



Architecture as a Source for Historical Documentation: The Use of Palestine's Built Heritage as a Research Tool

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Abwein, Ramallah Governorate.
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Introduction

Adequate attention has not yet been given to either Palestine's material cultural heritage or its spatial and cultural landscape. Both constitute important historical documentation that can serve as a primary resource for the reconstructing the past.¹ Most researchers and historians continue to pursue written documentation as though it were sacred-this is to a degree understandable and is reflected in the papers presented at this conference.² With the exception of this paper, nothing that is unwritten (except for photographs, if we consider them unwritten, memory and oral history) is being presented at this conference as historical documentation. However it is important to view the creative arts, including architecture and stone carvings (both ornamental and text-based), as historical

documents, just like other material remains that constitute material cultural heritage. It is also important to view non-material, spiritual culture such as art and literature as a resource for researching social and cultural history. In many cases, material cultural heritage is in fact a more credible and accurate expression of the “truth” than written heritage.

The value of material cultural heritage was not realized in Palestine until recently, which is considerably late even in comparison to neighboring Arab countries. At first, it was Western foreigners who were interested in antiquities and architecture in Palestine particularly from the mid nineteenth century onwards. This interest grew through the missionary delegations and “scientific” expeditions that engulfed Palestine during that period and afterward and which inevitably had underlying agendas.³ The role of Palestinians in such endeavors was to dig and haul dirt. There was no effort on the part of excavators to make connections between the sites they worked on and the people living in the surrounding villages and cities, just as local laborers only saw their work as a means of securing their daily bread. Palestinians generally viewed antiquities as something of interest only to foreigners, and when they had the opportunity to acquire historical artifacts, they would sell them to foreigners at lucrative prices.

Until recently there were very few Arabic language publications on antiquities or the history of architecture in Palestine, in contrast to the publication of thousands of books and articles on the topic in many of the world’s major languages. And there was no significant change when the Ottoman Empire gave way to the British Mandate. The same approach remained in place, and Palestinians remained isolated from their cultural heritage. Neither did Jordan’s assumption of control bring with it an information revolution. Ignorance continued to reign, not only among the general populace but also, with very few exceptions, among the Palestinian elite.

The Israeli occupation has undoubtedly played an important role in more firmly entrenching this situation. Antiquities have continued to be looted, and historical buildings have been destroyed. Their stones, and particularly ornamental ones, have been moved to Israel and used in new structures to grant them a historical feel. Israel has also exaggerated the role of antiquities and uses them in establishing “historical rights”. In addition it deals with antiquities as though they were an Israeli monopoly that Palestinians have no role in.⁴

On the other hand, the circumstances that have shaped contemporary Palestinian identity have played an equally important role in the creation of this situation. This paper will not go into the history of the establishment and development of Palestinian identity, for that is beyond the scope of it. Nor will this paper attempt to prove that material cultural heritage is a fundamental component of any national or cultural identity, for this assumption has become an accepted given. Yet it is important to point

out that the activities of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were based for more than three decades in the diaspora, mostly in Palestinian refugee camps, in the countries neighboring Palestine. During this period, Palestinian identity was expressed and symbolized through what refugees were able to carry with them, and Palestinians became known for their *kuffiyeh* and embroidered peasant dresses, their folkloric *dabka* dance, and various rural symbols that represented their relationship to their land.

Immobile cultural heritage (antiquities, architecture, and landscape) were to a certain extent absent from such expressions, for such heritage could not be placed in a bag and taken from one refugee camp to another.⁵ As such, this fundamental component of identity was absent from the people's minds, at least for Palestinians in the diaspora. In many of the PLO's publications, including those issued through its prominent research centers, no serious interest was ever given to immobile cultural heritage as an indivisible part of Palestinian national identity. This is not, however, to justify the negligence of those living on the land of Palestine towards material cultural heritage.⁶

This paper will focus on architectural heritage as a model of cultural heritage documentation and its different uses. Unlike written resources, this heritage contains issues that are related to all levels of society and includes rural and urban areas. It reflects taste, technology, building materials, social structure, the layout of alleys, adaptation to the environment, and much more. It consists of numerous important elements and is overall essential to the writing of history. This paper consists of two parts. The first will focus on Riwaq's experience of registering historical buildings. Building upon this groundwork, the second part will discuss historical architecture in the areas occupied in 1948 and their role in writing the modern history of Palestine and in particular the history of the *nakba*.

Riwaq's Registry of Historic Buildings in Palestine⁷

A registry of historical buildings is an irreplaceable necessity for any country. Several goals can be met through the compilation of such a registry, including the protection of a country's material cultural heritage and architectural identity. Most of the world's countries do not own a comprehensive registry, as most focus on a specific city or village rather than upon compiling a centralized national registry. These observations make Riwaq's Registry of Historic Buildings in Palestine of significance for other countries.

Riwaq, the Center for Architectural Conservation,⁸ has not sought to document historical architecture in the areas occupied in 1967, but rather to register it, a difficult enough task that has taken more than ten years to complete. Registering architecture involves collecting basic information about buildings, including their ownership,

exact location, description, date, building materials, physical condition, structural integrity, ornaments, characteristics and uses. Each building is placed on a map, and at least one photograph is taken. The outcomes of this process were astounding, and will be described in detail below. As for comprehensive documentation, that would need to include, in addition to the process of registering, drawing plans and sections of every building, analytical studies, documentation of its ornamentation, and detailed photography. Such documentation is very time-consuming, difficult work, and requires a massive budget. This type of work has been carried out by Riwaq and other institutions working in the field when buildings are renovated, or when a comprehensive plans are drawn up for the conservation and development of historical areas.⁹

Riwaq's Registry of historical buildings in Palestine is extremely important as it addresses the component of Palestinian material cultural heritage most threatened today.¹⁰ It also gains significance due to it being the first of its kind in documenting an element of material cultural heritage in Palestine—the historical buildings in the cities and villages of the West Bank, including Arab Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

Although numerous surveys of antiquity sites in Palestine have been carried out, prior to the publication of Riwaq's Registry, no comprehensive inventory of historical buildings existed in Palestine.¹¹ Riwaq, the Center for Architectural Conservation, thus began work in 1994 to register historical buildings as a first step in the long process to protect the material cultural heritage of Palestine. The registry is comprised of descriptive and analytical architectural data on more than 50,000 historical buildings distributed among 422 localities including 16 major cities and 406 towns and villages. The importance of this registry lies not only in its information on a large number of historical buildings, but also in its archive of digital maps, of which there are more than 400. The registry also contains over 100,000 photographs of old buildings. Riwaq's Registry of Historical Buildings in Palestine thus forms an important historical document that combines information, site location on maps, and photographs. Before going any further in describing the different components of the register, let's first place this all within a more general framework of material cultural heritage.

Material Cultural Heritage in Palestine

The historical and cultural significance of Palestine greatly outsize its small physical space, for geopolitical and cultural/religious reasons. Palestine is a unique place in which global civilizations have come together in a small space. The land of Palestine has witnessed cultural marriages between the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq and the Mediterranean and the northern Levant. This was reflected in a wide array of rich cultural products that have contributed to world civilization. Due to Palestine's

geographic location between Asia and Africa, it became an important part of trade routes. Trade caravans that traveled from the Arabian Peninsula with goods from India, Africa and the Arabian Gulf to the north would often stop to rest in Palestine after a difficult journey. They then continued through the Gaza port or transported their goods along the Palestinian coast or via the mountain peaks or the Jordan Valley road. Thus numerous human settlements were established along these trade and transportation routes, that included many architectural structures such as milestones, caravansaries, fortresses, fountains, wells, and pools.

Both prior to and since the development of the monotheistic religions, Palestine's religious status had granted it an aura of sanctity. Holy sites appeared throughout the country since humankind worshipped nature and people, and continuing throughout the development of the monotheistic religions. Many of the places of worship in Palestine have been sacred sites for more than 5,000 years. Most shrines, tombs, oak and terebinth trees, caves, and water springs in Palestine are part of sacred stories.

Layers of history have accumulated upon one another in Palestine, forming tells and mounds of antiquities, some of which comprise of more than 20 layers from different cultural eras. Surveys show that the territories occupied in 1967 alone contain more than 10,000 antiquity sites and features that represent all the various periods of human history in Palestine. Many of these sites include cultural remains from the areas surrounding Palestine, or of the cultures that invaded it or built upon it which include Canaanites, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Philistines, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, Ottomans, etc. This diversity in the cultural faces of historical Palestine makes it a remarkable cultural store.

Because of the geographic diversity of Palestine, it has also produced various cultures, such as cultures of the coastal plain, the mountains, the Jordan Valley, and the desert, not to mention the hybridity of elements. Although most of the Palestinian areas have typically been inhabited throughout the same historical periods, each area has been distinctive due to differences in its material culture, in the environment and the ways in which inhabitants have adapted to it.

Palestine is rich in both natural and material cultural heritage. In addition to its many historical religious sites such as the al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Nativity Church, and the Ibrahimi Mosque, it also holds many other historical sites such as the Roman amphitheaters, Byzantine churches, Umayyad palaces. These include Hisham Palace in Jericho and the Umayyad Palaces in Jerusalem as well as historical schools (*madrasas*), Ayyubid and Mamluk mosques and a great deal of Ottoman era architecture.

Palestine also has a large number of historical urban centers, such as the old cities of Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus, Bethlehem, and Gaza. Palestinian villages, with their



Habla, Qalqiliya Governorate. *Source: © Riwaq Photo Archive.*

beautiful rural homes, add a further dimension to this wealth of cultural diversity. The desert monasteries on the eastern plateaus form yet another type of architecture in Palestine, in addition to being an important marker of religious development and a historical testimony of religious thought. The sacred shrines spread throughout the countryside and in cities are emblems of various forms of worship. Diversity is also found in the architecture of the throne villages, which are feudal palaces in the Palestinian countryside from the 18th and 19th centuries. The caravansaries along the historical trade routes and the beautiful rough stone terraces along Palestine's chain of hilly peaks are further proof of the wealth of Palestine's material cultural heritage.

This architectural diversity also extended, for the most part, to the use of local building materials and adaptation to the local environmental conditions. Some architecture relied on various kinds of stones, and others on mud brick. Some public buildings used marble and granite imported from distant lands.

Historical architecture (including the traditional) in Palestine is the result of lengthy experiences in building. Whether it be through the local accumulation of skills or the importation of skills during certain historical periods and their subsequent integration with local experience. In both cases, architecture remains a mark of the cultural development that Palestine underwent. The traditional Palestinian buildings found throughout Palestine's old cities and villages remain, despite everything, a national

treasure. Some of Palestine's old cities hold the record of an entire people, and are considered among the few remaining models of the ancient Eastern cities (such as Jerusalem, Nablus, Hebron, Bethlehem, and Beit Sahour). Many Palestinian villages also retain their historical architectural fabric, such as in al-Dhahiriyyeh, Yatta, Beni Na'im, Birzeit, al-Tayyibeh, al-Mazra' al-Qibliyyeh, Kur, Deir Istiya, Sarta, and 'Arraba, among others.

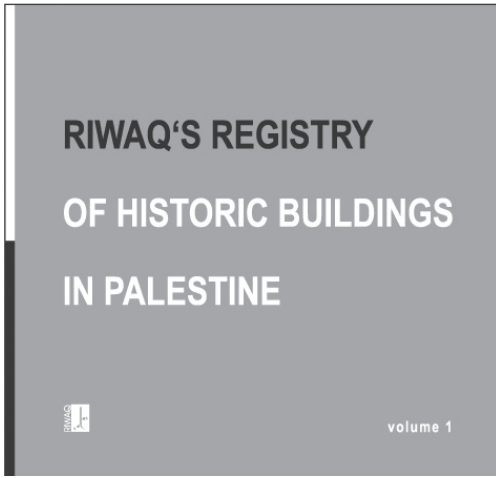
In Palestine, where natural resources are limited, and where opportunities to develop the national economy confront many obstacles due to the unnatural circumstances Palestine has faced, eyes have turned to investment in cultural heritage in all of its manifestations (historical architecture, antiquities, artifacts, folklore, art, crafts, etc.). Some people call cultural heritage in Palestine, "white gold" due to its unlimited wealth owing to its potential to boost the economy and serve as a wheel for social development.

Protecting and developing natural and cultural resources, along with expanding and diversifying areas that attract tourism to include cities such as Nablus, Gaza, Jenin and the throne villages (e.g Kur, 'Arraba, Ras Karkar and Beit Ikhsa) and natural areas such as the Suleiman Pools, the Jordan Valley, and the forests of Jenin (e.g Umm al-Rihan) would undoubtedly produce economic and social development. It would also provide the tourism sector, renovation and conservation projects with employment opportunities at a time when unemployment is high and is difficult to overcome without investing in the sector of cultural heritage.

It is impossible to reach the best routes to protecting and investing in material cultural heritage without changing the dominant social outlook of political and administrative decision makers as well as the general populace. Heritage is not costly, as it might seem at first glance since the returns on investment take a long time to come to fruition. Heritage, in its modern, international sense, is an income generator and not a consumer of funds. It offers many benefits that are gained through its protection.

Riwaq's Registry of Historical Buildings

It is impossible to draft a national plan for the protection of material cultural heritage without first registering it and creating a database to provide information during the plan's early stages on heritage sites in Palestine. To begin with, it was important to set the geographic area of the project. Not for cultural reasons, but for political as well as logistic reasons, as well as others related to tying the registry to Palestine's development plans (for the territories of the Palestinian National Authority). Riwaq decided to limit its work to the areas occupied in 1967. Riwaq realizes that from cultural and historical perspectives, the registry should include all of Palestine within its Mandate borders, as the primary material of the registry of buildings constructed



prior to the *nakba* of 1948. The picture will never be complete until Palestinian architecture in the territories occupied in 1948 are included within the registry, and Riwaq hopes that this will take place in the future when the appropriate circumstances make that possible.

Through a decade of hard work, Riwaq managed to complete the major part of the process of registering every historical building in this area that predates 1948.¹² This accomplishment is extremely important and bears innumerable benefits. In addition to the direct benefits made possible through the knowledge gained about historical buildings, including their condition, description, and detailed location on maps, other, indirect benefits that have been reaped throughout ten years of Riwaq's work.¹³ Hundreds of Palestinian university students specializing in architecture, history, and antiquities have been trained to deal with historical buildings, and this has left its mark on them and their understanding of this cultural inheritance. Moreover, Riwaq spoke with almost all of the owners or tenants of the old properties, more than 50,000 people, and created partnerships with more than 400 town and village councils and many public and non-governmental institutions. Work on the register actively contributed to developing public awareness of material cultural heritage and opened up social dialogue on its importance.¹⁴ While it has not been able to put a complete end to deterioration, it has contributed to the protection of some historical buildings and centers, as well as having invested in the development of human resources.¹⁵

The Benefits and Uses of Riwaq's Registry

Riwaq's registry of historical buildings is considered a national treasure, and even more so because it uses modern technologies for documentation. Some countries have registries that are over a hundred years old, but they are hand-entered and difficult to use. Yet Riwaq began where others had left off, and has used modern technology, and thereby conserving precious time and effort. The benefits of the Riwaq registry include the following:

- a. **Scientific research:** The registry is a scientific document that researchers in history, architecture, society, economics, and history of art can use. It includes a wide scope of information relevant to all of these fields and provides a vantage point onto an important part of the cultural and social history of societies in Palestine. It also provides clear examples of the ways in which Palestinian society has interacted with its surrounding environment, as well as significant information on various building materials, and the development of architecture and building crafts.
- b. **Urban planning and the administration of historical areas:** The registry contains rich information important for preparing a master plan of any city or village in Palestine, just as it is essential to regional planning. Its database is essential to the administration of historical areas. The registry also aids detailed planning for the administration and protection of cultural property in general, and specifically in old towns and cities. No master plan for any city or village in Palestine should be ratified unless it contains a plan for the preservation of the location's material cultural heritage.
- c. **Protection of cultural property:** No project for the protection of material cultural heritage anywhere in the Palestinian territories can be undertaken without knowing the extent of this property, its physical and structural condition, its exact location, the predominant forms of property, their relation to development, and the historical architectural fabric of the area. The registry provides this important information and forms an essential resource for carrying out such projects.
- d. **Social and economic development:** Cultural properties are a national treasure that can be invested in for the development of Palestinian society, on both a national and local level. The registry can provide guidance for those seeking investment opportunities in the arena of material cultural heritage. The registry clearly proves the immense investment opportunities that are to be found in material cultural heritage.
- e. **Documentation:** It is clear that the registry has become a historical document, particularly with regard to the buildings that have since been destroyed. In many cases, it forms the only reference on lost buildings, including their photographic

documentation. The production of architectural heritage maps in Palestine has nearly been completed, and can now be used for tourism or other uses. Many of the registered sites, and especially the villages, have no other maps, and in many cases the Riwaq maps produced to pinpoint a building's location are the only digital maps available. These can be used for multiple purposes by official and other agencies.

- f. Housing: Those seeking solutions to the housing problem in Palestine can use the registry to turn deserted traditional buildings into houses suitable for human habitation. The registry shows a large number of deserted buildings (more than 18,000) that could be partly turned into modern housing following renovation. Doing so would serve several goals: protecting cultural properties, protecting and developing the Palestinian countryside, solving the housing problem, and lessening pressure on agricultural land for example.
- g. Awareness: The information in the registry can be used as the basis for raising awareness among local councils and owners about their architectural heritage as a way of increasing their interest and getting the involved in the protection of heritage. It can also guide development practitioners and the private sector on regulated investment in some historical sites as a way that would protect and preserve them. Discussion of awareness raising also brings up national issues, particularly with regard to national identity. This is not a marginal issue, for the denial of the Palestinian people's existence and the destruction of its cultural property makes this a registry of a people, its history, and its cultural wealth, which is a fundamental element in reaffirming Palestinian existence and deepening its relation to its land and history.
- h. Law¹⁶: The national registry (a public inventory according to a draft law) is considered the primary resource for the protection of historical buildings through "registration" via the proposed law.¹⁷ The public inventory forms a database that can guide agencies responsible for heritage in preparing an initial registration list to later enter heritage into the national registry and then obtain protection for it on the basis of the law. Riwaq's registry is also a database that can be used for classifying historical buildings and determining their importance according to the law.

Overall Outcomes

- a. The registry project revealed several crucial facts about the situation of architectural cultural property in Palestine. The most important of these was that Palestine remains rich with architectural property, as 50,320 old buildings were registered. This means that Palestine (in this case the West Bank including Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip) has a large number of historical buildings,

particularly when attention is given to the size of these areas and their population. Most of this property is in the West Bank and only a small proportion of it is found in the Gaza Strip, except for in Gaza City, where there are 417 of the total 446 buildings registered.

- b. According to our estimates, more than 95% of the registering of historical buildings in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has been completed. The remaining 5% is distributed among 287 localities found throughout the various governorates. Most of these are very small villages, either small structures or recently built residential areas in which we do not expect to find a large number of historic buildings. According to Riwaq's estimates based on these areas' populations (as given by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics), we expect to find additional 2,000 to 3,000 old buildings there. We also did not enter refugee camps into the registry project, these could be a focal point of a special project.
- c. To provide a clearer picture, the chart below classifies information on the number of localities in each governorate, the percentage they represent of all the localities, the number of localities that were surveyed, the number of old buildings in each governorate, and their percentage among the total number of old buildings.

Governorate	Number of residential areas	Percentage of total number of residential areas	Number of surveyed residential areas	Number of historical buildings	Percentage of total number of buildings
Jenin	96	13.56%	83	5332	10.59%
Tubas	23	3.25%	10	548	1.08%
Tulkarm	42	5.94%	31	3237	6.43%
Nablus	73	10.31%	54	9734	19.33%
Qalqiliya	35	4.95%	22	1321	2.62%
Salfit	23	3.25%	19	1639	3.25%
Ramallah and al-Birch	80	11.30%	71	7618	15.13%
Jericho	16	2.25%	8	520	1.03%
Jerusalem	51	7.20%	30	7022	13.95%
Bethlehem	71	10.02%	17	2581	5.12%
Hebron	156	22.03%	69	10322	20.50%
The Governorates of the Gaza Strip	42	5.94%	7	446	0.88%
Total number	708	100%	422	50320	100%

- d. The outcomes show that the historical buildings in the main cities are in much better condition than those in the villages. Cities also have more old buildings, and they are mostly protected by their intensive use, except in the old city of Hebron.¹⁸ They are also well preserved due to the strong need for them, and due to the application of municipal laws in relation to the issuing of demolition and building permits. The primary 16 historical cities (Jenin, Tubas, Tulkarm, Nablus, Qalqilya, Salfit, Ramallah, al-Bireh, Jerusalem, Jericho, Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Hebron, and Gaza) have 14,347 buildings, forming 28.51% of all of the buildings registered. This can be seen in greater detail by reviewing the governorate and residential area reports.
- e. In addition to the major cities mentioned above, the outcomes have shown that by protecting merely 34 towns and villages that contain the largest number of historical buildings, we can protect approximately half of the old buildings registered by the project. If we protect the historical buildings of these areas, we will protect 23,767 old buildings out of the total of 50,320 that were registered by the project, forming 47.23%, or nearly half. Riwaq has compiled a list of 50 sites that, if protected, will preserve the majority of historical buildings in Palestine. Moreover, the material cultural heritage of these areas could then be used as a tool for development.
- f. Other groups can also be determined among the surveyed towns and villages and work can be done to protect them. These groups can be chosen on the basis of other criteria, such as their deep rootedness, their historical importance, the level of preservation of their historic fabric, their special distinction (the throne villages, for example), the condition of their buildings, and other classifying criteria from which information can be drawn from the database.
- g. The outcomes related to the use of old buildings show that little more than half of the buildings, 51.71% or 26,019 buildings are still used in their entirety. A total of 4,447 registered buildings (8.84%) are partially used, and 18,216 buildings (36.20% of the total) are deserted. Either no or not enough information was obtained about the use of 1,638 buildings (3.26%). This information means that approximately half of the traditional buildings in Palestine are either deserted or only partly used. This fact grants renovation projects a housing dimension that could solve the housing crisis in many of these sites. It would also help, to a large degree, in projects to develop the Palestinian countryside since a significant proportion of these buildings are in rural areas. They could be used as the headquarters of institutions, village councils, schools, nurseries, libraries, community centers and youth clubs. This is in addition to the possibility of using some of them as restaurants, museums, and small rural hotels that would help in the development of environmental, cultural and rural tourism.

- h. As for the structural condition of the buildings, the outcomes show that a little less than half of the buildings (25,133 buildings, or 49.95%) are in good shape. They are followed by 12,005 buildings (23.86%) that are in adequate condition, and 7,174 registered buildings (14.26%) that are in poor condition. A total of 2,786 buildings (5.54%) are not fit to use, and the condition of 3,222 buildings (6.40%) was not determined.

This information shows us the extent to which traditional buildings have been destroyed or neglected. With time and continued negligence, only a few of these buildings will remain a witness to our existence in Palestine. Every day we are losing a fundamental part of our identity, as well as an important resource for economic and social development. Moreover, the environment is continuing to be marred, as historical centers form an important tool for preserving the environment.

***Al-Nakba* and Cultural Heritage**

Along with its people, land, culture, and history, Palestine underwent a catastrophe (*al-nakba*) in 1948 and in the subsequent years. From its humanitarian, social, and political perspectives, the *nakba* has received relatively widespread attention, yet its cultural ramifications have not gained as much interest.¹⁹ In any case, during the initial years of the Israeli occupation of 1948, bulldozers erased the traces of more than 400 Palestinian villages, towns, and cities, wiping out their historical centers with their mosques, churches, shrines, and all their material cultural heritage, including, in many cases, their cemeteries.²⁰ It is impossible to estimate the value of the material cultural heritage that was lost due to the lack of detailed documentation on the one hand, and due to the priceless nature of cultural heritage on the other hand. Cultural heritage is priceless due to its connection to collective and individual memory.

The reconstruction of old towns on paper has become a difficult task that requires the memories of the residents still alive and scattered across the globe. By all standards, this loss has been catastrophic, and especially since the wheel of time cannot be turned back.

Based on Riwaq's experience in documenting historical buildings in the territories occupied in 1967, it would be very difficult to produce accurate estimates of the number of those buildings (according to today's definition, meaning buildings that predate 1948) found in the territories occupied in 1948. If we rely on the population statistics for 1931 and correlate them to the destroyed villages, we find that the total number of buildings that existed in 1931 but which have been destroyed is 50,399. This number relates to residential buildings only, and does not include public buildings, whether administrative, religious, or educational. Taking into consideration what was built between 1931 and 1948, the number would reach more than 70,000

buildings that were destroyed in villages and small towns. This number does not include the thousands of buildings that were destroyed in cities such as Haifa, Jaffa, Lod, Ramla, Tiberias, Safad, Acre, Bir Saba'. A total estimate of 100,000 would not be at all exaggeration. In my opinion, it provides an approximate picture as to the extent of the *nakba*.

Reaching this same conclusion through other means is also possible. There is near consensus among historians today that the number of Palestinians uprooted from their homes in 1948 was about 750,000. If we assume that Palestinian families consisted of six members, that means that the refugees left behind them approximately 125,000 homes, with the exception of public buildings. As not every home was destroyed, this brings us close to the number proposed above.

There are certainly other means of determining the number of buildings that were destroyed, including the use of British maps and aerial photographs. Yet this would be exhausting work and would only bring us back to estimates similar to those we have already reached. In general, it worth trying all the above mentioned methodologies in order to come close to the number of building bulldozed by the Israelis in the aftermath of the Nakba of 1948. This does not include those buildings bulldozed after the 1967 war: the three Latrun villages, Mughrabi Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem, Nablus (2002), Hebron (since 1967) and other buildings in different parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

What concerns us here is that in addition to the importance of the historical documentation the registration process produced, we can now add to the list of massacres committed against Palestinian civilians--the massacres committed against the material cultural heritage of Palestine.

Yet some of the Palestinian cities and villages in the territories occupied in 1948 were not completely destroyed by the occupation (although most of them also remain undocumented)--Haifa, Shafa Amr, Ramla, Lod, Jaffa, Nazareth, Acre, Tiberias, 'Arrabat al-Battuf, Sakhnin, Umm al-Fahem, al-Tayyibeh, etc. These locations are waiting for Palestinian efforts (whether by the Palestinians living within those territories or in cooperation with us) to complete the process of documenting part of the collective memory of the Palestinian people.

The remaining architectural heritage of the territories occupied in 1948 is in a deteriorating condition and are deserted. Many Palestinian homes in Jaffa whose families were driven away, for example, remain empty and on the verge of collapse. It's as though what the bulldozers didn't get was left to collapse and hence completed the process of utter destruction.²¹ It is the same situation in Tiberias and Haifa. As for Safad and part of old Jaffa, its buildings have been poorly renovated in most cases and misused in others. In the old city of Acre, the remaining Palestinian residents are being

moved out and their places being taken by others, thus erasing the historical relations between the place and its population. In the rest of the locations that continue to be populated by Palestinians (except for Nazareth), there are no technical or material capabilities to renovate, nor is there sufficient awareness of the importance of material cultural heritage to protect what remains.²² None of the attempts until now to jump start an initiative like that of Riwaq and similar institutions have been a success, and yet doing so is far too important to put off any further.

Documentation in the territories occupied in 1948 would certainly be different from that which has taken place in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Rather than sufficing with the documentation of buildings, as Riwaq has done, it would be better to take the opportunity to connect the buildings to the history of their families and their fates, and to collect their stories. I believe that taking this step would form a major contribution to writing the history of modern Palestine and in particular of the *nakba*.

Riwaq has made two modest contributions to this process. The first is the publication of Diala Khasawneh's book "Palestinian Urban Mansions" (2001). Already in its third printing, this book showcases buildings from all the cities in Mandate Palestine. The featured mansions from the territories occupied in 1948 are the home of the Hawa family in Acre, the Qaraman home in Haifa, the Khouri home in Jaffa, the Daher homes in Nazareth, and the Shamma home in Safad. This book has revealed what a massive amount of information lies hidden within historical buildings as long as they remain standing. Losing these buildings in any way would mean the loss of important resources for the writing of the *nakba's* history.

Riwaq's other contribution was the publication of a book by Sharif Sharif-Safadi in 2008 entitled "Wall and Ceiling Paintings in Notable Palestinian Mansions in the Late Ottoman Period: 1856-1917". This book is an important historical record that documents homes and their owners, along with their tastes and political, social, and cultural orientations. While it addresses most of Palestine, it also places a special focus on Nazareth, Jaffa, Haifa, Acre, and some of the Galilee villages.

These contributions have confirmed that the resources for writing Palestine's modern history are many, and that architecture is an important one of them. Historians must make use of it and not just leave it to architects and art historians who seek merely aesthetically pleasing models. Riwaq's two books are examples of how when a multi-faceted approach is applied to the products of the Palestinian elite, history can be written. When historians use architecture as a historical resource, they will find even more information about the general history of the Palestinian people.

The history writing of distinctive architecture is extremely important and needs a lot of work, such as in the buildings of al-Dhahir Omar—its palaces, fortresses, and civil and military buildings; the caravansaries of Palestine; shrines from architectural

perspectives (they have been documented from historical and folkloric perspectives); mosques; churches; etc.

The challenges facing the project of documentation in the territories occupied in 1948 are twofold:

Firstly, it would require documenting the buildings that predate 1948 and connecting them to people and their histories and fate, as well as the fate of the buildings themselves. It would also require protecting what can be protected, at least that which remains the property of Palestinians and campaigning for the protection of the rest. Cultural-social awareness would have to be raised in order to demand the protection of the buildings left in destroyed villages or in what are called mixed cities (such as Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, Ramla, Lod, Safad, and Tiberias).

Secondly, and this is the more difficult task, the cities and villages must be reconstructed in order to make an inventory of their cultural property. This would be done through the use of archives—such as The Survey of Western Palestine, British maps, the Haganah archives, and tax records, as well as individual’s memories.

Without exaggeration, every day we are losing a large part of what remains of the historical buildings spread across the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948. The yearly loss comes to dozens, even hundreds of buildings.

Not putting the creation of a registry and the documentation of the historical buildings in the territories occupied in 1948 on the list of priorities, and continuing to overlook them, particularly by our people, equals the daily loss of historical documents.²³ Not registering and documenting components of national identity is just like ignoring an archive of a people’s history. Not protecting and renovating historical buildings is like leaving the archive to be eaten by dust and humidity.

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Endnotes

¹ This is not to deny or underestimate the importance of the many attempts made by academic and government institutions. However, these attempts have not yet been able to meet the challenge facing them.

² This paper was originally presented at the “Archive Resources and Social History in Palestine” conference organized by the Institute of Jerusalem Studies and Birzeit University from 25- 26 July 2008.

³ I will not go here into the ideological and religious background of research in antiquities,

history, and anthropology in Palestine, for this has already been addressed by other researchers.

⁴ This is not to suggest that the Israeli role should be used as an excuse. I will not address the Israeli role in erasing Palestinian identity and cutting off the relationship between Palestinians and their land. This is not to deny the existence of such an Israeli role, and yet I will focus in this paper on Palestinian factors.

⁵ Yet photographs of the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher were used

- to decorate many Palestinian slogans and were hung in Palestinian and even non-Palestinian homes as national and religious symbols.
- ⁶ Many serious and important attempts have been made within the West Bank and Jerusalem to preserve folkloric heritage. A collection of museums dedicated to that purpose have been opened, including the initiatives by the Society of In'ash al-Usra in al-Bireh, Dar al-Tifl al-'Arabi in Jerusalem, and Baituna al-Talhami in Bethlehem. This work is extremely important, and has preserved essential resources for the writing of the cultural history of the Palestinian people.
- ⁷ This is referred to as Riwaq's registry not only because Riwaq compiled it but also because it cannot be called a national registry since the necessary legislation to do so is not currently in place. Should the necessary legislation be ratified, the registry's name may be changed. The registry in itself does not currently have any legal value, although it will form important material for future legislation.
- ⁸ Riwaq, established in (1991) is a Ramallah based non-profit non-governmental organization whose main aim is the protection and development of architectural heritage in Palestine. Riwaq's activities include the Riwaq's Registry of Historic Building; the implementation of more than seventy conservation projects in major West Bank towns and villages, a number of protection plans for historic centers, the publication of fourteen books on cultural heritage, and a rich photo archive. Realizing the difficulties and challenges facing cultural heritage protection, Community outreach activities are implemented in close cooperation with the public and the private sectors of the society. Riwaq's main partners include: cultural heritage agencies, relevant PNA Ministries specifically municipalities and local village councils, as well as local and international cultural institutions. For more details on Riwaq's work, see www.riwaq.org
- ⁹ Riwaq has complete documentation of more than 200 buildings in addition to the complete documentation of Ramallah, al-Tayyibeh, Deir Istiyeh, Birzeit, al-Dhahiriyyeh, 'Ain Sinia, and al-Mazra' al-Qibliyyeh. Riwaq has also prepared conservation plans for 17 villages and cities that include a great deal of detailed information on each building within them. This is in addition to dozens of other detailed maps.
- ¹⁰ There are several factors threatening traditional and historical architecture in the territories of the Palestinian National Authority. The most significant is the lack of sufficient space in cities, towns, and villages for growth, either due to the lack of a modern master plan or due to Israeli settlement. This raises land prices drastically and increases pressure on historical centers. Moreover, the lack of sufficient protective laws essentially encourages demolition. The fiercest enemy remains lack of awareness of the importance of historical architecture, as well as a lack of specialists in all municipalities and village councils.
- ¹¹ Antiquities have been surveyed and registered since the British Mandate and many antiquities sites have been placed under legal protection through publication in the national gazette. This is in addition to the legal protection provided by the legal definition of antiquities. The first law for antiquities was issued in 1927, and was amended by Jordan in 1966. The first law for antiquities in the Gaza Strip is now in force.
- ¹² The choice of 1948 is clearly significant, for it refers to the immense loss of buildings that year from Israeli bulldozers, making that year a decisive one. Moreover, 50 years can be taken as a standard global measure for evaluating the historicity of buildings. And yet protection is not related to a specific date--some peoples may want to protect buildings only a year old for political, social, or cultural reasons.
- ¹³ The components of Riwaq's registry can be reviewed by referring to the three volumes published in 2007 under the title "Riwaq's Registry of Historical Buildings in Palestine." All the details of the registry can be found on the website www.riwaqregister.org
- ¹⁴ Riwaq sponsors numerous activities that aim to raise awareness of material cultural heritage and the importance of protecting it. Among these activities is the annual competition on drawing historical buildings for fifth-graders across the territories of the Palestinian National Authority. This competition is held in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. More than 103,000 students participated in the last round, and were assisted by their families and teachers.
- ¹⁵ Since 1991, Riwaq has been able to renovate approximately 100 buildings in approximately 70 villages and cities. These buildings are used for public purposes, such as social, women's, and youth centers; nurseries; libraries; charitable organizations; and schools.

The Hebron Rehabilitation Committee has completely renovated most of the old city of Hebron, an incredibly important task. As for the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation in Bethlehem, it alone has renovated dozens of buildings, as has the Welfare Association in the old city of Jerusalem. Not much achievement has been made in Nablus, despite it being the second largest historical city after Jerusalem. Nablus is waiting for a comprehensive national plan. Despite these other achievements, lack of awareness remains a major challenge, for our bulldozers are still tearing down historical buildings.

¹⁶ The current law in force in Palestine (in the West Bank) is the Jordanian antiquities law of 1966, which defines antiquities as ruins dating before 1700. This definition makes the law incapable of protecting most historical buildings in Palestine as most of them are from the Ottoman period and are subsequently not protected by law, unless declared by the director general of the Department of Antiquities, which never took place.

¹⁷ Cooperation has taken place between Riwaq, the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation in Bethlehem, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, and the Law Center of Birzeit University to draft modern legislation for the protection of the material cultural heritage of Palestine. This legislation has been drafted and submitted to the relevant Palestinians institutions to be discussed and approved by the appropriate administrative bodies for enactment before presenting it to the Legislative Council. Yet the dramatic political changes that have since taken place and the suspension of the Palestinian Legislative Council's activities have halted this important development. We hope that the Palestinian Legislative Council will soon resume functioning and propose the legislation anew.

¹⁸ Due to the current political conditions, most specifically Israeli settlement and the encirclement of the old city by Israeli forces, most of the old city has been deserted. By 1996, only 300 people continued to live in the old city. Since the renovations carried out by the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee more than 700 apartments, in addition to the infrastructure and streets, the population of the old city has risen to approximately 3,000. Yet while the physical conditions of the old city have improved drastically, and while the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee offered

incentives for people to return there, a large number of buildings remain deserted even though they are considered architectural gems.

¹⁹ Although destroyed villages were documented in an important book titled "All That Remains" (written by a group of researchers and edited by Walid Khalidi), this is only considered an initial endeavor that should encourage researchers to conduct further detailed documentary studies. With the exception of Birzeit University's publication of detailed studies on 25 villages, and the documentation of another 30 villages by independent researchers, most destroyed Palestinian villages continue to be only initially documented.

²⁰ The number of destroyed villages differs among researchers according to the definition of "village" and how Bedouin settlements are included. The estimates range from 370 to 500 towns, villages, and Bedouin settlements.

²¹ The buildings left behind by their residents in 1948 were placed under the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property. They were then transferred to the Keren Kayemet and the Land Registry Department, and many were sold, rented, or given away, while many others remain deserted until this day. The same fate befell religious buildings. As for public buildings, which were the property of cities or villages (such as schools), or the property of the Mandate Government, Israel considered them its inheritance.

²² In preparation for the third millennium, the Nazareth municipality renovated numerous historical buildings in the city and repaired its infrastructure. Yet the high population in Nazareth, like in other Arab cities and towns, has placed serious pressure on the old city.

²³ The partners desired for such efforts are many, including municipal and Arab councils in Israel and their coordination committees; cultural institutions in 1948 Palestine; architects, archeologists, and historians in 1948 Palestine; Riwaq and other institutions working in the field of cultural heritage conservation in Palestine; and Palestinian and Arab funding institutions.