monument is the physical and political focal point of the city and is divided to be used by two different religious groups.

Al-Khalil/Hebron is the one of the largest and known cities of Palestine, located 30 km south of Jerusalem. The city's importance comes from its location on the road of trade in the previous

centuries, which served as an economic and cultural centre at the crossroads between southern Palestine, Sinai, eastern Jordan, and the Arabian Peninsula.

Although there is an extensive literature on the city, the history of Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Abraham's Tomb and the political development of its region, this research is the first comprehensive one to focus on the problems arising from the balance of preservation and usage, which was initiated after the physical division of the building complex in 1994 to be used by two different parties due to political conflicts. This paper presents the findings of a PhD thesis conducted on the preservation problems of Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Abraham's Tomb and the reflection of its division on the Old City.

The methodology of this study is based on literature review and fieldwork. In the beginning of the research, the existing studies were collected and compiled. A scientific study should prioritize objectivity and the subject in question is politically fragile,

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therefore taking these facts into consideration, different points of views were evaluated from different resources. Then, a fieldwork was conducted in Al-Khalil/Hebron and on the monument site. During the fieldwork, physical data regarding the historic buildings and land use policies on Al-Khalil/Hebron were collected. In addition, the present physical condition and preservation problems of the complex of Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Abraham's Tomb was studied through the accessible parts.

2. Hebron City: the location and history

The importance of Hebron can be attributed to Prophet Ibrahim Al-Khalil, the forefather of all the Prophets. In the Islamic period, the city was called “Khalil Al-Rahman” – the friend of the God – a name usually abridge to Al-Khalil. At different times, Hebron was called Kiryat Arba’ – the village of four – referring to the four hills, then it was called “Habra” and “Habron” from the verb “Habar” – to be joined, coupled, or be friend – in reference to Abraham the friend [1].

The first urban human settlements in the region can be dated back to around 1700 B.C. In Tall Rumaida, Ancient Hebron, which lies at the north-western part of the present Old City, there are ruins from the Stone Age and the Bronze Age. Tall Rumaida became a Canaanite city in the mid-Bronze Age, when many cities were built by Canaanites in Palestine [1]. The second site in the city is Al-Rama “Mamre/Mambre”, which is located at the north of the Old City. In this site, there was an international market, which was considered as one of Palestine’s major market places from Roman to Islamic Period. The third site is the Old City (Hebron’s Valley), which includes Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tombs of the Patriarchs [1].

Arabs and Edomites have settled on the ruins of the town Tall Rumaida in the 1st Century A.D. In the Hebron’s Valley, there was only the wall of Al-Haram around the tombs until the Islamic period. After the Islamic conquest, the site was converted to an Islamic prayer site in 636. In this period, the settlement was attributed the statute of a major city, due to the presence of this sacred complex [1]. It is assumed that, during the Umayyad Period, a mosque was built above the Tombs of Prophets. Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tombs of the Patriarchs became a focal point of the city after the Umayyad Period, similar to the Haram Al-Sharif in Jerusalem.

The city’s economic boom came to a halt after the conquest of the Crusaders in 1099. The mosque was destroyed and a Romanesque-style church – bearing early Gothic elements – with a fortress was erected in its place in 1168. In addition, a farmhouse was constructed in 1100 on the western wall of Al-Haram [1].

In 1187, the Ayyubid leader Salah Al-din conquered the city. During the Ayyubid period, the city was rebuilt and its population was increased. Thus, some of the quarters, which are still present today, were founded during the Ayyubid period [1]. In Mamluk period (1250–1516), the city became a magnet for all mystics who wanted to feel closer to Prophet Ibrahim Al-Khalil. The increase in the number of residents and visitors also led to an upgrade of the water systems during this period. The city continued to develop in the Ottoman period with the construction of new buildings in empty zones left from the Mamluk Period and the addition of extra floors on the existing buildings [1]. The historic centre is dominated by the Mamluk architectural style, with influences from the subsequent Ottoman Period [2].

In 1831, Al-Khalil/Hebron, like other parts of Palestine, was besieged by Ibrahim Pasha – the Governor of Egypt. During the siege, the fortress along with the other parts of the Old City was destroyed. In the 19th century, there was an increase in population; inhabitants started expanding outside of the Old City. The first expansion was along the main road leading to Jerusalem, where

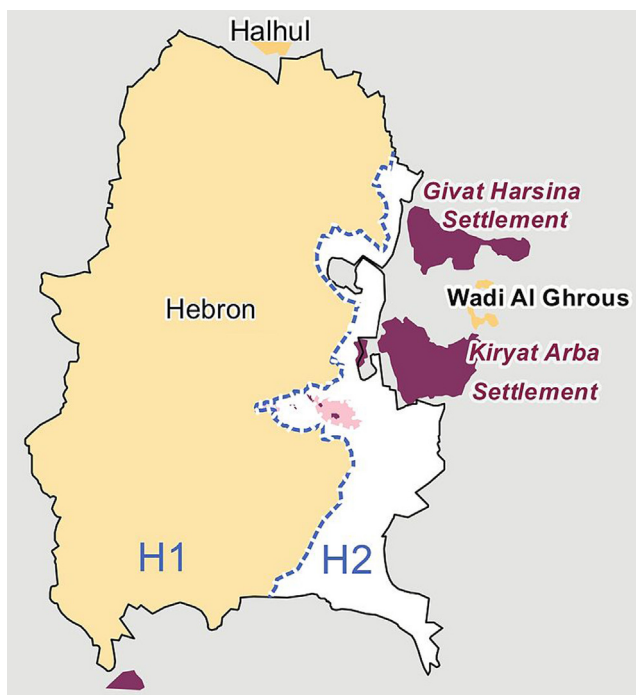


Fig. 1. H1, H2 areas in Old City (image: [3]).

new markets were built limits, while later expansions continued in other directions [1].

During the British Mandate (1917–1947), there were no major changes to the physical structure of the city, while under the Jordanian rule (1948–1967) buildings surrounding the Ibrahimi Mosque were demolished in order to highlight the mosque itself in 1960s. As a result, not only many of the surrounding historical buildings, but also parts of some quarters were destroyed, while the fortress ruins were wiped out completely.

After the Six-Day War in June 1967, the control of Al-Khalil/Hebron city was taken by the Israel state. As a consequence of tensions in Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tombs of the Patriarchs in 1994, agreements were signed between Israel and Palestinian government, “Oslo II” in 1995, which divides Hebron City to 3 parts: A – under Palestinian control, B – under Palestinian and Israeli control, C – under the Israeli control; and “Protocol of Hebron” in 1997 [1], which divides the Old City of Hebron to two parts: H1 – for Muslims and H2 – for Jews; while the third agreement divides Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi into two parts, one for Muslims and another for Jews, Fig. 1 [15] shows the parts (H1, H2) of Old City after division.

3. Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tombs Of the Patriarchs: general description and physical evolution of the building complex

Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tombs of the Patriarchs in Al-Khalil/Hebron is among the world’s oldest sacred buildings being continuously used. It is believed to host the tombs of prophet Ibrahim/Abraham, his wife Sarah, their sons Ishaq/Isaac and Yakoob/Jacob as well as latter’s wives Leah and Rebecca [1].¹ It is not certain when the site acquired its sacredness, when the burial site of the Prophets “Patriarchs” was defined and when its sanctity started to spread among the population [1].

¹ Inside the walled structure, there are the cenotaphs of the Prophets and their wives in the halls of prayer above the tombs: (Al-Ishakya, Al-Ibrahimiya, Al-Yakooby, Al-Malikya and a courtyard) while outside the wall, there is another cenotaph, and another prayer hall (Al-Jawaliya).

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