

Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi



By Emad Hamdan

The Ibrahim Mosque is a sacred landmark in the heart of Hebron's old town. While it features beautiful architecture, its importance stems from the fact that it is built above the Cave of the Patriarchs that

contains the shrines of Prophet Ibrahim and his wife Sarah, their son Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and Yacoub (Jacob), the son of Prophet Isaac, and his son Yousef (Joseph). The site is revered by the faithful of all three monotheistic religions, considered the fourth holiest site in Islam, and one of the most important tourist attractions in the world.

Surrounding the sanctuary is a large wall that was built 2,000 years ago, in Herodian times, and encloses an area of 60 x 34 meters. With a thickness of two and a half meters, it is constructed of stones that reach up to over seven meters in length and a meter and a half in height. Around the year 570 AD, a Byzantine church was built here; it was converted into an Umayyad mosque in the seventh century but destroyed and rebuilt as the Church of Abraham during the twelfth-century Crusader conquest, only to be converted a few years later into a mosque again after Al-Nasir Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub



■ An old image of Hebron. Photo courtesy of Tariq Tamimi.



■ The interior of the Ibrahim Mosque in Hebron. Photo from Palestine Image Bank.

had reconquered the city. Beginning with the 1967 occupation, Jewish worshippers began to pray here, but the official division into a Jewish synagogue and a Muslim mosque occurred in 1994, after American-Israeli settler Baruch Goldstein stormed the mosque and killed 29 and wounded 125 Palestinian Muslim worshippers. The sanctuary is divided today by a wall that separates these sections.

Al-minbar (the pulpit) is one of the oldest Islamic wooden platforms; it was built in the eleventh century for a mosque in Asqalan (Ashkelon) and brought to the Ibrahim Mosque by Salah al-Din in 1191, where it is located today to the right of *al-mihrab* (the niche that indicates *al-qibla*, the direction that points towards Makkah, which Muslims face during their prayer).

The Mamluks completed what Salah al-Din had begun and covered the

mosque's walls with colored marble. Later on, they also built the *Malikiyah mihrab* and the women's mosque.

Al-Haram al-Ibrahimi is accessible through three doors and contains several important prayer spaces: in the middle of the building is the Ibrahim Mosque that contains graves and shrines, including the Isaac prayer area; Al-Yaqubia prayer area (which contains two rooms and the tombs of Prophet Jacob and his wife Leah); and Al-Malikiyah prayer area (used by the *malkiyiye* Muslim denomination). Al-Jawli Mosque is an integral part of the building and was added in the fourteenth century by the Mamluk emir Sanjar al-Jawli. It is located along the northeastern wall of the Ibrahim Mosque and connected to it by a covered passage. Al-Yusufiya building also lies adjacent to the mosque's outer wall; here, a silk-covered shrine marks the burial

Emad Hamdan is the general director of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC). A lecturer and trainer in many local universities and institutions, he holds a master's degree in sustainable development and a bachelor's degree in business administration.

Virtual imagery for the main
indoors area:
<https://youtu.be/LmboGCfbu5U>

Virtual imagery for the
mosque's indoor prayer
area for women:
<https://youtu.be/rEdcZW35xC8>

Virtual images courtesy of LionHeart.

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■ The Ibrahim Mosque in Hebron, Palestine.

place of Prophet Yousef (Joseph). This site is accessible to Jews only, except for ten days a year when the Jewish sites are accessible to Muslims for prayer and vice versa. An internal open courtyard facilitates the ventilation of all these sections. The mosque's roof features several domes as well as gray sloping surfaces. Two square minarets date back to the Mamluk era.

Since its establishment in 1998, the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC) has stood out because of its great efforts in the rehabilitation and maintenance of the mosque, engaging with a local technical team of specialists. The HRC trained the team in caring for mosaics, stucco, marble, stone, tiles, wood, iron, and murals while simultaneously taking into consideration the need to strengthen the Palestinian and Islamic presence inside and around the mosque.

The committee has rehabilitated all buildings and infrastructure in the Haram, paying attention to the

smallest details – and succeeding despite many obstacles imposed by the Israeli occupation forces. For example, it has made great efforts to repair the water-damaged foundation through the construction of an internal canal. The damage was caused by the building of houses and structures on the adjacent rocks that leaked water into the mosque's basement. The canal was constructed so as not to affect the building's fabric. It is worth mentioning that the HRC considers its care for the holy site of the Ibrahim Mosque – and the historical building – a religious, moral, and patriotic duty.

On July 7, 2017, thanks to the joint efforts of Hebron Municipality, the HRC, and the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, "Hebron's Old City and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the occupied West Bank" were listed as a world heritage site in danger by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).