Cultural Heritage in Palestine
RIWAQ New Experience and Approaches

Nazmi Ju’beh*
Ramallah-Palestine
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Introduction

Cultural Heritage in Palestine was for more than one century a monopole of western foreign scholarship. It is just in the last two decades that Palestinians began to establish national infrastructure to deal with the different components of cultural heritage. The terminology “cultural heritage” in itself is also very recent, the locally used terminologies were “antiquities” and “heritage”. The first terminology was a legal one, meaning all kinds of movable and immovable remains of cultural heritage which existed before the year 1700, and for local Palestinian population it meant a source of income, either through working for foreign missions as cheap unskilled labor or through illicit excavations, selling the artifacts in the black market. The second terminology was nothing except ethnographic objects with a lot on nostalgia meanings.

In the last two decades a tremendous development, in spite of all kinds of difficulties, took place in Palestine. The experience is in general very recent, but very rich and the number of involved institutions is growing rapidly; as well do the number of involved individuals in different components of cultural heritage.

It is very important to bear in mind that cultural heritage in Palestine, unfortunately, is still a very sensitive, ideologically and politically oriented “science” and practice. Cultural heritage research in Palestine is to be understood in the context of the area’s historic developments since 1850 until today. Therefore, to process the history of the various groups, whether local or foreign, it is important to examine the historical factors that have developed in the area. This facilitates the comprehension of these groups’ and the analysis of the scientific research tools and theories used in reconstructing the past. Thus, it is important to review the historic roots and variables in Palestine, which have contributed to the emergence of new groups throughout the various eras of history.¹

* Nazmi Ju’beh holds a PhD from Tubingen in Oriental Studies and Archaeology. He is the Co-Director of Riwaq-Center for Architectural Conservation. He taught history and archaeology at both Birzeit and al-Quds Universities and still offering seminars at both Universities. Ju’beh had published a great number of books and articles on the different fields of cultural heritage and politics and he is a consultant of number of institutions on cultural heritage issues.

¹ The aim of this revision is not just to reflect on the past with its advantages and disadvantages, but also to trace certain orientations towards more scientific, objective and modern cultural heritage, relieved from the ideological pressure and relaxed from the influence of the political conflicts. The discussion in the following part of the paper is based mainly on detailed paper and research conducted to serve as a policy paper for the new proposed legislations in Palestine, in which the author had intensively worked on as well as coordinated the sections concerning archaeology. The policy paper, not published, was a proved in 2003, the legislations are still waiting for farther discussions and lobbying.
I. History of Cultural Heritage Research in Palestine

1. After the end of the Egyptian invasion of Palestine in 1840, the Ottoman Empire implemented a string of major changes Reforms (tanzimat). These reforms were an attempt to rebuild the state by issuing new and modern legislation; this was a need to modernize the Ottoman societies, but also as a reaction of the growing European presser. This coincided with the commencement of European consular and religious missions to Jerusalem in particular and to Palestine (Holy Land) in general, and the introduction of foreign working groups in the fields of geographical, archaeological and historic research studies. The movement of foreign working elite in the field of archaeology adopted an Orientalists approach. It was a conservative school of thought derived from fundamental Christian religious beliefs in Old Testament texts, which were mainly used to interpret the cultural past of Palestine.

With the emergence of this school in Palestine, a knowledge base was created, of course not without exceptions, which came from a biased examination of the past, without interaction with the local intellectual groups. In fact, the nature of the local society’s economical, social and political composition of that period (1850-1917) led to a failure to produce significant intellectual elite with the tools of knowledge necessary to establish an information framework for the history of its people. The available scientific knowledge was depending mainly, of course with exceptions, on the traditional Islamic educational system, which was far away from that one adapted in the West at the end of the 19th century. This had changed slowly with the begging of the 20th century.

During this period, many research institutions laid their foundations in Palestine in general and in Jerusalem in particular, such as the Palestine Exploration Fund, the Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Francaise, the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology in the Holy Land (Das Deutsche Evangelische Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes), the British School of Archaeology and the American School of Archaeology (The Albright Institute), in addition to hundreds of travellers who wrote and published their accounts, memories, maps and pictures. They explored Palestine's topography, including the main cultural sites and came up with detailed maps, often in harmony with the Old Testament interpretations, and mostly the Palestinian population was invisible, they were not the target, nor were the researches and exploration conducted for their benefits. In spite of the great achievements that can be listed, these activities had other serious shortcomings, findings from archaeological excavations and digs of that period have largely been dispersed or exported to international museums, mainly to European academic establishments, “Oriental” research institutes and museums. Generally, the findings from a site explored by a foreign mission were kept by the mission itself in Palestine and mostly taken abroad.

On another level and coinciding with the period (the second half of the 19th century) of industrial development in Europe, western travellers and ethnographers turned to the still developing areas in the Near East. There, the local population was still closely linked to

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2 A relatively comprehensive survey of sources on Jerusalem in particular, which can be generally used on Palestine, see Ben Arieh, Jerusalem in the 19th Century, the Old City, Jerusalem, 1984, pp. 1-12.

3 It is not the aim of this paper to trace the intellectual development of Palestine in the second half of the 19th century, but for further discussions on this issue, see different publications of Rashid Khalidi, Alexander Schoelch, Bishara Domani, Adel Manna and others.
its traditions and living them physically and conceptually. It was possible to establish a better understanding of the nature of social and economic systems in Palestine through the Survey of Western Palestine (implemented by the Palestinian Exploration Fund). This Survey documented on detailed maps the distribution of the territories dominated by agricultural communities. However, this effort was not purely a corollary for defining the socio-economic context of the area but was rather a part of an attempt to link this situation with the tradition of Jewish tribes that inhabited the region during the Iron Age (biblical period).

2. The World War I resulted in the collapse of the Ottoman rule in Palestine and the onset of the British Occupation and few years later the British Mandate. The British Mandate sent British specialists\(^4\) to Palestine to lay the foundation of central administration of antiquities; they implemented various excavations and archaeological surveys, thus continuing the work started by the foreign institutions in the previous period. Specific events of interest during this period include the establishment of the Department of Antiquities in the 1920’s. Then the effort continued to propose legislations concluding in 1929 of The Antiquities Law\(^5\). The law focuses on the protection of archaeological sites with little mention of other cultural assets. On another level, the Muslim Waqf (Foundation) establishment the Aqsa Mosque Museum in the early twenties, but this museum did not play any central role at the time. The establishment of the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem in 1930 followed this\(^6\). The Museum was set up to house some of the Palestinian archaeological findings from excavations run by foreign archaeological teams. The high interest in cultural heritage in Palestine was also reflected in the establishment of the Pro-Jerusalem Society in the 1930’s: A group of foreign nationals living in Jerusalem and some local residents formed a society for the protection of cultural heritage and for the promotion and encouragement of local crafts.\(^7\) There were very few Palestinians who were working then in the Palestinian Department of Antiquities, most worked there as clerics since they did not possess the ability of research, excavation and publication. The exception was Dimitri Baramki, who worked as an inspector at the Department of Antiquities, and published numerous articles in the Department’s Quarterly Journal.\(^8\)

It was during this period between 1905 and 1946, that Dr. Tawfiq Canaan gathered his unique collection (1400 items) of Palestinian amulets, talismans and other objects related to healing, superstitious beliefs, etc.\(^9\) The amulet collection is considered one of the rarest of its kind in the region.\(^10\)

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\(^4\) The British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem was particularly active in that period.
\(^5\) The Israeli Authority later applied this same law, with small amendments by the Jordanians after 1967.
\(^6\) Renamed the Palestinian Antiquities Museum in 1966 under the Jordanian regime, and again renamed as Rockefeller Museum by Israel after the occupation of East Jerusalem 1967.
\(^7\) A substantial collection of Palestinian costumes and ethnographic artefacts was gathered by the society with the idea of exhibiting it in the Rockefeller Museum. The 1948 war prevented the implementation of this project. The collection safety kept in until 1970’s when members of the society in London decided to donate the collection to Dar at-Tifl Society in Jerusalem, and is now exhibited in an ethnographic museum.
\(^8\) Dimitri Baramki became a professor of Archeology at the American University of Beirut, and his publication report on Khirbet al Mafjar (Hisham Palace) is a main reference on the subject.
\(^9\) Now owned by Birzeit University (since 1996), as a gift from Canaan’s family. 2002 who had witnessed the inauguration of the collection in form of an exhibition and catalogue. His Library and Icon Collections,
3. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Palestinian society, following the 1948 war (al-Nakbeh) and the establishment of the State of Israel, de-facto sovereignty over Mandatory Palestine was divided among a group of countries, namely, Jordan (in West Bank and East Jerusalem), Egypt (in Gaza Strip) and Israel (the rest of Mandatory Palestine). The recent history of Palestine, as marked by the 1948 and 1967 political events, triggered the destruction, dissemination and dispersal of many aspects of cultural heritage.

The expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 from their homeland was detrimental in the expropriation of hundreds of towns and villages by the state of Israel. The Zionist nature of Israel led to crude attempts to acquire a political, historical and cultural legitimacy in Palestine. This hegemony resulted in the illegal exploitation, destruction and manipulation of the existing cultural heritage. Thus in a deliberate attempt to minimize all memory of the history and existence of Palestinians, 422 of villages and towns with their typical local architectural were demolished or eradicated. Most of the physical aspects of Palestinian life and tradition, houses, furniture, personal belongings, photographs, documents etc. in the territories of the State of Israel were lost. In the rush of leaving, people sadly chose to take just the necessary possessions, leaving behind households and places full of belongings and memories, which evidenced centuries and centuries of the history, taste, beliefs and social life of Palestinian society. Above all else, most Palestinians were forced to leave behind all the historical, archaeological and natural heritage of their ancestors. Whoever remained in land occupied by Israel had and still to struggle to keep their identity including their cultural identity as “Palestinians”.

As a consequence of all these changes, the scientific elite working in history sciences now had to resume work in yet new historic-political circumstances, mostly in exile. The Palestinian Department of Antiquities (of the British Mandate) was annexed to the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, which took the task of managing surveys and issuing licenses for foreign archaeological missions working in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.11 The Jordanian Government also did major renovation works on the Dome of the Rock as well as rehabilitating several archaeological sites and had opened them up for tourism.12

In this historic international context and its influence on the elite working in history sciences, the Palestinian elite emerged though it was still under establishment and the Palestinian contemporary existence materialized; hence commenced the countdown for linking this contemporary Palestinian existence scientifically with its old physical heritage in historic Palestine under the auspices of the Palestinian rising intellectuals.

which were of great value, were ransacked and stolen (in 1948) from his house in the Musarrara Neighbourhood, located close to Damascus Gate in West Jerusalem.

10 It is comprehensive and thoroughly documented by Canaan himself. Canaan also published numerous articles on cultural heritage, documenting social customs and beliefs.

“Aberglaube und Volksmedizin in Lande der Bibel” (1914)


“Arabic Magic Bowls” (1936) JPOS 16: 79-127


11 It was at this time that the renowned British archaeologist, Kathleen Kenyon excavated the site of Jericho (Tell al-Sultan), see her different publications on the subject and mainly her book: Digging Up Jericho, London, E. Benn, 1957.

12 Gilded aluminum sheets replaced the lead dome shell and newly imported tiles from Turkey replaced partly the old Ottoman Iznic-styled tiles on the exterior of the octagon.
This linkage was noticed on the onset in literature and particularly in novels, stories and poetry by using symbols on the physical heritage that are interwoven in the fabric of these literature and intellectual works. The upgrade process of the various Palestinian groups especially of those working in the field of history sciences was launched, following an increase in the number of Palestinians steered towards higher education, which started in the country after founding various Palestinian universities, where specialized academic programs were developed in the field of history sciences including archaeology. For the first time in contemporary history, the latest developments led to establishing a connection between contemporary Palestinian society and its old physical heritage, using the tools of knowledge in interpreting the past. It is the first time that Palestinians were set on archaeology despite the ambiguity of the process. Ongoing various gaps in history sciences linger today and are characterized mostly by the slow use of new scientific methods to uncover the past. Progress is however, rapidly moving.

4. During this period, there was an official Israeli “undeclared” policy to dominate archaeological activities and to discourage the development of local expertise in this field. Restrictions were imposed on Palestinians preventing them from carrying out local excavations while the Israeli archaeologists had a free hand in exploring any historical site. In the process of these “focused” digs. Furthermore all archaeological findings of the Occupied Territories digs were “confiscated” and handed over to Israeli Military Administration, Israeli Department of Antiquities or to Israeli Museums. In occupying East Jerusalem in 1967, the Israelis took control of the Palestine Museum, (Rockefeller Museum) and put it totally under the jurisdiction of the Israeli Department of Antiquities, even this department had moved its headquarter to the premises of the Museum. Certain number objects of Rockefeller Museum were removed to Israeli museums.

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13 These programs developed in Birzeit University particularly, upon the establishment of the Palestinian Archaeological Institute that started operating in 1975. The author of this article is one of the early graduates of this institute.

14 Even Israeli government ministers were involved in illegally excavating archeological sites, most known was Moshe Dayan.

15 Archaeological evidence of the periods succeeding those that the Israelis were interested in was partly neglected, namely Islamic, Byzantine, Classical etc…. Since the late 1970s in general and since Camp David Peace Agreement between Israel and Egypt the tendency of dominating archaeology by ideological aspirations began to slow down, several Israeli archaeologists began to free themselves from the ideological archaeology and to open themselves to critical approaches and to deal with archaeology outside the biblical framework. This tendency became obvious and stronger after 1991 when the first negotiations between Israel and PLO were launched.

16 During the peace process, the issue of archaeological artifacts was raised, the Palestinian team had insisted on getting back every artifact that was transported from the Occupied Territories, exactly as the case of Egypt getting back all the objects, which were excavated or found in Sinai. The Israeli position in general was not total denial, but selective. No agreement or even understanding was yet reached. For sure, the issue will be subject of long negotiations.

17 See footnote 7. Israel considered itself as inheritance of the Jordanian Kingdom, hence the city was annexed to Israel unilaterally, therefore the Palestinian Museum became “Israeli” governmental property and not Palestinian property that Israel holding it as occupier.

18 Most important are the Dead Sea Scrolls.

19 In defiance of clauses in international conventions that specifically forbid the mishandling or removal of any “protected” historical evidence and cultural heritage by occupation powers. See, for instance, the UN
After the 1967 occupation, there has been a rekindling of national interest among the Palestinians in preserving material culture as a way to affirm “national identity” and attachment to the land. This “Palestinian awakening” arose in the 70’s to safeguard what remained of the local heritage, historical buildings, monuments, archaeological sites and remains of ethnographic, personal belongings, art objects etc... Initially started by individuals, this interest in salvaging, promoting and collecting sorts of “heritage” objects, mainly embroidered costumes, later developed into a more structured framework. In the absence of a governmental body, it was the NGO’s, mainly women’s charitable societies and other national establishments - that initiated this drive. In the plastic arts, symbols of Palestinian cultural heritage, pottery, embroidery, architecture, designs and landscape became intrinsic to the themes chosen by the artists. These symbols were supposed to emphasize issues of national identity, pride, belonging and deep rooted nets to one’s own history and traditions.

A few specialized academic programs were developed and departments established in the field of archaeology and architecture. Birzeit University in particular was a pioneer having established in 1975 the Palestinian Archaeological Institute, it being the first specialized Palestinian academic institution to take on this task. al-Najah (Nablus) and al-Quds (Jerusalem) Universities developed teaching and different degree programs in archaeology, restoration and cultural heritage managements.

5. With the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, many attempts were made to organize and contain the situation pertaining to cultural heritage. A situation needed urgent programs and structural actions. Both the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Ministry of Culture (Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museum Department) sought to make plans to invigorate research and find strategies for the promotion and the safeguarding of cultural properties under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. Some of these initiatives had reached the level of feasibility studies and consultations for establishing a National Museum to house vestiges of the past, the archaeological, historic, ethnographic and art objects. Inventories and lists and other data were collected as a

Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict 154, and Protocol 1 (specifically Article 1), Israel is a party to these instruments.

20 It is obvious that this movement was concentrated in the Occupied Territories (West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem), but its influence had exceeded it to Palestinian communities in Diaspora as well as among Palestinians in Israel.

21 Under others to mention Asia and Sophie Halabi in Jerusalem, Mrs. Mansour in Ramallah, and Wadad Qawar in Amman.

22 It was often very difficult to trace objects and their present locations. Sometimes very significant objects were hidden with families or individuals and thus kept from being recognized as important moveable heritage.

23 Ina’ash al Usrah in al-Bireh (Ramallah), Women’s Unions, in Ramallah, Bethlehem, etc.

24 The University managed to conduct several salvage excavations in Tell Jenin (mid 1970s) and later (early 1980s) in Tell Taannek, both digging permissions were obtained by late Prof. Albert Glock, an American who founded and directed the Institute at Birzeit University. The permissions were issued by the Military Officers of the Israeli Military Administration who was responsible for antiquities, issuing it for Prof. Glock in his personal capacity and not in the name of Birzeit University.

25 This department became in 2003 part of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

26 Other more specialized Museums were also considered, the Contemporary Art in Bethlehem - part of the Bethlehem 2000 project, was almost completed but never actually housed because of the political situation and lack of funds for running the museum professionally.
way of starting a national inventory, however the political situation delayed the completion of this inventory. In Architectural Heritage, the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority, as a result of Oslo Accords (1993), meant that Palestinians gained control over their own towns and villages built on 6-8% of the total land, while the remaining areas (B and C) constituting of more than 92% of the land was left under total Israeli control including the civil administration. This automatically meant a major danger for the cultural heritage located in area A.

The PNA gave the deprived Palestinian communities, in both villages and towns, relatively “complete freedom” to build within area A. This was accompanied by the flow of considerable private Palestinian capital resulted in an unprecedented rate of construction. The land available for new construction was limited to PNA areas, leading to land speculation. Historic old towns and villages were suddenly sitting on extremely expensive lots of land, which were potential sites for “new developments”. Many historic buildings were pulled down. High-rise buildings surrounded historic villages minimizing its cultural heritage. The eagerness to build modern concrete high-rise buildings was insurmountable. The “shameful”, dilapidated, and cold old houses had to go and be replaced by modern high-rise apartment buildings, which are considered by many as a valuable source of wealth. As old historic buildings were being destroyed, there was a dramatic change in the built fabric of most Palestinian towns and villages. Towns and villages became victims of miss planning, lack of taste and marginalizing the cultural heritage.

This was an irreversible loss, but “fortunately” the euphoria for new construction relatively ended in 1996 as the political scene deteriorated and the economic situation changed. Public sector funds seemed to be considerably controlled and the euphoria of political and economic transformation settled. As people became more concerned with survival and less driven by the construction craze, some local authorities developed more awareness of the issues of heritage conservation and the situation began to gain more balance and control. Cultural preservation has not achieved full momentum in Palestine but the PNA, the private sector and the communities will hopefully activate their efforts after been through turbulent times in the last few years.

Positive initiatives in the field of Heritage protection took place and many attempts were made to organize the situation pertaining to cultural heritage. Both the Ministry of Architectural Heritage, the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority, as a result of Oslo Accords (1993), meant that Palestinians gained control over their own towns and villages built on 6-8% of the total land, while the remaining areas (B and C) constituting of more than 92% of the land was left under total Israeli control including the civil administration. This automatically meant a major danger for the cultural heritage located in area A. The PNA gave the deprived Palestinian communities, in both villages and towns, relatively “complete freedom” to build within area A. This was accompanied by the flow of considerable private Palestinian capital resulted in an unprecedented rate of construction. The land available for new construction was limited to PNA areas, leading to land speculation. Historic old towns and villages were suddenly sitting on extremely expensive lots of land, which were potential sites for “new developments”. Many historic buildings were pulled down. High-rise buildings surrounded historic villages minimizing its cultural heritage. The eagerness to build modern concrete high-rise buildings was insurmountable. The “shameful”, dilapidated, and cold old houses had to go and be replaced by modern high-rise apartment buildings, which are considered by many as a valuable source of wealth. As old historic buildings were being destroyed, there was a dramatic change in the built fabric of most Palestinian towns and villages. Towns and villages became victims of miss planning, lack of taste and marginalizing the cultural heritage.

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27 Some of the surveys were successfully conducted; inventory of most Palestinian museums objects, including those in East Jerusalem was completed. In 1998, a committee was established in order to establish “Palestinian Memory Museum”. The concept paper of the museum, was prepared by the author of this paper, generally approved from the Ministry of Culture in full cooperation with the French Consulate in Jerusalem as well as the French Ministry of Culture; a historic building was selected to house the “Museum of Memory” in the village of 'Ain Sinia, 7 km north of Ramallah. The first phase of restoration was concluded by Riwaq, and the second phase had just started when 2002 the PNA areas were invaded by the Israeli tanks leading to freeze the project. The project never later gained momentum.

28 Referred to as area A, where PNA have full civil control, except overall security, this was the case till 2000, this was also de facto lost.

29 Several civil society initiatives are now active in cultural heritage protection (mainly architectural heritage), restoration, rehabilitation, promotion and management. Some of them, like Riwaq, see www.riwaq.org are working all over the country, others like Hebron Rehabilitation Committee, Nablus Unit of Restoration, Bethlehem 2000 Project www.bethlehem2000.org, the Welfare Association welfare@jwelfare.org are working in specific localities.
Tourism (Department of Antiquities) and the Ministry of Culture (Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museum Department) devised plans to invigorate research and find strategies for the promotion and the safeguarding of the cultural properties under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority.

Palestine provides infinite opportunities for investment in cultural heritage resources. This investment should form part of mainstream development and should be considered as a national priority. The Palestinian people are shoulderered with a very difficult task, which is, preserving the heritage of Palestine that is of great value not only to the Palestinians but also to the world community at large.

International attention has been given in the past and actually also in the present to a large number of sites, which suggests projects for preserving the cultural heritage in Palestine can be undertaken and that there is a readiness, on the part of donor countries and agencies, to provide funds for the implementation of projects for the preservation of this heritage. In addition, there has been a growth in Palestinian NGOs interested in heritage protection, such as those that are rehabilitating historic buildings, thus strengthening the foundation for future protection of such heritage in Palestine. Further, there is a relative Palestinian control over a large number of sites, despite the prevailing political conditions, which makes it possible to carry out and implement some projects during the transitional phase.

In the recent decades, the architectural heritage had managed to attract more attention of the PNA, NGOs, international organizations and donors, as well as the public, leading to various restoration projects and above all certain level of public awareness. It is true that the invested efforts in the field did not meet yet the challenge. More than 50,000 historic building can not wait long. The PNA did not manage to convert cultural heritage to national priority, in spite of the fact that PNA interest in the field is growing rapidly.

The field of archaeology is still ranking second, hence very few civil society organizations are allowed, according to the law, to work in it. Archaeology can be considered as state monopole, preventing the civic society’s involvement. The Department of Antiquities in spite of tangible efforts failed to protect the archaeological sites, as well it did not succeed to upgrade its own team, leading the field of archaeology into crises. The objective discouragements and the lack of resources, both human and financial, are real barriers between the Department and the implementation of a progressive development program. The problem is not just related to a vision. Therefore, very little initiatives were undertaken to work in the field. The most important achievement that can be considered is the excavations in the Byzantine Churches in Gaza, which was conducted jointly with a French expedition (Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem) leading to a very impressive exhibition in Paris. The rehabilitation of Umayyad (8th century AD) floor mosaics in Khirbet al-Mafjar (known as Hisham Palace) in Jericho resulted in school of mosaics is another achievement of the Department. Tell as-Sultan (Ancient Jericho) had also received some attention from both the Department

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30 Hundreds of archaeological sites were in the previous four years were plundered and illegally excavated by thieves of antiquities. The high level of unemployment (ca 50%) led the thieves to the archaeological sites looking for artifacts. The artifacts usually sold to Israeli antiquities dealers. A helpful report on some of the activities of the Department of Antiquities can be found in, FOCUS, Cultural Heritage, vol. 1, 2004, published by the Program of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP), Jerusalem.

and international expeditions. The Khirbet Bal’ameh (south of Jenin) is another site that attracted the attention of the Department since 1996 (the water system/tunnel in the site dated back to Late Bronze and/or Early Iron), several cleaning and rehabilitation works and excavations seasons were concluded, other seasons are to expect. The Department also managed to clean and consolidate another series of archaeological sites and historic buildings. In 1995 the Department in cooperation with Ecole Biblique began excavating the ancient Gaza Hellenistic Port (Anthedon), the excavation results are of great value to the cultural history of Palestine, the exploration of the site will continue for seasons to come. The other form of contentious activities of the Department was the salvage excavations.

Two universities were recently involved in excavations; Birzeit University excavated Khirbet Birzeit (1 km south west Birzeit town) for three seasons and two seasons in Khirbet Sayya (north west of Ramallah), and al-Quds University had conducted several seasons in Khirbet Shweika (2 km south west Ramallah).

It is clear that the amount and quality of the achievements in the field of archaeology are very modest and do not meet the minimum level of challenges facing this field. In the field of restoration of historic buildings and historic cities and villages centres relatively was advanced; several hundreds of buildings were restored in the historic centre of Hebron 34 tens of buildings were restored in Bethlehem in addition of a large-scale preventive conservation in Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahor. The Old city of Jerusalem was also a subject of restoration of several dozens of building mainly medieval monuments 35 but also tens of buildings had underwent preventive restoration. 37 Riwaq implemented tens of restoration projects all over the West Bank, which is the only NGO not limiting its projects in certain geographic areas. Other restoration work was also conducted by the Municipality of Nablus, especially after the Israeli tanks invasion of the old city in April 2002. The same municipality is now working together with the UNESCO restoring one of the historic caravanserais of the old city, which was deeply affected not just by the above-mentioned invasion but also by misuse and negligence.

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32 A full report on the deferent activities of the Department of Antiquities was published in a special file by the UNESCO in 1999: L’Archeologie Palestinienne, in Dossiers d’Archeologie No. 240-Janv/Fev. 1999. At the end of 2000 Palestine had witnessed the beginning of the Intifada, hence by then very little was done.


34 Implemented by Hebron Rehabilitation Committee, this is a semi-governmental organization.

35 First conducted by Bethlehem 2000 Project and then continued by Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation in Bethlehem, this NGO enjoys a governmental support.

36 This work was finished by a Palestinian NGO called the Welfare Association, sponsored by wealthy Palestinians but also raises funds mainly from the Arab countries, in addition to the restoration they compiled a form of conservation plan for the Jerusalem’s Old city, see Shadia Tuqan (ed.), Jerusalem Heritage and Life, the Old City Revitalization Plan, Welfare Association, Jerusalem 2004.

37 Mainly directed by a popular initiative “the Social and Economic Welfare Committee of Jerusalem, depending on local and Arab contributions.

38 Riwaq-Center for Architectural Conservation was established 1991, besides its work in restoration it possesses a database, that includes information about more that 50,000 historic buildings (Riwaq’s Register of Historic Buildings). Riwaq is now deeply involved in preparing conservation plans for historic centers, with the aim of compiling six sites every year, in order to integrate them in the existing or under preparation master plans, for details, see below.
Small initiatives of restoration also can be seen in several cities and villages done by private people, who either decided to restore their house and to use it or to restore parts of the historic fabric for the benefit of the public.

II. Nature and Characteristics of the Immovable Heritage in Palestine
Palestine’s rich heritage encompasses different areas and fields. This is reflected in the innumerable archaeological and historical sites, in renowned architectural monuments, in the typical rural and urban buildings and constructions as well as in the wide range of objects and traditional artifacts. Moreover, Palestine’s folk heritage including craft making, oral traditions, music and customs is part of this national wealth. However, many factors threaten the survival and continuity of the cultural heritage in Palestine.

1. Archaeological Sites in Palestine
In spite of the problems that face us in understanding the archaeological exploration history, methodologies, intentions and tasks, Palestine is still exceptional in containing thousands of archaeological sites (more than 10,000 archaeological sites and features), a lot of them are internationally known. Some of these sites have managed to change historical assumptions and theories, and add new dimensions to international cultural history.

An archaeological site in Palestine could be less than one dunum (a dunum is 1000 m²), but could also reach several tens of dunums. Sites could have one stratum, but also several strata. However, the importance of the site does not depend on its size or the number of strata represented in it.

Most of the Palestinian cities, towns and villages have archaeological sites beneath or close to their historic centres; those archaeological sites reflect their cultural continuity. The same fact could be observed, indeed, in most of the holy shrines, regardless of their religious belonging.

Very few sites have been fully excavated; in fact, most of them have had very little excavation (in comparison with the potential). Old methodologies depended mainly on exploring the acropolis, neglecting the rest of the site. This means that hundreds of sites are still awaiting further exploration, which could dramatically change the cultural history of Palestine and may be of the reign.

In the West Bank, there are a large number of archaeological sites, but the more intact are in the Gaza Strip, which have great importance to the cultural history in Palestine particular and international cultural history in general. In Jerusalem, archaeological remains managed to attract international discussions on history, excavation methodologies and documentation. The results of exploring the history of Jerusalem have become a source of religious and political discourse.

Tell as-Sultan in Jericho (Ancient Jericho), for example, contributed very important information to the history of humanity, especially in the field of environmental

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39 A detailed documentation of the Palestinian Heritage was published in the monumental publication of Gustav Dalman, a multi-volume magnum opus *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* remains a classic and an invaluable enormous source of information on the customs and language of Palestinians.

40 It means here: West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.
archaeology. The site is considered of international importance, the fortifications (the tower) are considered one of the oldest in the world, not to mention the fact that the city itself is the lowest city of the world. *Tell as-Sultan* also participated in changing history, by opening the discussion on the historicity of the Bible (considering the Bible as an international historical document). This discussion, which was opened in the 1960s, is still a matter of dispute among scholars. It is also very difficult to imagine the typology of ancient pottery all over the Middle East, which is very important for dating, without the long process of development, which took place since the mid 19th century in Palestine.

2. Architectural Heritage
The diversity and wealth of heritage can be seen in the historic buildings in Palestine. In addition to its numerous monumental religious sites such as the Dome of the Rock, the Nativity Church, the Holy Sepulchre, and the *Ibrahimi* (Abraham) Mosque in Hebron, Palestine has a number of valuable historic towns such as the old city of Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus and Bethlehem. Further, the Palestinian villages with their organically beautiful peasant architecture add to the variety and richness of this heritage. The desert monasteries located in the eastern slopes illustrate another typology of architecture in Palestine, as does “throne village architecture”, which refers to the feudal palaces in eighteenth and nineteenth century rural Palestine. The caravanserais along historic trade routes, in addition to the dispersed holy shrines (*maqamat*), and the beautifully constructed dry stone farmhouses, within the typically terraced hills of Palestine also illustrate the variety and richness of a cultural heritage, which the Palestinian people have been entrusted with for the World Community at large. The old city of Jerusalem is listed on the UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites, as well as on the list of threatened cultural reserves. Other Palestinian old city centres could be added to the list, as soon as proper conditions emerge.

Unfortunately, architectural heritage in Palestine has been facing alarming deterioration, destruction, and negligence resulting mainly, (but not only) from the construction boom that took place 1995-2000. As a result of this, the urban, as well as rural and natural landscapes have changed in an unprecedented manner. Almost 50% of the buildings, which have been constructed in most Palestinian towns and villages, were built during this time. The other 50% make up all the construction from in previous centuries. This unprecedented scale of construction, at least in Palestine, took place within the boundary limits of Palestinian towns and villages that have not been allowed to expand since 1967. This is due to the fact that Palestinians can only build within areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian National Authority (Areas A and B), while the vast majority of land is still under Israeli control (Area C). All the Palestinian historic towns and villages are located in areas A and B. As a result of this completely uncontrolled, and unplanned, chaotic building sprawl, the historic towns and villages have lost many of their buildings and much of their fabric.

3. The Existing Legal Regime for the Protection of Cultural Heritage
There is no unified legal regime in the Palestinian Territories. In fact, there are different laws that are applicable in these territories. This is because Palestine was subject to different rulers since the end of nineteenth century. The British Mandate, Jordan, Egypt,
and the Israeli Occupation issued large amounts of legislation, some of which is still applicable in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) that was inaugurated in March 1996 also issued legislation on different fields of life in the Palestinian Territories. However, the different scopes of sovereignty of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (areas A, B, and C), the continuing application of the Israeli military orders in area C, the continuation of the Israeli occupation to East Jerusalem and application of the Israeli law there, and the reoccupation by Israeli troops of the PA areas (since 2002) put serious constraints on the legislative role of the PLC, the role of the judiciary, and the executive role of the PA to enforce this legislation. The existing legal regime concerning cultural and natural heritage in the Palestinian Territories are the British Mandate Law of Antiquities of 1929 (applicable in Gaza Strip only), the Jordanian Law of Antiquities of 1966 (applicable in the West Bank) and the Israeli laws of 1978 in East Jerusalem. The Palestinian Basic Law of 2003 contained a paragraph of relevance to Heritage Protection. Under this paragraph, the President swears, “…to be faithful to the homeland and holy places, to the people and its national heritage…” This is currently the only reference to “heritage”, and it is limited, in the draft constitution. Since there is not yet an approved Palestinian constitution, the protection of cultural and natural heritage remains, until today, without a solid Constitutional basis. As it stands today the Constitution is in its fourth reading. The major Deficit of the 1966 Law of antiquities is the Definition, which sounds: “Antiquities is any movable or immovable remains or any part of it that was constructed, or formulated, or decorated, or inscribed or built in any form or any addition by a human being before 1700 AD. Antiquities also include human or animal remains prior to the year 600 AD. It also includes any structure built after 1700 AD, which is declared by the Director of the Department of Antiquities to be ancient antiquities”. The definition clearly excludes any archaeological sites (including historic buildings) and artefacts (movable objects), which post date 1700 AD. The definition also excludes religious buildings, as well as natural heritage sites. Neither architecture (groups of buildings, monuments) nor movable objects are defined or included as separate categories in these two laws.

III. Vision for Archaeological Science in Palestine
1. The Concept of Pluralism
Treating the history of Palestine starts with abstaining to deliberately marginalize or erase the history of others. I believe that, historically, Palestine strength resides in its cultural and religious pluralism that shaped its history in the past. Upon accepting the concept of pluralism, a so-called balance in the existing history emerges, which is based on this cultural pluralism in the country since the late Bronze Age, passing to the various eras, until our present times.
This understanding does not correspond with reality without criticizing the historic record constituting the main catalyst for writing history in texts on all of the ancient discoveries, and that transformed the country’s history to a mere history of generations governing Palestine. Modern scientific theories in history sciences started to consider the history of

41 The modern terminology "cultural heritage" is not mentioned in any of the existing laws. The only terminology used is "antiquities" for both movable and immovable heritage. The law also mentions the terminology "historical buildings" and "historical sites".
large human groups, indeed, behind any past; there are local groups with varying cultures. For the sake of more precision, the history of cities and countries is not only the history of kings and generations, but also the history of simple collective social groups, that have shaped the history of cities/countries including of course Jerusalem. Summarizing the history of life to that extent is linked with the history of scientific research led by the various elite and that was based on written history, limited on generations and large classes in old societies.

2. The Cultural Landscape
Upon the arrival of the Western researchers to Palestine, the concept of a cultural landscape had not materialized yet in Europe or the United States, as an independent field in its present form. In the 19th and early 20th century, this field was still growing in a historical geography framework, i.e. it did not form an entity of its own. Historically in Palestine, the various researchers, especially the foreign ones, dealt with the cultural landscape from a historical geography angle of the place. Thus, upon the arrival of organized missions to Palestine and since the mid of the 19th century, the place was linked to the historic or religious events or to the events of social groups inhabiting the area.

The beginnings of cultural landscape discoveries in Palestine had started by the Survey of Western Palestine42. Palestine was put on 27 sections of maps with a 1:100000 scale; cultural and geographic landmarks were referred to in their local and biblical names. Various other surveys were implemented in parallel to this one, the most important of which was carried out during the French Invasion of Palestine 1799. The problem of these surveys, in spite of there great importance, however, is that they failed to produce realistic maps but rather artistic ones, indicating the geographical and cultural landmarks without linking them to their geographical novelty, sea level or scale maps. In addition to these surveys, many of the foreign missions documented their travel in a travel account with interweaved documentation of Palestine in the geographical, ethnic or historical concepts such missions included Adam Smith43 and Edward Robinson44. The value of these texts relies on their indirect depiction of the cultural landscape in Palestine with pre modernization details, i.e. prior to the 20th century modern technology. The focal point of

42 These references became very essential for any contemporary researches in the field of cultural landscape, in spite of the fact that this was not the intention of the initiators.
43 Adam Smith had published a magnificent book on the historical geography of Palestine, The Historical Geography of the Holy Land. This book is still in use, and as the book title bears, the interest of the author, which is typical to the period, was concentrated on the Old and New Testament, other periods or components of the LAND was less important, therefore the landscape concept was ok so long it serves this concept.
research changed gradually from searching for the cultural landscape to the historical and cultural sites for the following two factors:

1. The focus of history sciences, and especially archeology, was on historic sites, since they connect with the panorama of events of the Old Testament.
2. A parallelism between the establishment of the influence of urban archaeology studying cultural civilizations living in the same area from the most ancient to the more recent by studying change indications in clay.

Thus, the site’s connection to its environment (to its cultural landscape) was neglected and the satisfactoriness to search till the end of the historical clues of the sites, i.e. at the end of its bedrock, resulted in the fact that the field of cultural landscape remained relatively intact and was influenced to a certain extent only by the Bible. This makes it the key for future development of archeology and other sciences of history in view of the development of modern scientific technology and theories that are connected to sciences of the cultural landscape, which enabled the expansion and increase in its areas of study.

Knowing what we have of Cultural Heritage Assets, which in spite of destructions and difficulties is tremendous and including many opportunities for conservation and development. Because we see in cultural heritage not just a testimony of the past, and not just appreciating its beauty, and not just considering it as an element of national and local identity, but also we have to see in Cultural Heritage a main economic sector and economic opportunity, especially for a country like Palestine, where there are no natural resources nor sufficient agriculture or industries.

The main characteristic of this universe is its constant change and instability. It is the nature of mankind to be constantly active in the aim of renewing his/her life, existence and resources. This does not imply the absence of questions over the past; societies are cognizant to their past, but are in need of organized tools to treat this past and move it from a fictional image to a scientific one, using an organized scientific tool. It could be a coincidence that local groups’ especially agricultural ones not only possess a cultural link with their place of habitat, but also a link with the cultural landscape. This link is spontaneous; it is limited in the traditional knowledge of the various groups of Palestinian society. This however, establishes a strong introduction to develop scientific research through the cultural landscape in an attempt to transfer traditional knowledge from fictional images to scientific ones based on surveys that collect the information from the field and analyze them.

Thus it becomes important to define the various values stored in the cultural landscape in any suggested management of cultural heritage, since the cultural landscape is the space in which it settles and in which we carry out our activities, whether above it or beneath it, thus it forms a space for cultural heritage resources. The definition of these values is also important due to the natural un-renewed resources, which could disappear by erosion from human mankind or nature.

The establishment of a scientific vision on the cultural landscape is a first step towards managing it, i.e. conserving and developing cultural heritage resources which are above the surface, this entails a link between the results of the scientific study and development, a relation that was lost during the various scientific research phases in the region. The research agenda was not linked to a local agenda that is based on carrying out scientific research in accordance with the society’s cultural and developmental needs.
IV. Challenges Facing the Cultural Heritage in Palestine

Besides the obstacles and challenges facing the cultural heritage all over the world and specially those facing the third world countries, Palestine still have its own problems:

1. The Occupation: despite the of the peace process, the major parts of the Palestinian Territories are still under the Israeli occupation. The Israeli forces are still considered as a major destruction force for the cultural heritage. In several occasions Israeli tanks and bulldozers destroyed major parts of the old city of Nablus as well as Hebron, besides tens of examples in different villages. The construction of the apartheid wall added another dimensions to the destruction of tens of archaeological sites as well irreversible destruction of the cultural landscape.

2. The legislations: the existing laws are too old (mainly depending on the British Mandate legislations), and don’t protect most of the historic centers and great number of historic buildings nor it can protect so many components of cultural heritage, even the existing insufficient laws are not implemented. Besides that the weak executive authorities on every level are not capable to implement the existing laws to protect the cultural heritage.\(^{45}\) The level of destruction is tremendous. More than 50% of the listed (more than 50,000) historic buildings are in bade shape or in process of deterioration. As well as about 50% of the total number of the old buildings is abundant.

3. The cultural heritage, in spite of the improvement in the last decade, is not yet a national priority on both communal and governmental level. Most of the cities and towns don’t have conservation plans, with few exceptions.\(^{46}\)

4. The lack of proper experienced administration and lack of needed expertise in the various fields of cultural heritage.

5. The problem of ownership. (Islamic inheritance system), which led to subdividing each property sometimes to 1 share out of tens. This doesn’t encourage the owners to invest in the old properties as well as it leads to a certain extent to abandon the historic properties.

6. The lack of proper funds and incentives.

V. A New Approach

Knowing what we have (as it is reflected in the National Registry), which in spite of destructions and difficulties, is tremendous, and including a lot of opportunities for conservation and development. It was one of RIWAQ’s aims to find suitable and possible approaches to overcome the above mentioned difficulties or at least to solutions for some of them. Because we see in cultural heritage not just a testimony of the past, and not just appreciating its beauty, and not just considering them as an element of national and local identity, but also to deal with cultural heritage as a main economic sector, especially for a

\(^{45}\) Riwaq worked very hard to propose, in cooperation with several official and non-official partners, new modern legislations, which are in harmony with the modern approach of protecting and managing the cultural heritage in full coherence with the international laws and conventions.

\(^{46}\) Riwaq had already managed to prepare protection and conservation plans for 21 communities.
country like Palestine, where there is no natural resources nor sufficient agriculture or industries.

Since the Intifada (the uprising of 2000) the occupied West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem were converted through the Israeli barriers, check posts, closure and so called Separation Wall into isolated islands. As a result of these policies it became very difficult to move from one locality to another.

The economic situation had deteriorated dramatically; the level of unemployment had reached more than 50% in most of the regions. The character of Palestine is not any more a shape of geographically a united country. And still, in spite of everything, we have to fight for the sack of cultural heritage and its protection.

Hence the community is becoming the main possible focus of development (visa vie the national), we became more aware and oriented towards the community and its development. The answer to this challenge was a very successful project “Job Creation through Restoration”. We had managed to prove that restoration is very intensive labor demanding work, which can help the community to overcome some of its current difficulties, even if it is just for a short time (creating some jobs of short term), where the outcome of the project is going to help the community on the long term.

The marriage between cultural heritage and the community was a great surprise for us. Most of our villages and towns have social institutions, youth clubs, women initiatives and local government administration, but they are mostly fragmented with no networking structure, and mostly have no centers (buildings), or they are accommodated in improper rented apartments or buildings.

The idea which evoked, after surveying and collecting the needed data in order to face this problem and to use it for the benefit of the cultural heritage, was to find out a suitable old buildings or building complexes to restore in full cooperation with the local community, and then to convert it into a community center, where the different local institutions and initiatives could share the space and developing working relationships among them with the help of Riwaq and the cultural heritage. During the process of restoration, in any of our restoration projects, we take advantage marketing cultural heritage as well as engaging as much individuals and institutions in this enterprise.

The partnership has to be solid. We tried our best not to present our work as a gift from the donor through RIWAQ to a community without any commitment to its cultural heritage. Therefore the community has also to contribute both by voluntary labor as well as by offering building materials or even contributing money for the benefit of the project. The value of the contribution is seen in its materialistic dimension, rather in its engagement and commitment value. The commitment is an integral part of the agreement (the contract) hence the community (through their representatives) has to agree contribute minimum 10% of the total cost, in addition to other services that they have to provide. The other commitment that the community has to fulfill is to organize public meetings inviting Riwaq to address the community and explain the different dimensions of the restoration project. The village council or the municipality has also to insure that no permission can be issued for destroying any old building which is listed in RIWAQ’s list of historic buildings.

The community has to have also full control over the property for not less than 10 years, or even to convert the property into a community property registered under the name of the local council or any other representative sustainable institution. It is not rare to
discover that the community exceeding our expectation. But it is not rare also to be misunderstood or even to have problematic relationships with some of the communities. Sometimes we have to find ways out when the community could not fulfill its commitments and obligations with minimum damage. Therefore the selection process for the suitable project is becoming more complicated consuming intangible time and effort at the beginning, but sparing time, money and efforts at the end.

VI. RIWAQ - Center for Architectural Conservation

Riwaq is a NGO non-profit organization established 1991, during very critical socio-economical and political situation. The main aims of RIWAQ are to protect the architectural heritage and the cultural landscape of Palestine, as well as the related skills and handicraft. For this purpose several units within the center were established:

1. Community Out-Reach Unit: to broadening the public awareness and interest in cultural properties. Friends of Riwaq, Exhibitions, Training courses, school teachers training, youth activities, films, interviews, articles, lectures, distributing materials, yearly calendar, book markers, postcards, posters...etc. The most recent activity organized by this unit was a drawing competition for school kids in the seventh class (12-13 years old) with cooperation of the Palestinian Ministry of Education. The number of participants reached 103,000 kids. The competition was conducted under the title “Our Old Houses are Beautiful and Restorable”. Kids went to old buildings and draw them, others used their imaginations. A special committee was established from the Ministry of Education, Riwaq, and the Artists Association to choose the best 50 drawings and to declare them winners in order to award them. This event will be repeated in the future.

2. Research and Publication Unit: To fill the gap in research and publications on Palestinian architectural heritage 12 books were published and several others are in different stages of preparation. The books met relatively good success and well distributed on the national level. Some of our books even became text books in the architectural departments in Palestinian universities.

3. Revitalization of Historic Centers Unit (the Planning Unit): To protect the historic centers, in both cities and villages, utilizing the current implemented laws of zoning and planning. Few major experiences were conducted in Hebron, Ramallah and partly the old city of Jerusalem, in addition to several villages and small towns. Now we are using our experience in small locations with clear aim to develop our partnership with the ministry of local government. Our plan to conduce several plans every year. This type of work is preparing for the implementation of the newly prepared legislations for the protection of cultural heritage, as well it raises the level of the public involvement of the official local government representation determining the faith of their cultural heritage and widening the range of the social partnership of conservation.

4. The National Register Unit: A major project of Riwaq began 1994. As a result more than 50,000 historic buildings were listed, 2-3 pages of descriptive information for each building, at least one image for each building, and exact localization on the map. All of this data was digitized and interconnected using special database, enabling endless cross indexing possibilities. Riwaq managed to
register more than 95% of all historic buildings which are (more or less) 50 years old. Now we are in the process of publishing the results. The results were published in 3 volumes. The information about the entire historic buildings is available to every community, planners, investors, private sector, ministries and researchers. The uses of the database are endless and costless.

5. The Conservation and Rehabilitation Unit: The aim is to deliver pilot projects of restored buildings in different communities hoping it will help creating local initiatives to restore more and more examples. Tens of buildings were as a result of this project restored. Riwaq and its message became more familiar for the public through this project, hence Riwaq is the only organization that work all over the country, where other similar organizations are limited in their activities in certain areas (for example: Hebron Rehabilitation Committee, or Bethlehem Initiative etc.).

6. Riwaq Biennale: Riwaq is organizing huge activities around architectural heritage every second year, this year (2009) the third Biennale will take place under the slogan: 3rd Riwaq’s Biennale 2009 A Geography: 50 Villages. Particular 50 Palestinian villages will be the locations for the 3rd Riwaq Biennale to take place throughout Palestine from the 3rd June - 16th October 2009. The starting point of the Riwaq Biennale has always been to advance Riwaq’s aim of protecting and promoting cultural heritage in Palestine. Another unusual feature of this Biennale is that it is named after an organization rather than a place. To emphasize this link with the organization, the Biennale is structured around a series of visits, gatherings and projects in these 50 historic centers identified by Riwaq as being a priority to develop. In partnership with local institutions and communities, the aim is to use the Biennale as a way of creating opportunities for achieving the organization’s central goal of protecting, utilizing and promoting cultural heritage in Palestine through tangible and intangible projects of rehabilitation and revitalization. The 3rd Riwaq Biennale is creating an opportunity not only to investigate the trappings of our cultural codes and practices, but also to look at ways of reconnecting isolated and walled Palestine to the international art world.

VII. The Socio-Economic Dimensions of Riwaq’s Work - Case Studies
Riwaq has actually a lot of cases to present, both good and less good\(^47\), I will present the good examples to encourage you and myself. This kind of work cannot afford the luxury of committing mistakes, hence disappointment and depression is very dangerous in such delicate enterprises. All of us who are working in protection the cultural heritage in their countries, specially those who are facing difficulties similar to those in Palestine, can tell a lot of stories which can lead to a collective disappointment and depression.

1. The Case of Beit Reema Town
The community of Beit Reema, located about 27 km northwest Ramallah (ca 45 km northwest Jerusalem), is considered a well educated community with very high

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\(^{47}\) Riwaq has already worked in almost 60 communities, restoring some 100 buildings and building complexes, all for public uses: community centers, libraries, women associations, kinder gardens, youth clubs, music centers...etc.
presenting of unemployed young university graduates. The community (about 6000) is highly socially engaged in different initiatives and activities, most important is the cultural club but also a women association, and farmers union. The cultural club had initiated the contacts with Riwaq and began to discuss the possibility of restoring a large building complex to be used as a center for club. After choosing the proper building complex most properly from the 18th century, which was abundant (before 40 years) and falling down, meeting our criteria of designation, the club was asked to build a coalition of the initiatives in the town including the municipality. After reaching that, with the help of Riwaq through so many meetings and presentations, the contract was signed and our surveys and documentation of the building in particular and the town in general, had begun. The restoration design and the land use took into consideration the following criteria:

a. To protect the historical character of the building.
b. To adjust the building for modern uses.
c. To fulfill the needs of the different partners who are intending to use the building.
d. To insure sustainability of using the building for at least ten years to come.
e. To minimize the costs of restoration as well as the running costs afterwards (after finishing the restoration) as much as possible.
f. To engage the community with several working activities.
g. To consult with the partners coalition in all phases of the work.
h. To present a pilot educating project in the town and the surrounding area.
i. To use the project as a vehicle in order to communicate with the community on the subject of cultural heritage, a community outreach approach in both theoretical as well as practical issues.

It is worth mentioning that the process of design is the most difficult task, hence sometimes you cannot understand the needs of the community, the social structure, as well as the different small conflicts inside it. The communities cannot sometimes appreciate the philosophy and ethics of restoration, which not rarely a source of misunderstanding and conflicting. In Beit Reema, for example, one of the rooms was designed as meeting room for the women club; the architect decided that the room is too dark, so a glass door will help solving the problem allowing more daily light in the room. The partner had refused the proposal claiming that their society is too conservative, so the women cannot feel free meeting under the eyes of the men passing by the glass door and “glazing” at the “women”. Our argument was, you may right, but let us try, and if it will not function we will cover the door with a poster, a sticker, or any thing which will protect the women from the “men’s eyes”. After few month of use we went to visit the community center asking about the glass door, the shy women and the glazed eyes of the men. The answer was that the women don’t even close the door during their meetings, the men passing by even without noticing that there are women meeting or working, so it became part of the daily life of the building. Even most of the visitors and users of the building are women. Their wrong presumptions of the social behavior of the community had built an obstacle of working together not just in this example; the project in this case was the right way to remove certain social believes and to create new social partners.
The center is now a very active social and cultural institution; it accommodates several initiatives including small library and computer center. Afternoons, when people have nothing to do, the center is usually full with visitors and activities. The center is now the soul of the town, besides it serves several other villages in the surroundings. The town began to be active in expanding the complex adding other neighboring houses to it. It is easy to expect that Beit Reema was a story of success and an ideal pilot project on both social development dimension and cultural heritage protection. Both were fulfilled to a larger extend. The town is still very celebrating the project, which became a vehicle for conscious activities. The women club is using large part of the space converting it to a production center for women’s productions marketing their products, creating additional small family income. The library is growing every day. The community is addressing several institutions to get a computer lab...etc. Riwaq is still a partner in the project by organizing several lectures on cultural heritage, conducting summer camp for the youth, inviting musical groups to perform in the center and so on. Most of our aims were fulfilled in Beit Reema project. The Total costs were around 132,000 USD. The project had consumed 1847 working days mostly from the inhabitants of the town.

2. The Case of Sarta Community Center
Sarta is a large village with a population about 4000 inhabitants located ca. 40 km northwest Jerusalem and about 20 km southwest Nablus. The village used to have no one center for the community or any public facility. The village council did not have any building to meet or to coordinate its activity, the council used to meet in private houses of its members. The only available public institution existed in the village was the mosque. Sarta had also very active community including university graduates and women initiative. The initiative came in this case too from the village council during the inauguration of children resources center in a neighboring town Deir Istia, which also was renovated by Riwaq. The council of Sarta had managed before contacting Riwaq to get one of the oldest buildings in the village as a donation from its owners. The building consists of three levels, considered the largest in the village, owned by the richest and largest clan. The building was in catastrophic both structural and physical conditions; a lot of consolidation work was highly needed, in addition it contained a very high level of humidity, it lacked of air circulation and enough daylight. To understand the restoration challenge of the building, it is enough to know that the largest hall in the ground floor was used (we don’t know for how long) as a sewage container.

During the implementation of the project, the building became a sort of museum. The community was visiting the site everyday. When the kids were leaving the schools, and just before gowing home, they used to pay a visit to the project, asking about the details. Whenever RIWAQs team was visiting the site (at least 3 times a week) the community was showering them with questions. The experience was really tens of lectures were given in a form of daily discussion. The results of the project:

a. Clear community awareness of the cultural heritage and the importance of its preservation.
b. Already another initiative began with local sources to restore another building and a private house.
c. We managed to open dialogue with several other communities in the area, resulted with other projects.
d. The community has now a multi-purpose center, where several institutions working together for the benefit of the community: women care and development project, health clinic, computer center, village council, a small library and youth activities. All of this now gathered in one building.
e. The area surrounding the building was also rehabilitated by the voluntary work of the community and the council, turning the historic center to a more attractive place to live in or to try to live in.
f. The council became as a result of the project active, so fund raising process resulted with water supply project as well as rehabilitating the streets of the village.

Sarta project had coasted around 94,000 USD, produced around 3000 working days, mostly worked by unemployed young workers of the village. Sarta is a good example of socio-economic development through preservation.

3. From Single Buildings to Comprehensive Historic Centers – Fifty Villages

After obtaining relatively good experience and becoming undeclared authority for cultural heritage in Palestine, Riwaq had moved from restoring single building in each village, considering it as a pilot project, to a large scale projects dealing with historic centers in their totality.

Considering the financial and human resources limitation in the field of architectural heritage, and based on Riwaq National Register,48 we have identified some 50 historic centers. By protecting and rehabilitation of 50 historic it would be possible to save up tp 50% of the historic buildings in Palestine. The selection of the 50 historic centers was based on their architectural significance most important is a well preserved architectural fabric. The work began in three communities as a learning process.

Riwaq’s Planning Unit, in partnership with the municipalities of Birzeit (north of Ramall), Taybeh (northeast of Ramallah) and Thahriyyeh (south of Hebron), as well as local non government organizations, started the documentation, the classification as well as the rehabilitation of the historic town centers.

Perhaps one of the most difficult and taxing process was the real involvement of all stakeholders namely; the local institutions and the community at large, the owners the users of historic buildings, the architecture department of Birzeit as well as the participation of some international professionals.

In the case of Birzeit and Taybeh (and to a lesser degree in Thahriyyeh) the following studies have been accomplished;

1. Documentation and studies in the fields of: architecture, planning, plazas, roads network, environment, social, economic and legal frame works.
2. Developing a common understanding and vision about the rehabilitation, including the socio-economic outcomes of the projects.

48 See the website of the Register www.riwaqregister.org
3. Identifying specific conservation projects that will trigger the future revitalization of the historic centre.
4. The actual implementations of few conservation and rehabilitation projects as well as infrastructural projects (sewage, electrical, water telephones).

In the case of al Taybeh one of the most impressive element was the readiness of the owners to invest in their own houses; out of the 60 housed some 40 has expressed their willing to rehabilitate their house from the inside the real involvement and interest of the owners.

The results of the three projects were very impressive. In Taybeh and Birzeit the preventive restoration had been completed in most of the historic building located within the historical fabric. A large portion of Thahriyyeh’s historic center (400 buildings) was completely renovated from outside and indoor. Most important in all of these localities was the empowering process of local institutions and training. A department of cultural heritage management was established. Riwaq is looking forward of next stages of these projects, namely the socio-economic dimensions.

Concluding Remarks
We are trying to learn from these projects, both technically as well as socially and community development approaches. In restoration we consider every building as an independent entity to be tackled in different form after understanding its development, history, historical and social use of spaces, user’s history, building materials, etc. Riwaq’s approach is not just to restore the historic centers, which are very important, but also to see how restoration is going to help communities to develop.

Through our modest experience we can say that the financial resources are very important, but the social appreciation of the cultural heritage is much more important than the other factors. When a society is convinced that cultural heritage protection is a priority, then the financial means will not be the main obstacle. Therefore our approach cannot be implemented without the community out-reach program aiming to restore the relationship between the community and its heritage and environment. The investment in the communities is not less important than the investment in the buildings; this has to be part of that.

RIWAQ is depending very much on this approach, using the implementation of a project as a vehicle of raising the public awareness, but also conducts several other activities to reach this task.

Restoration is very important to protect the cultural heritage, but cannot be useful and sustainable unless it meets certain needs of the society, otherwise we will find ourselves restoring museums, which are important, and for this purpose it is enough to protect examples. But if we want to protect the larges part of our heritage, then we have to invest in the communities, because there is no need of heritage if it is not appreciated by its own owners.
Roman Palestine not only left many influences in the cultural heritage of the land, but also deeply influenced its population (Hirschfeld 1995). These influences did not convert the people of the country (Palestine in this case) into Romans, in spite of the fact that some members of the elite of Palestine were heavily influenced, and even adapted imperial Roman culture, including personal names (Shahid 1984, p. 22 ff). The highlands of Palestine during the Bronze and Iron Ages were called the Land of Canaan; the coastal plains were Philista. The Palestinian people have had a long experience in the process of integration in the surrounding environment, thus producing a rich cultural heritage, which became an essential part of their identity. Director of Riwaq Centre, Ramallah, Palestine.