

AL-HARAM AL-IBRAHIMI
AL-KHALIL

A BRIEF GUIDE

PUBLISHED
BY
THE SUPREME AWQAF COUNCIL

PRICE 250 FILS

AL-KHALIL (HEBRON)
1964

INDUSTRIAL ISLAMIC ORPHANAGE PRINTING PRESS

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

Visitors should bear in mind that all the Haram Area, is sacred to Moslems: and that they will be expected to pay due regard to its sancticity. In particular, they must abstain from smoking anywhere in the Area, and from bringing dogs with them.

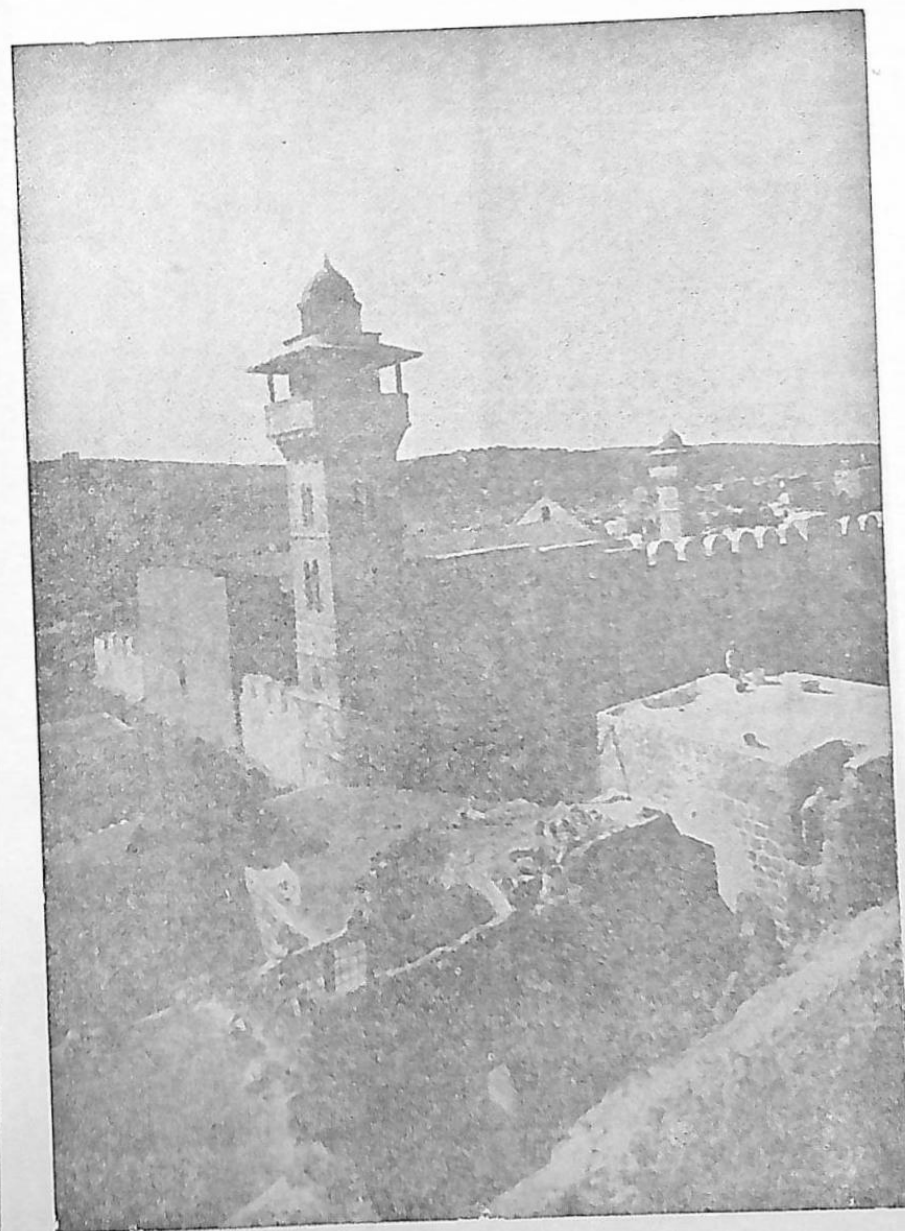


FIG. - 1

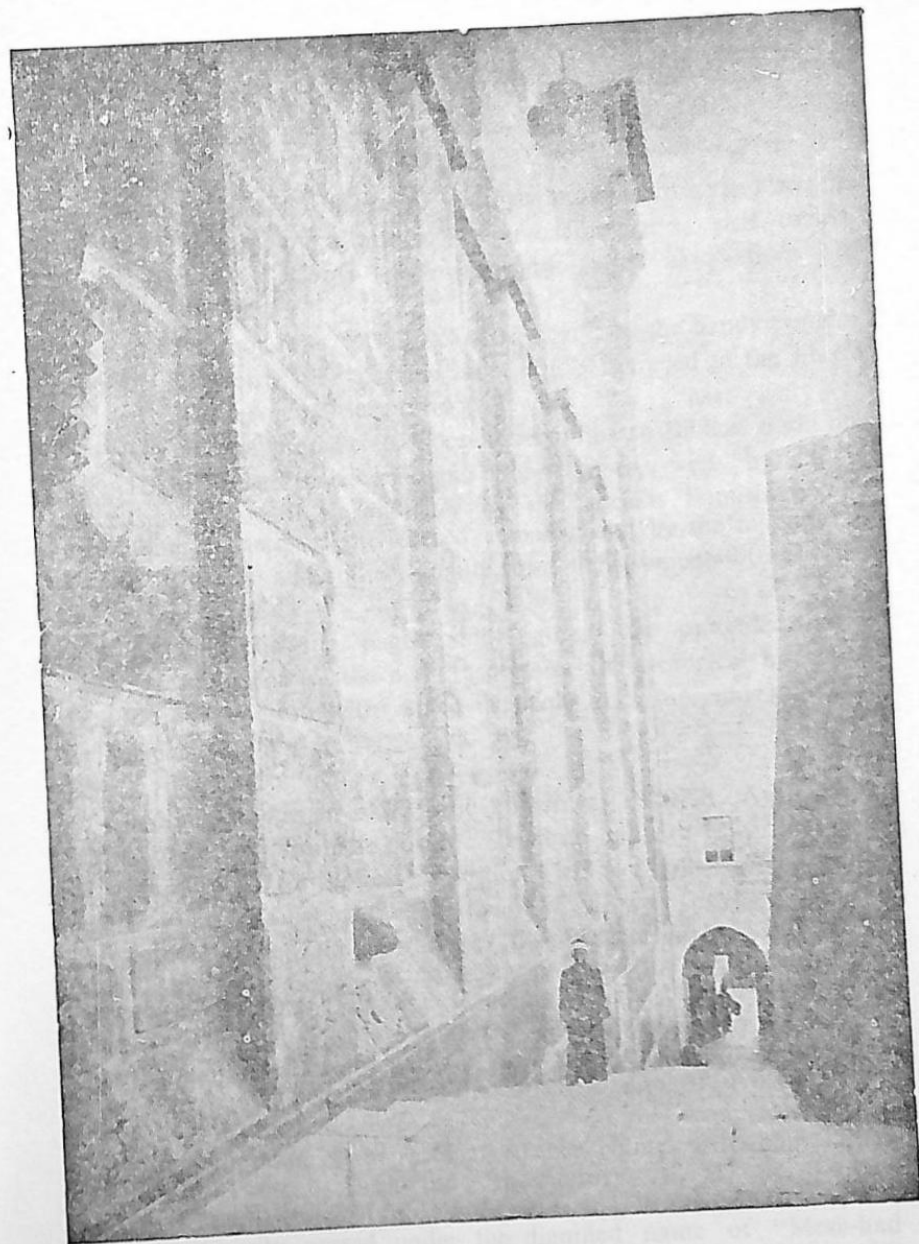


FIG. - 2

...the town is situated on a hill, and the houses are built on the slope of the hill. The town is surrounded by a wall, and the houses are built on the slope of the hill. The town is surrounded by a wall, and the houses are built on the slope of the hill. The town is surrounded by a wall, and the houses are built on the slope of the hill.

FOREWORD

"And the almighty adopted Abraham of a Friend"
"Koran"

To the Tourist, in general, to the pious visitor, and to the student of history, architecture, or archaeology, a visit to Al-Khalil (Hebron) affords various sights and associations of particular interest.

Al-Khalil, or fully "Kkalil, Ar-Rahman", as the happy popular name of this town of "extreme antiquity": is traced to the above cited text of the August Scripture.

The cave of Macphelah, wherein according to Biblical tradition, ABRAHAM, other patriarchs and their wives, were buried, is marked as a venerable sanctuary by the ancient imposing walls surrounding the site of the sacred remains, and by the magnificent Mosque (Fig. 1) and other architectural achievements within the Sacred Enclosure.

In the following pages and figures are presented, in a concise form, some of the main aspects of archaeological historical, Architectural interest with which the Holy Enclosure and Buildings are associated.

THE CITY

Al-Khalil was in older time known as "Kirjah Arba", the "town of four", from its position on four hills.

According to Biblical tradition, it was built seven years before Zoan (Tanis), the chief town of Lower Egypt. We are also told in "the Old Testament" that the patriarch ABRAHAM pitched his tents in its vicinity, upon the land of Mamre the Emorite, under the Oak, or "Terebinth" Trees.

It is interesting to note that "Nemra" is to this day the popular name of adjacent locality where oak trees are abundant and it is within such Locality that the ancient site of ABRAHAM's Camp is identified.

The adoption of the present Arabic Name "Al-Khalil", may be traced as far back as the 5th century A. H. the famous traveller, Nasiri-Khusro, did not omit to observe that even in his time the city passed under the dignified name of "Mesh-had ul-Khalil" meaning the shrine of the Friend", in accordance with the Koranic text cited in the foreword.

Comparatively small, as it is now, the town has continued, as of old, to be surrounded with vineyards and orchards, bedes watered by several springs, and to show traces of the to trade and industries which once flourished within its walls.

AL-HARAM AL-IBRAHIMI

It is not unusual for a structure of special significance to disclose at a first glance whatever use or purpose it was erected for. Thus fortresses, castle, schools or theatres will in most cases convey to the spectator purpose which they were intended to serve. And so will the various places of worship.

But unlike other structures of particular interest, Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi, as first found in the Herodian period and until the various buildings were erected therein figured; for ages, as a mysterious blind enclosure filling the spectator with but awe and bewilderment called forth by the huge mass symmetrically piled up (Fig. 2) in the common type of "rampart walls" round something covetously cherished though altogether invisible.

The Minarets, the Domes, and other picturesque constructions which at intervals, loom into the silence of the mysterious site, do not seem able to break the spell which overcomes one on approaching the precinct of the historical Area.

The Haram precincts may be entered through three gates. The first situated in a south-westerly, the second in a north-westerly, direction, and the third in a southern direction all these gates lead to a small porch in the eastern walls which is the entrance only to the mosque.

On passing through either of the main gates, the visitor will find himself within the lofty mass of enclosing walls, the special feature of the walls is their impressive construction with huge blocks of "mazzy" (solid) stone, with evenly dressed edges, most symmetrically laid without mortar. Some of the blocks are about a metre and a half in thickness, and run to a length of over seven metres.

From the top of the walls, two minarets rises, one on the east, and the other on the west side.

Stepping through the entrance in the east wall, the visitor will notice, to the right hand, the sahn (open court) dividing the whole site into two unequal sections a southern and [a northern (Fig. 7).

The southern section mainly consists of the Mughatta—as the roofed part of the Mosque is known—containing the cenotaphs of ABRAHAM and SARAH. Between these two monuments of hexagonal shape, lies a small vaulted porch. The latter is a square space and through a door in the south wall rendered attractively conspicuous by rich mosaics, the visitor is ushered into the interior of the mosque.



FIG. - 3



FIG. - 4

The Mughatta will be seen to consist of three naves, or strictly speaking of one nave and two aisles. Each of the piers supporting the vaulted roof presents the charming spectacle of a cluser of trees branching into the various arches. The suggestion is that of a forest.

The central nave is rendered more conspicuous by the graceful mihrab (prayer-niche) of marble, surmounted by bright multi-coloured mosaics.

Immediately adjoining the prayer-niche (mihrab), stands the elaborate minbar (pulpit) a masterpiece of perfection and rare magnificence. (Fig. 3) Its kufic inscriptions tell us that it was made in the year 434 A. H. in the reign of Al-Mustansir Billah, the Fatimite Caliph of Egypt, by order of his Minister Bedr al-Jamali, for the Ascalon Shrine wherein the head of Al-Hussein, son of Caliph Ali, was supposed to have been laid, (Fig. 4).

Facing the mihrab stands the dicca, a tarrace-like structure supported by slender columns of marble (Fig. 5).

In front of the Mughatta we also find, in the shape of two small square chambers, facing each other, the cenotaphs of ISAAC and his wife REBECCA.

The northern section contains the cenotaphs of JACOB and his wife LEAH. These two domed monuments are also separated by a vaulted porch.

The two sections are divided by a long gallery.

Through a door in the middle of the gallery, the visitor passes on to JOSEPH's cenotaph, a dome constructed at the back of, but close to, the west side of the enclosing walls. This monument overlooks the ruins of the Citadel.

THE HOLY CAVE

While the tombs of the patriarchs and their wives are invisible in the Cave beneath their respective positions are supposed to the indicated by the corresponding cenotaphs in the interior of the mosque.

The Cave itself is practically inaccessible.

The two orifices, one near the Minbar and the other between the two cenotaphs of Isaac and his wife, are, as will be seen, closed. The third orifice, supplying the only communication with the shrines below, is situated south of ABRAHAM's CHAMBER. From a brass covered marble orifice an oil-lamp is suspended which but ineffectually copes with the subterranean darkness. Over this unique contrivance rises a handsome cupola. furnishe by Al-Malik An Nasir Mohamad ibn Qalaun. (Fig. 6)

ANNEXES

The most important addition to the Haram premises in the JAWILI Mosque, a picturesque building contributed by Sanjar El-Jawili and named after him. Standing to the east of the Enclosure, the mosque is joined to the walls by a vaulted porch from which access into the Enclosure is gained through the east gate. The vaulted roofing, is supported by imposing piers, and surmounted by a dome.

The inscription on the wall says that Sanjar had this place of worship built entirely with his own private money without any aid from the fund of the "two Harams"* which were in his charge.

HISTORICAL SKETCH. THE PRE-ISLAMIC PERIOD.

On the death of his wife, SARAH, the patriarch ABRAHAM purchased, for 400 Shekels of silver, from Ephron the Hittite, the Cave of Macphelah wherein he buried her. This is narrated in the Bible which also tells us that ABRAHAM himself was buried in the same Cave and that subsequently the remains of ISAAC, JACOB, and their wives were likewise placed in this patriarchal abode of peace. Hence the great sanctity of the Area.

The likelihood moreover, is entertained that the household of ABRAHAM settled of the macphelah property as a favourite, consisting of a residence set in the midst of an orchard.

Long ages elapsed throughout which the sanctity of the ancestral estate was preserved but complete silence was kept as to any events, that may have taken place there.

For the first time this long silence would seem to have been broken during the Herodian era in which the second Temple was erected. The reference is to Herod the Great to whom the construction of the walls round the Jerusalem Temple is attributed. For judging from the apparent similarity in size, in dressing and in the laying of the stones in the two relics, the inference is the same work. (Fig. 2).

Thus with the exception of the upper portions which are readily distinguished and which are distinctly Moslem, the present inclosing walls would, with some degree of probability take us back to a few years prior the Birth of Christ.

In the Byzantine era, the Christian used to go on a

[*] I. e. the Haram in Jerusalem and the Haram in Hebron.



FIG. - 5



FIG. - 6 The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, San Francisco, Calif.

pilgrimage to the site of ABRAHAM's Camp in the vicinity of "Nemra" where ABRAHAM's Oak was supposed to have survived.

A Christian king eventually erected a church within the Sacred Enclosure for such pious adorers to resorts to, leaving the rest of the Area to other worshippers.

This seems to agree with a statement made by the Arab chronicler Mujir ed-Din, to the effect that the upper portions of the Mosque were parts of a former Greek structure and that it was the Greeks who first pierced an entrance through the blind walls.

AFTER THE ISLAMIC CONQUEST

When Chaliph Omar conquered Palestine, the relic of an ancestor of the Prophets could not fail to engage the attention of Moslems. The shrine had fallen into ruins during the Persian invasion of 614 A. D. After the Arab conquest it was restored as well as the means and circumstances of the time permitted repairs to the upper sepulchre monuments being specially carried out.

The present vaulted roofing of the Mughatta, as well as the existing monuments over the the tombs of ABRAHAM and JACOB, and those of their wives, were partly constructed by the Ummayyads.

During the Abbasid dynasty, the Caliph El-Mahdi, pierced the walls made the east entrance and there erected the two flights of steps from the north and the south.

The Dome over the supposed of Joseph's tomb was constructed by order of Al-Muqtadir Billah, another caliph of the same dynasty.

DURING THE CRUSADES

When the city was occupied by the Crusaders in the 12th century, the Haram and its annexes were turned into a Castle Garrison quarters, and a Monastery. The valuable Moslem treasures of the Haram were lost at that time. The crusaders, however, restored the church of Byzantine origin mentioned above.

According to Abdul-Fida's account of the year 513 A. H. the relics were "discovered" and placed on view for pious visitors. This is corroborated by the "Invention" Manuscripts now at Leiden and Bruxelles.

The city was recaptured from the Crusaders by Saladin who supplied by Mughatta—forming the southern part of the

Mosque—with its magnificent Fatimite Minbar which had expressly removed from Al-Hussein Sanctuary of Ascalon.

The mihrab adjoining the minbar, as well as the Dicca, facing the same, are also ascribed to Saladin.

Restoration works were subsequently undertaken by Saladin's nephew, Al Malik al-Muazzam Issa, who, in the year 614 A. H., dedicated, for the upkeep and maintenance of the Haram, the two villages of Dourah and Kefr Breik (in Al-Khalil District).

AFTER THE CRUSADES.

The Mosque was rebuilt by Bibars who constructed the upper portions of the walls. The "Simat", an institution for the charitable distribution of soup and bread, was by him organized and transferred from the interior of the Haram to a special premises in the immediate neighbourhood.

It was in Bibars, time that the restriction preventing non-Moslems from entering the Haram was more rigorously enforced.

In the year 686 A.H. Qalaun had ABRAHAM's Chamber covered with marble.

But it was Al-Malik En-Nasir Mohamed ibn Qalaun, who, through his famous Viceroy for Syria, Tankaz, introduced such structural and decorative modifications and additions as elevated the Mosque to its present rank of world renown. The walls from within, were encrusted with marble slabs, the upper portions of the Mihrab were decorated with mosaics designs, and the two coloured glass apertures, one over the Mihrab and the other in the opposite wall, were made. The handsome cupola near the Dicca, over the mouth of the Cave, we also one of this contributions. [Fig. 5].

To the same period are also ascribed the east porch, the decorated doors : as well as the aqueducts and sebils (public fountains, in the neighbourhood of the Haram.

The Jawili Mosque (718-720) A. H. was built by Sanjar, the Viceroy and Nazir (Director) of the Waqf of two Harams.

During the reign of Sultan Barquq, the Nazir of the Harams Waqfs Al-Yaghmoory, by name, erected the mausolemn of Josephs and pierced a special entrance thereto in the west wall of the Enclosure. He also erected (792-801) A. H. the lower tomb within the Madrassa (school) ascribed to Al-Malik An Nasir Hassan, which was eventually transformed into the Citadel now in ruins.

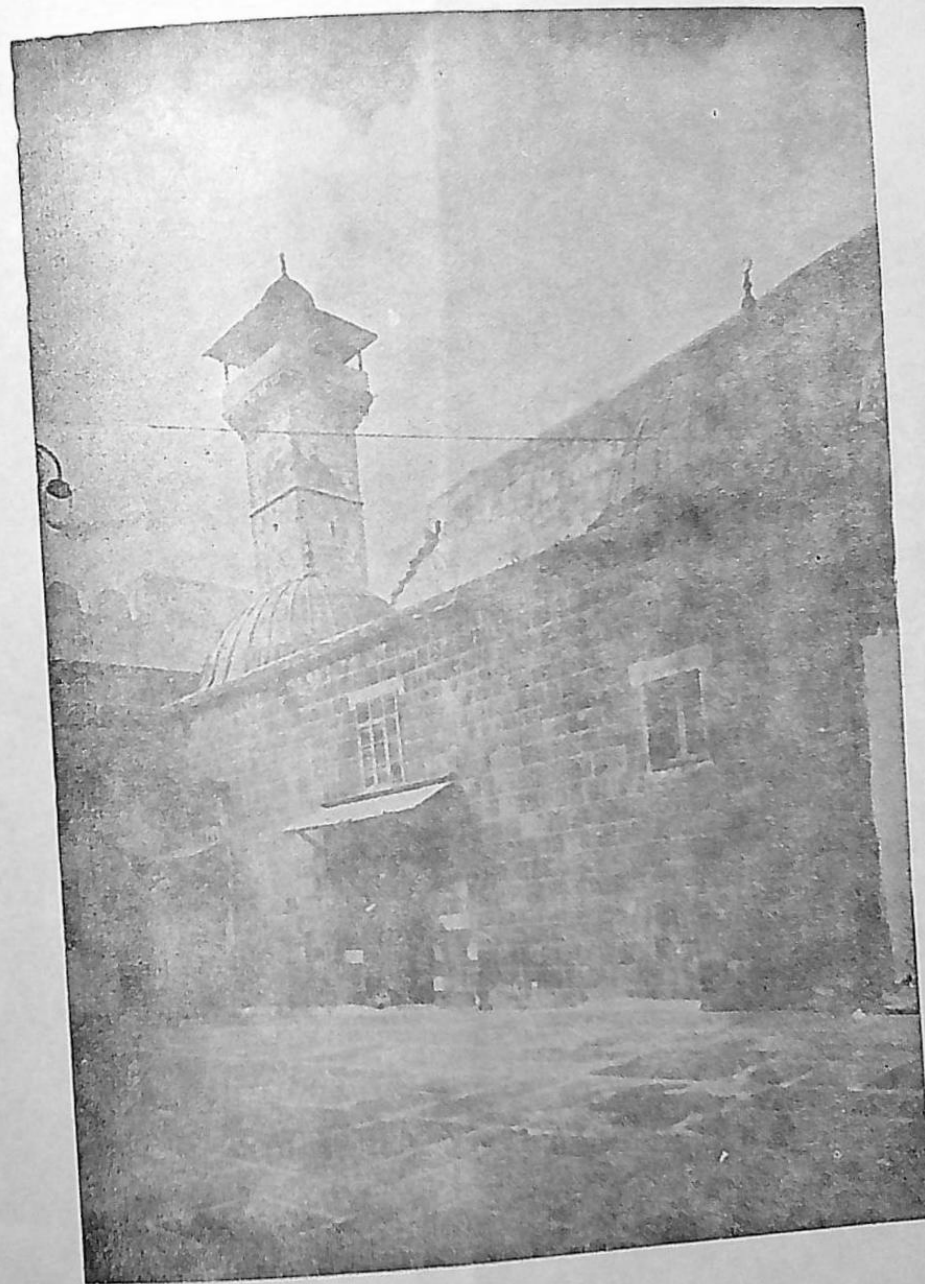


FIG. - 7