

## Archaeological Heritage and Related Institutions in the Palestinian National Territories 16 Years After Signing the Oslo Accords

DR. SALAH HUSSEIN AL-HOUDALIEH  
*Al-Quds University, Palestine*

## التراث الأثري الفلسطيني والمؤسسات الفلسطينية ذات العلاقة 16 عام بعد توقيع اتفاقية اوسلو الاولى

د. صلاح حسين الهودالية  
جامعة القدس وفلسطين

Since the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993, Palestinians have made every effort to preserve, conserve and promote Palestine's cultural heritage resources in their national territories. In order to carry out this national responsibility they have established the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities; several programs at local universities in the fields of archaeology, conservation and restoration, and planning; and a number of non-governmental organizations, as well as other institutions and professional committees. A large number of projects and activities connected with protection and promotion of the cultural heritage have been conducted throughout the Palestinian National Territories (PNT), mainly by local teams funded by foreign grants. However, despite the strenuous efforts that have been made, unless full coordination is established between the relevant parties concerned with heritage resources, both the immediate and future prospects for protecting Palestine's archaeological and historical heritage remain in real jeopardy. Indeed, this heritage is facing serious, heightened challenges which will surely damage or destroy most of it in the near future, unless the Palestinian Authority, together with other private and national institutions, forcefully addresses this widespread phenomenon. This article draws mainly on interviews with Palestinian archaeologists and members of the Palestinian public, as well as with stakeholders in the relevant NGOs. The main purpose of this analysis is to diagnose the current status of Palestine's cultural heritage, particularly its archaeological and historical heritage, in order that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) may develop policies to ensure their protection and preservation. From a political perspective, I must say clearly that the exclusion of the Gaza Strip from the study does not in any way presume the legitimacy of the political partition that happened in the summer of 2007. This exclusion was due to the difficulty of travelling between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and to the scarcity of information available about the current reality of the archaeological heritage in Gaza Strip.

بذل الفلسطينيون جهوداً كبيرة منذ توقيع اتفاقية اوسلو الاولى عام 1993، وذلك للحفاظ على مصادر التراث الثقافي في مناطق السلطة الوطنية الفلسطينية. وللقيام بمسؤولياتهم الوطنية فقد أسسوا وزارة السياحة والآثار، والعديد من برامج الآثار في الجامعات المحلية، وصيانة وترميم عدد كبير من المواقع والمعالم التاريخية والأثرية، وإعادة تأهيل بعض المواقع الأثرية التي تتمتع بقيم جمالية، وفنية وتاريخية، بالإضافة الى تأسيس عدد كبير من المؤسسات غير الحكومية التي تعنى بالتراث الثقافي. لقد تمكنت الفرق الفلسطينية المختصة من تنفيذ مئات المشاريع والنشاطات ذات العلاقة بحماية وترميم المميز من مصادر التراث الثقافي المحلي بتمويل خارجي. وبالرغم من الجهود المضنية المبذولة في نفس الاتجاه لحماية الموروث الثقافي، الا ان واقع هذا الموروث ما زال مشوه. وحقبة الامر، ان قطاع التراث الثقافي الفلسطيني ما زال يتعرض لعوامل تدمير كثيرة، والتي سوف تؤدي في المنظور القريب الى طمس غالبيته ما لم يتم تدارك الامور على المستويين: الحكومي والجهاديين. اعتمدت هذه الدراسة على المقابلات الشخصية التي اجراها الباحث مع عدد من الأثاريين المحليين، ومع عينة عشوائية غير مختصة في حقل الآثار من ابناء المجتمع الفلسطيني، ومع رؤساء المؤسسات غير الحكومية والتي تعمل في مجال التراث الثقافي، بالإضافة الى انها اعتمدت على ما توفر من ابحاث ودراسات منشورة. ويكمن الهدف الاساس من هذا البحث في تشخيص الواقع الحالي للتراث الثقافي الفلسطيني من اجل تطوير سياسة شاملة ترمي الى الحفاظ على الموروث الحضاري في مناطق السيادة السياسية الفلسطينية.

## Introduction

The total size of historic (British Mandate) Palestine is 27,000 square kilometers, of which approximately two-thirds is desert. The cumulative archaeological fieldwork carried out all over the country has proved that the fertile one-third of Palestine attracted a long series of peoples who settled the land without interruption from the lower Palaeolithic down to modern times. Actually, Palestine is considered one of the richest countries in the world in terms of its archaeological heritage, with a total of some 35,000 archaeological sites and features, of which 12,000 are located within the West Bank and Gaza Strip (for further information about the distribution of the heritage sites and features see Taha, 2005: 69-70). This rich legacy reflects, among other things: the country's unique role as a land-bridge linking Africa, Asia and Europe; the consequent cultural diversity, with many ethnic groups inhabiting the land throughout history; several distinct regional and sub-regional environments; the sheer density of settlement, both pre-historic and historic, throughout the country; the biogeography of the land; and, of course, its profound religious significance. Palestine's cultural heritage embodies several components, such as archaeological and historical sites, traditional buildings, unique places of aesthetic value, sacred places, ancient roads, natural and artificial caves, cisterns, agricultural terraces and watchtowers, ancient rock-cut tombs and cemeteries, olive and wine presses, as well as a large number of artifacts and other movable objects of historic, scientific or aesthetic value.

Palestine was a British colony from 1917-1948, then the Israelis occupied the northern and western parts of it in 1948 in establishing the State of Israel, and in June of 1967 Israeli military troops occupied the rest of Palestine (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip). According to the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995 between the Palestinians and Israelis, a limited Palestinian administration of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was established. The Accords divided the West Bank into three areas, as follows: Area A (18.2% of the West Bank and 3.8% of historic Palestine) under complete Palestinian civil and security control; Area B (21.8% of the West Bank and 4.5% of historic Palestine) under Palestinian civil control but Israeli security control; and Area C (60% of the West Bank and 12.5% of historic Palestine) under full Israeli civil and security control (Amnesty International, 2003: 12). Nearly 40% of the 12,000 Palestinian archaeological sites and features are located within areas A and B, with the remaining 60% located in area C. In April 2001, the Israeli military reoccupied the West Bank, leaving no access for the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (DACH) to the majority of heritage resources within the Palestinian territories.

## The current reality of Palestine's cultural heritage

The PNT are still under Israeli military occupation, and the Palestinians' official administrative authority is therefore relatively weak. Under these circumstances, heritage protection and preservation as well as combating antiquities looting unfortunately attract comparatively little attention, among either public officials or the general populace. The political conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis, and the resulting economic deprivation, have caused the PNA, of necessity, to marginalize the preservation of heritage resources in the interest of securing the basic needs of Palestinian society, mainly through foreign monetary aid. The archaeological heritage of the Palestinian Territories is thus facing a number of challenges which, besides hindering progress towards sustainable development, indeed threaten the heritage resources' very existence. These serious challenges, deriving from a mix of internal and external factors, include the following: a notable deterioration in the economic status of Palestinian society, beginning with the outbreak of the first uprising (*intifada*) in 1987; a lack

of coordination among the relevant local parties concerned with cultural heritage; the negligence, based largely on ignorance, of the local populace; a lack of awareness on the part of Palestinian society generally; active illegal digging and looting, as well as the forgery of heritage objects; the absence of national museums; poor law enforcement; insufficient master planning for development and inadequate oversight of housing and other construction; the pressure of population growth; a lack of financing and of well-trained human resources in the area of cultural heritage conservation; the absence of a comprehensive, strategic policy, generally accepted by all parties, designed to protect, manage and develop the local cultural heritage; the Israeli excavations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, from the beginning of the occupation in 1967 and continuing to the present (for further information about the Israeli excavations in the Palestinian National Territories including east Jerusalem see Greenberg and Keinan, 2007); and, finally, the ongoing local and regional political crises, including the intrusion of both the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the Israeli Apartheid wall. All these factors, and others, have led to the disfigurement or complete loss of thousands of heritage resources. Perhaps it goes without saying that the miserable current situation of Palestine's archaeological heritage constrains the Palestinian politicians, employees of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, and academics and intellectuals to all turn their heads in shame from this outrageous, ongoing phenomenon. In this section, the article will focus on four factors of enormous danger to the existence of archaeological resources throughout the PNA: the Israeli Apartheid wall, illicit digging at heritage sites, modern development, and poor law enforcement.

### **1. The Israeli Apartheid wall**

The concept of constructing this wall derives, first, from the proposal of the British Mandatory authorities in 1937 (though never realized) to build a barrier along the main roads, from the northern boundaries of Palestine to the Beersheba region in the south. Much later, in 1983, Ariel Sharon proposed building two separation walls, the first along the Jordan Valley and the second along the Green Line (the 1949 armistice line that separated the State of Israel from the West Bank until the 1967 war). Then in June 2002, following a decision by the Israeli ministerial cabinet, Israel's government began constructing the separation ("apartheid") barrier, without consulting with or obtaining the agreement of the PNA. The announced Israeli purpose in building the wall was as a security measure for preventing the suicide bombings and other attacks then taking place in Israel, to stop illegal immigration, to reduce the entry of unauthorized workers into Israel from the Palestinian Territories, and to prevent car theft and other criminal activities. On the other hand, the Palestinians reject these Israeli justifications and point out that this barrier has nothing to do with the alleged security concerns, but rather with annexation and confiscation of land (abu el-Haija, 2008: 71-84). The barrier is an 8m-high structure consisting of either a solid concrete wall or a barbed-wire fence. It is often surrounded by a buffer zone between 15 and 100m wide with deep trenches, a smooth dirt track for footprint detection, roads for patrol vehicles, electrified fencing, thermal imaging devices and video cameras. Many sections have armed watchtowers every 300 meters.

The planned construction of the separation barrier has been divided into three main stages, and when complete the barrier is projected to stretch approximately 780km in length. Almost 75% of its total length is *inside* the West Bank, rather than along the Green Line, and with the wall constructed in many places *deep* inside the Palestinian Territories, the confiscated areas located between the wall and the Green Line have been declared by Israel

as closed military zones. In these areas all Palestinians must obtain permits to be able to continue living in their own homes, or to cultivate their land and pick the fruit of their own trees, always under Israeli security control.

Yahya (2008a: 43) estimates the total number of archaeological and heritage sites and features isolated between the Green Line and the barrier (the projected route, if it is ever completed) at about 2,800. Independently, Taha (2005: 69) concluded that within the Palestinian areas the total number of archaeological and heritage sites and features fully controlled by Israelis, as a consequence of the construction of the apartheid wall and the establishment of Israeli settlements, is about 4,500, including over 500 major archaeological sites. Altogether, this constitutes some 45% of the heritage resources of the Palestinian Territories. Yahya (2008a: 43) has further estimated the total number of archaeological sites and features severely damaged (either partially or totally destroyed) by the construction of the apartheid barrier itself at about 800, which means that, from this one activity, about 6.7% of the heritage resources in the Palestinian Territories have been forever lost.

As a result of several successful appeals highlighting the potential impact of the barrier's construction on cultural heritage resources, Israel's High Court of Justice has demanded that some changes in the route of the wall should be made. The Israeli military officials in charge of building the Apartheid barrier have responded to these orders in three main ways:

- a. The route of the barrier was sometimes changed, to ensure that the infrastructure works would not damage some of the most significant heritage sites, by moving it *within* the PNT. It is noteworthy that these modifications did not relocate the barrier in the immediate vicinity of the endangered site, but far away from it, leading in effect to the confiscation of additional land from Palestinian farmers and isolating an even larger number of heritage resources from their natural landscapes (Yahya, 2008a: 44).
- b. Israeli institutions have sometimes conducted salvage excavations, before construction has begun, at archaeological sites which would otherwise be damaged by the proposed route of the barrier. The two main aims of such excavations were not only to explore the history and stratigraphy of the sites but also to unearth cultural materials in order to move them to Israel institutions. The excavations, carried out without prior consultation with the relevant Palestinian institutions, were characterized by haste and inaccuracy due to the political pressure on the excavation teams. Abu el-Haija (2008: 95) has calculated that 263 such salvage excavations were carried out along the proposed route of the wall, including places such as Khirbet Salah, es-Sawahra es-Sharqia, Khirbet Najem, A'in el-Jwaza, Khirbet en-Najjar, Khirbet Huryah and el-Baja'a village.
- c. Sometimes a thick layer of earth or base material has been laid over sites along the route of the wall, to avoid damaging the cultural materials during the infrastructure work. From my point of view, this methodology is the ideal way to preserve the heritage resources threatened by the building of the barrier through these areas; however this method was not employed very often. From a political perspective, I must say clearly that my personal support for this method does not in any way

presume the legitimacy of the construction of the apartheid wall. One of the most significant archaeological sites where the Israelis have used this technique is Khirbet Huriya. This site, dated to the Hellenistic through early Ottoman periods, is located between Saffa village and Kfar Rut settlement, approximately 18km west of Ramallah and 20km northwest of Jerusalem. There the Israeli Antiquities Authority conducted a salvage excavation at several spots, unearthing several constructions of historic and aesthetic value. Two of the most significant discoveries at this site were a huge Byzantine church with mosaic pavements and a large house whose remains still stand to a height of some 2.5m. In the end, the Israelis constructed the wall across the middle of the archaeological site, dividing it into two parts (see Al-Houdalieh, 2006: 108).

## **2. Illicit digging at heritage sites**

The origins of this unsightly and harmful phenomenon in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are still quite vague; however it seems that it mostly arose during the late 1940s to early 1950s. This development was partly an unfortunate by-product of the employment of large numbers of local residents as workers in the many legitimate, large-scale, professional excavations conducted in the first half of the twentieth century at sites throughout Mandatory Palestine. This exposure imparted to many of the laborers, for better or worse, their first awareness of the importance and value of heritage artifacts. The resultant illicit digging has evolved through three main phases: from the middle of the twentieth century until 1986; from 1987 (the outbreak of the first Palestinian uprising) to 1999; and from 2000 (the outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising) to the present. The first phase was characterized by: the use of traditional excavation tools like shovels, pickaxes, trowels, plastic or metal containers and brooms, in order to find the valuable objects; a low level of experience in classifying the unearthed cultural material according date and price; relatively few people engaged in the illegal digging; full secrecy surrounding the activity; working in small looting gangs, usually consisting of members of the same family; and relatively few individuals mastering this profession as a permanent career, with the rest digging only occasionally. By contrast, the second and the third phases were marked by: the use of metal detectors and bulldozers (in addition to traditional excavation equipment) to search for cultural deposits (and valuable objects in particular) and to locate features hewn into the bedrock; a well-developed level of fieldwork experience, enabling the looters to choose exactly the most valuable spots to dig, as well as to classify the artifacts by historical period (and even particular phase), and to assess the monetary value of items according their physical condition and the demand for them on the antiquities black market; more openness and visibility surrounding the digging; greatly increased numbers of looters, working in both small and large gangs; and, finally, an increased number of looters engaged in digging as their full-time occupation. Truly, these looting activities, especially in the second and the third phases, have disfigured or demolished a significant portion of the vital heritage of the country and have resulted in the extraction of *at least* hundreds of thousands of archaeological objects, isolating them forever from their original cultural contexts. Based on personal interviews, conducted by the author from February 2006 to October 2009 with more than two hundred prominent heritage looters in their hometowns or villages throughout the Palestinian National Territories (where their neighbors are fully aware of their illegal digging activities), the conclusion is reached that the majority of treasure hunters are now (from the end of 2008 until the present, October 2009) *avoiding* digging up heritage resources, because they fear

consequences from employees of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities or the Anti-theft Unit of the Tourism Police (for detailed information see Al-Houdalieh, 2006: 103-105; Kersel, 2007: 85; Yahya, 2008b: 497, Al-Houdalieh, 2009a: 340-342).

The causes of the plundering of heritage resources are numerous, such as: ignorance of the value of keeping heritage objects in their original, stratified cultural context, and the importance of this both for the Palestinian national identity and for human beings as a whole; the desire for quick profits, and the essential human egocentricity by which private financial gain often prevails over the public interest; the widespread economic deprivation of Palestinian society; poor law enforcement in the Palestinian Territories, due both to the occupation and to internal difficulties; the Israeli antiquities law, which allows for and licenses a “legal” antiquities trade, providing the treasure hunters with both incentive and a ready market; an incorrect understanding of “ore” (*rikaz*), i.e. extracted objects, in Islamic teaching; and the growing demand of the illegal antiquities market for special objects from certain periods. In general, the plundering itself can be classified, according to its dynamics, into two types: intentional and unintentional. The intentional plundering entails a long and relatively complicated process: buying or renting the excavation equipment, assembling the looting gang, choosing the correct place to dig, and making oral agreements with the owners of the land on which they desire to dig. It is noteworthy that the illicit diggers attach much more importance to the landowners than to the Israeli military forces, the Palestinian police, or employees of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Indeed, they are keenly aware that, if caught by any governmental authority, they will merely be arrested for few days, pay a penalty of a few hundred Jordanian dinars, and lose the seized objects, along with their excavation tools. However, digging without making an arrangement and full coordination with the *landowners* is considered by the looters a dangerous activity, since it can lead to a violent inter-familial fight. The unintentional variety of plundering, by contrast, takes place mostly when the owner of a piece of land carries out certain legal activities, such as plowing, planting new trees, constructing cultivation terraces, digging a water cistern into the ground, or building a new house. In general, the owner of the land retains the unearthed objects, and keeps them a closely-guarded secret (compare Al-Houdalieh, 2006: 103-106).

Some of the treasure hunters have close working connections with Palestinian and/or Israeli antiquities dealers as well as middlemen, all of whom are working also in groups. Usually, the Palestinian dealers and middlemen visit the antiquities looters secretly, at their homes or on the excavation sites, in order to see the cultural material and to establish a price. If the looter does not agree to the offered price, the dealer or middleman will typically leave, however he then secretly asks one of his colleagues, after giving him detailed information, to contact the same looter. The new visitor of course offers an even lower price than his accomplice. This kind of visit might be repeated several times in order to force the looter to sell the objects to the first middleman at the original price — unaware that he has been the victim of an elaborate, well-scripted ruse! Ultimately, the vast majority of illegally obtained objects find their way into Israel proper, which serves both as a primary market and also as an export market, channelling objects to markets and collectors in foreign countries.

### **3. Modern development**

In Palestine, there is a disturbing inverse relationship between modern development on the one hand and the protection of heritage resources, in both urban and rural environments, on the other. This wave of development, it seems, constitutes a sort of war — unintentional but nonetheless destructive — against the country’s cultural legacy. All too often

the process of urbanization, and its attendant construction of private housing, roads and other infrastructure, has come at the expense of preserving the traces of past cultures. Since the establishment of the PNA, the population of the Palestinian Territories has increased markedly, bringing about a corresponding construction boom within and around the existing residential centers. Actually, it is well known that the ancient cores of the vast majority of the Palestinian cities and villages have a long history of settlement, sometimes going back to prehistoric periods (Al-Houdalieh and Sauders, 2009: 1-4).

Constant population pressure, the revival of many long-delayed investment projects, as well as the general desire of local people to modernize — all have resulted in a dramatically elevated level of urban development in most Palestinian cities, towns and villages. Consequently, modern concrete high-rise buildings increasingly dot the skylines of the Palestinian Territories, dramatically changing both the natural and cultural landscapes, and eclipsing the physical character and style of the traditional architecture. Due to the failure to update master plans for development (in many places still the responsibility of the Israeli government), a large amount of modern residential and commercial construction has replaced thousands of traditional buildings in the historic cores of cities and villages, or has been built on archaeological sites located on the peripheries or in the open hinterlands of these population centers (Al-Houdalieh and Sauders, 2009: 4-5). Usually, an employee of the Inspection and Licensing Unit of the DACH will visit a land parcel on which new construction is proposed, once the developer has submitted the required documents. If the inspector determines that the land in question contains or is part of an archaeological site, he will immediately carry out a salvage excavation at the expense of the landowner. However, since most developers are aware that the DACH prevents the demolition of traditional buildings and prohibits or delays construction on archaeological sites, they have been known to destroy the old buildings and then change the landscape by digging to bedrock, thus obliterating any architectural remains that were present — all *before* asking the DACH to inspect the site (Al-Houdalieh, 2006: 106-107).

In the name of modernity, and as a normal response to population pressure, many public infrastructure projects have likewise been carried out in the Palestinian Territories. Many parts of Palestine's network of streets and roads have been widened and reconstructed in recent years, mostly without any kind of assessment as to the impact of these development projects upon the heritage resources. Such projects have unfortunately been responsible for damaging or destroying thousands of heritage features, such as traditional buildings from the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, caves, winepresses, water cisterns, and watchtowers from various periods. Furthermore, the laying of water pipelines in the historic centers of many population centers (involving the cutting of trenches from a depth of 30cm to 1.6m and a width of 80cm, on average) has had a similarly severe impact on still more cultural deposits, all because those undertaking such projects have operated without supervision from DACH or some other related institution during their work.

From my perspective, such development within the historic cores of the cities and villages is a necessary activity, in order to maintain these areas as living communities and perhaps even showcase them as examples of a successful wedding of the past with the present. However, all development projects in such areas should have to satisfy detailed criteria in order to ensure the retention and functionality of the existing traditional buildings of historic and aesthetic value, as well as to preserve the overall historic character of the area.

#### **4. Poor law enforcement**

In order to protect Palestine's cultural heritage material and to regulate antiquities trafficking, the Ottoman Empire implemented the country's first antiquities law in 1874. Ten years later, the Empire imposed a new law which now considered Palestine's heritage resources as part of its own — Ottoman-Turkish — national patrimony. It also sought to regulate archaeological fieldwork by requiring those wishing to undertake projects to apply for excavation permits. Further, under this law all objects unearthed in archaeological expeditions became the property of the Empire and were to be hosted in the National Museum located in Constantinople, at least until the final disposition of the finds. In order to protect these national properties from loss and dispersion, Chapter I, Article 8 of this law prohibited the exporting of archaeological objects unless the person in charge obtained permission from the National Museum. By the end of World War I, Palestine had come under British control, and in order to manage and safeguard the heritage of the country, the British colonizers, in their turn, established in June 1920 the first Palestinian Department of Archaeology (Antiquities). In response to an increasing demand for exploration of "biblical" archaeological sites, and the strong desire on the part of Westerners to possess archaeological artifacts from the Holy Land, the High Commissioner for Palestine in 1929 enacted Antiquities Ordinance No. 51. It is noteworthy that this law was considered so well crafted that it has provided the basis for all subsequent antiquities laws in Palestine, Jordan and Israel. Immediately after the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, the West Bank came under the guardianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan while the Gaza Strip was administrated by Egypt, and the Antiquities Ordinance of 1929 remained in effect in both places. Then in 1966 the Temporary Antiquities Law No. 51 of 1966 was enacted by the Kingdom of Jordan and imposed on the West Bank. This law declared that antiquities are considered the national property of the Kingdom and also addressed and attempted to reduce the problem of trafficking in archaeological objects. Beginning with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, the Israeli military authorities have dictated a series of Military Orders concerning antiquities, in effect giving themselves, as occupying authority, absolute control over all heritage resources and discovered archaeological objects. Furthermore, the Israeli Antiquities Law, enacted in 1978, allows for a licensed, commercial trade in antiquities (Kersel, 2008: 24-30; Abu el-Haijah, 2008: 159-167).

Since the establishment of the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in 1994, the Ministry, in cooperation with governmental and non-governmental institutions, academics and intellectuals, has drafted its own version of a national antiquities law. However, this draft has never been enacted as law, and therefore the Jordanian Antiquities Law of 1966 is still applicable in the Palestinian Territories today. The proposed legislation stems from a World Bank-sponsored project — funded in 2002 by a grant of US\$220,000 — specifically for the drafting of a Palestinian "Cultural and Natural Heritage Law", which the Institute of Law of Birzeit University was called on to prepare (Taha, 2008). The fifth draft of this law was discussed in 2005; however it has remained unlegislated until today. During the course of the interviews for the present research, several Palestinian archaeologists expressed dissatisfaction with the final draft of this law because they feel it gives precedence to the country's natural heritage at the expense of the cultural heritage, includes some contradictory information, and would legalize the trade in antiquities.

There have been a number of challenges involved in trying to implement even the Jordanian antiquities law of 1966 in the Palestinian Territories. For example, employees of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities are convinced that this law is out-of-date and does not adequate-

ly protect components of cultural and natural heritage. Another enforcement issue has to do with the many obstacles and hindrances imposed by the Israeli military forces on employees of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the police anti-theft unit. In particular, the staff responsible for pursuing antiquities looters and dealers in most of Area B and all of Area C are unable to perform their duties without first setting up full coordination with the Israelis through special liaison offices, and (besides being time-consuming) this rarely happens because the Israelis are not helpful in this regard. Other problem areas include: the dangerous nature of some of the illegal diggers and dealers, creating the possibility of serious physical harm in their apprehension; the periodic breakdown of the judicial apparatus, sometimes for long periods of time due to the failure of the Palestinian Authority to pay the salaries of its employees; the inadequacy of existing official tools and enforcement units for implementing the resolutions of the court; the PNA's inability to protect the lives of the detainees in its prisons, due to repeated Israeli military incursions; and inadequate resources being focused on the individuals and entities charged with protecting heritage resources, e.g. the lack of required awareness workshops for them and a failure generally to provide the necessary equipment and other means required for proper enforcement.

### **The Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities**

Under the provisions of the Oslo I Accord, and as called for by the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements for Palestinians, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities was established in August 1994. Palestinians regarded the establishment of this Ministry as a distinguished event in terms of society's responsibility to safeguard and promote their collective national legacy. Especially, it made possible the exploration of the long, rich history of their territories, drawing particularly on primary source material and free from the influence of a biblical ideology or paradigm. With the establishment of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Israeli Staff Officer for Archaeology (SOFA) handed over to the Palestinian Ministry the offices of the archaeology departments, along with their Arab employees — without, however, repatriating a single artifact or the documentation related to any Israeli excavation. Hamdan Taha (2005: 63-67; and personal communication with Taha, the director of DACH, October 2009) states that the initial start-up of the Ministry was extremely complicated, as it did not possess a sufficient annual budget, well-qualified personnel, or suitable space for its officials. It also lacked the necessary equipment for both its offices and fieldwork projects, any sort of database of the heritage resources throughout the country, and an adequate library. In this atmosphere, it was extremely urgent to build a solid foundation for the newborn Ministry, but the immediate stakeholders in this responsibility were few in number and most were newly-appointed to the Ministry. At the time of its establishment, the Ministry consisted of two main bodies: the Department of Antiquities and the Department of Tourism. Then, following an understanding between the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Ministry of Culture reached in 2002, the Department of Antiquities was restructured and renamed the "Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage". Finally, in 2005 yet another new structural plan for the Ministry was created under which its two main bodies were designated as the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (DACH) and the Department of Tourism, and its various support units were reorganized. Under the current structural plan (October 2009), the DACH consists of seven units: Excavations and Surveys; Inspections and Licensing; National Register; Conservation and Restoration; Management of Archaeological Sites; Museums; and Laboratories. The Department of Tourism is made up of three units: Licensing the Tourism Professions; Tourism Marketing and Information; and Tourism Services.

In the author's interview with DACH Director Hamdan Taha conducted in October 2009, Taha gave the impression of being extremely proud of his department, stating that:

... the very beginning of the Department of Antiquities (now the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage) was extremely hard and complicated. Before long, however, we found the right way to build up the department and we began with intense interest to carry out our responsibilities to safeguard and promote Palestinian cultural heritage, as well as to find our proper place within the world community of cultural heritage. The achievements are numerous and reach in several directions, such as conducting excavations, preserving and monitoring cultural heritage resources, and licensing new construction. The employees of the DACH carried out more than 600 Salvage excavations throughout the PNT at the sites of proposed construction projects, both private and public, from August 1994 to October 2009. Among these were the salvage excavations in Bethlehem, Nablus, Artas, Wadi Bela'meh, A'ttara, Asira es-Shamalieh, Beitunya, Ta'annek, Bani Na'im, Haram er-Rama, Samoua'Rammun, Qabatiyah, Jabalia, Nuseirat, Balakhiyah, Bir el-Hammam, Tawaheen es-Sukkar, Tell Jenin, Tell um A'mer, Khirbet Deir Ghannam, Khirbet el-Burj, and Khirbet Beit Bassa. Furthermore, the DACH itself, in association with five foreign academic institutions, has carried out sixteen joint excavation seasons at Khirbet Bela'meh, Tell es-Sultan, Tell el-A'jjul, Tell es-Sakan and Tell el-Mafjar. Beyond this archaeological fieldwork, DACH experts have carried out several preservation, conservation and rehabilitation projects funded by various foreign governments and non-profit organizations. Through these projects, some one hundred endangered archaeological and historical sites and features distributed all over the Palestinian Territories were cleaned of solid waste, documented and consolidated. Dozens of churches, mosques and shrines have been restored, including the churches of el-Birah, Sebastyah, Burqin and Abud, the mosques of Burham, Birzeit and es-Sabeen, the Omari mosque in the town of Dura, and the shrine of en-Nubani and el-Qatrawani. Several traditional buildings with unique aesthetic and historical values have also been restored and rehabilitated, such as the Khan in el-Bireh, ez-Zarru villa in Ramallah, a huge building in Deir Istyia village, a vernacular building in Artas village, a Mamluk bath in Hebron, two palaces in Arraba village, the Barqawi Castle in Shufa village, as well as dozens of historic buildings and traditional pathways in Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala. However, the two major rehabilitation projects of DACH were the water tunnel of Khirbet Belameh and our work at Hisham Palace.

On the other hand, Mr. Marwan Tubasi, undersecretary of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, stated in the interview conducted with him in November 2009 that:

... in spite of the tremendous achievements of the Ministry, we are convinced that we have not fulfilled our potential yet, due to numerous internal and external obstacles which include an insufficient annual budget for the Ministry, a lack of space and equipment, an insuf-

ficient number of well-trained, qualified personnel staffing our units, and the Israeli military occupational power, which continues not only to impede our employees from access to heritage resources but also dissuades tourists from visiting the PNT. Despite the rich heritage to be found within the PNT and our exhaustive, sacrificial efforts in marketing tourism here — tourism is to Palestine what oil is to the Gulf States — the occupying power restrains us from investing in this vital sector, among other things by imposing restrictions on foreign tourists which hinder their access to the PNT on the pretext that this area is not safe.

Six ministers have been appointed to head this Ministry over its relatively short history, however none of them was an archaeologist: Mr. Ilias Feraj, Mr. Metri Abu A'atta (lawyer), Dr. Nabeel Qasis (physicist), Mr. Ziad Bandaq (architect), Mr. Juda Murkus (architect), and Dr. Kholoud Du'abis (architect). The proposed organizational structure of the Ministry includes 560 posts, while the actual number of staff as of October 2009 was 312, and of these at least 60% had the aspect of political appointments or hirings, without due consideration of the persons' knowledge or competence. An analysis of the Ministry's employee database indicates the following distribution of Ministry staff (by section, location, sex, age and education) as of October 29th, 2009:

- a. The total number of employees of the Ministry is 312 persons, of which 207 are located in the West Bank and the rest in the Gaza Strip.
- b. The number of employees working in the DACH is 123, those attached to the ST number 92, and the number comprising the support units of the Minister and Deputy is 97.
- c. The employees' gender breaks down as follows: 226 male, 86 female.
- d. The total number of Ministry employees holding the position of director or chairman of a unit is 79 persons, which accounts for 25% of the Ministry's total personnel.
- e. The educational level of the employees is relatively low: 101 have completed elementary or secondary school; 45 have graduated from archaeology departments; 92 have graduated from various humanities studies such as history, geography, linguistics, law, international relations or political science; 17 have graduated from engineering faculties; 24 have graduated from business and economic programs; 25 have graduated from tourism and hotel management programs; and 8 have graduated from information technology programs.
- f. The breakdown of Ministry employees according to the degree they possess is as follows: elementary or secondary school, 32.72%; professional diploma, 17%; B.A., 41%; Masters, 8%; and PhD, 1.28%.
- g. The ages of the personnel break down as follows: age 20-29: 5; age 30-39: 118; age 40-49: 105; age 50-60: 84.
- h. The Ministry personnel break down according to the date of their employment as follows: employed before the Oslo I Accords: 29; between 1994-1999: 198; between 2000-2005: 67; and between 2006-2009: 18.

Today, the units of both departments of the Ministry are working independently, with a minimal degree of coordination. The personal interviews conducted by the author in October and November 2009 with 32 employees of the Ministry (approximately 10% of its total personnel) found that 26 of the interviewees recommend the complete separation of the two departments of the Ministry into two discreet bodies, with independent administrations. Actually, it seems to me that the motives behind this desire derive mostly from personal interest and only rarely from professional considerations.

### **The archaeology programs at local academic institutions**

The establishment of archaeology programs at Palestinian academic institutions came several decades after the foundation of the biblical archaeology programs at numerous European universities, and about one century after the establishment of a handful of field archaeology schools in Jerusalem. Five Palestinian universities offer, or once offered, undergraduate and graduate programs in archaeology. These institutions are Birzeit University, Al-Quds University, An-Najah National University, Hebron University and the Islamic University of Gaza. While all of these programs focus on Palestinian archaeology, their structure, format and the number of courses offered differ from one institution to another. The required credit hours of these programs range from a maximum of 78 (out of 134 required for BA graduation) to a minimum of 24. The earliest Palestinian archaeology program was founded in 1977 at Birzeit University, and the most recent one was started at Hebron University in 2008. While the Birzeit program was established before 1990 (but still during the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories), the other four archaeology programs were founded after the beginning of the first peace negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis in the early 1990s, or after the establishment of the PNA in 1994. All of these programs were founded on the personal initiatives of local or foreign professors who were dissatisfied with the low priority assigned to archaeological heritage resource preservation within the agendas of the Palestinian leadership, and with the minimal cooperation and coordination that existed between the heritage-related organizations and the chairmen of the already existing archaeology programs (Al-Houdalieh, 2009b: 161-169).

Two of the three core programs have experienced serious crises along the way. In 2003, the administration of Birzeit University closed that school's Institute of Archaeology and annexed its minor degree program to the History Department. However, quite recently (January 2009) a new administration at Birzeit, recognizing that the discipline of archaeology was vital to the Palestinian people, has assigned responsibility for revitalizing the Institute (academic program, library and projects) to a visiting professor from the University of Oxford (Dr. Mahmoud Hawari). In much the same way, the leadership of An-Najah National University made the painful decision in 2005 to freeze their program, while giving the then-enrolled students the possibility of completing their studies. It seems that the root cause of these crises with the programs at the two universities was that they came to be viewed as a financial drain upon the institution, i.e. with their relatively low levels of enrolment, these programs — especially the cost of maintaining them — became hard to justify. Perhaps it goes without saying that the other university archaeology programs will face the same fate as those of Birzeit and An-Najah unless decision-makers at the PNA level, along with the presidents of the universities, address this problem by ensuring employment of more graduates by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Local Government, or in other related governmental institutions.

According to the database of graduates of the archaeology programs of local universities (updated by the author), a significant number of Palestinians have engaged in studies in this discipline over the years (for a comparison study, see Al-Houdalieh, 2009b: 176-177), as can be seen in table 1.

University	B.A. program			Masters or diploma degree	Total
	Single	Major	Minor		
Birzeit		63	51		114
Al-Quds		22	33	52	107
An-Najah	99	30	40		169
Hebron					0
Al-Eslamia			106		106
Total					496

**Table 1:** Distribution of those graduates by institution and major, as of October 2009.

It is noteworthy also that another 45 Palestinian students (not reflected in the above figures) have graduated from archaeology programs at Arab or Western universities abroad. Approximately 88% of the trained archaeologists work in fields *unrelated* to their studies, while the rest are employed within the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the archaeology departments of local universities, private sector entities related to cultural heritage, or the Archaeology Department of the Ministry of Religious Affairs & Endowments. The total number of Palestinian PhD holders (residents of Palestinian National Territories only who possess a Palestinian ID or dual Palestinian and foreign citizenship), is 29. Their fields of study cover the archaeology of prehistory through to the Late Islamic period, history and epigraphy.

The archaeology departments of local academic institutions have carried out or participated in several awareness campaigns among the Palestinian public, in order to demonstrate the socio-economic and political role heritage resources play within Palestinian society, and to encourage local communities to participate effectively in protecting the heritage in their territories. Furthermore, the faculties of these departments have to date conducted 34 excavation seasons at seven different sites, with the aim of training students in the practical techniques of archaeological excavation. Each of these excavation seasons has typically lasted for three weeks and dug a fairly limited number of plots. In general, it seems that the university archaeology departments concentrate their resources on purely academic affairs, focused on a very limited number of students, while ignoring their essential role of protecting and enhancing heritage resources, especially by conducting much-needed multidisciplinary activities for civil society.

### **The heritage-related Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

Currently, there are a significant number of cultural heritage NGOs operating in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, of which the vast majority were established after the signing of the Oslo Accords. The fields of activity of these NGOs are numerous, including protection of historic heritage resources, sports, the visual arts, folk dancing and singing, promotion of needlework and other traditional handicrafts and sponsoring cultural programs

and events. However, very few of them are actually focused on preserving and promoting Palestine's archaeological or historical heritage. The NGOs active in this narrower field and profiled below, are the Riwaq Centre for Architecture Conservation, the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee, the Welfare Association, the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation, the Mosaic Centre of Jericho, the Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange, and the Civil Society of Nablus.

### **1. Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation**

The Riwaq Centre was established in 1991 by Dr. Suad el-A'mri, who later joined forces with Dr. Nazmi el-Jua'beh, and has its headquarters in the Ramallah - el-Birah twin city. The three main objectives of Riwaq are firstly to raise public awareness among the local people of the importance and value of their cultural heritage for Palestinian identity, secondly to protect, preserve and rehabilitate a large number of traditional buildings that have been identified as having the greatest historic and aesthetic value, and thirdly to conduct research projects to document these traditional buildings. Riwaq consists of five units: Architectural Renovation & Conservation, Research and Publication, National Register, Community Outreach, and Planning and Urban Development. The Architectural Renovation & Conservation Unit is considered the backbone of this organization, having renovated more than 80 historic buildings located in more than 70 communities over the past 19 years. These have included Khirbet Qais Guest house in Salfit district, the Young Scientist Club Computer Centre in el-Birah, the Council Centre in Beit Ijza village, the Child Centre in Deir Istia village, the Municipal Library in Taybeh village, the Women's Charitable Centre in Beitunia town, the old Ottoman Courthouse building in Ramallah, the Youth Cultural Centre in Beit Rima village, the Children's Library in Bir Zeit village, and el-Khawaja Palace in Ni'lin village. The National Register Unit has carried out a huge project to document the traditional buildings in 16 cities and 406 villages throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Their fieldwork teams have surveyed more than 50,000 historic and traditional buildings, documenting them by means of photos and full descriptions of their type of construction and physical and structural condition. Riwaq published the results of this ambitious project in 2006. Furthermore, the Community Outreach Unit has conducted several campaigns throughout the West Bank to raise awareness among the local public of the importance of cultural heritage. Riwaq has received funding from various governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Ford Foundation, the German Federal Office, Euromed Heritage, the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI), the Italian Development Cooperation, and the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) (Dr. Nazmi el-Jua'beh, pers. comm. November 2009; for more information see De Cesari, 2008: 125-127 and [www.riwaq.org/](http://www.riwaq.org/)).

### **2. The Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC)**

The HRC was established in 1996 with the personal support of Mr. Yasser Arafat, the President of the Palestinian National Authority. The two main objectives of this committee were to preserve and promote traditional buildings in Hebron, and to raise awareness of the importance of architectural and other components of tangible cultural heritage among the population of the district. Despite an extremely complicated living and working environment in Hebron due to the presence of Israeli settlers inside Hebron city, HRC has been successful in rehabilitating more than 850 residential apartments and about 150 commercial shops, and in providing hundreds of Arab families in the historic centre of the city

with essential infrastructure services. HRC has benefited from the financial support of a variety of global organizations and governments, including the Saudi Development Fund, the Arab Economic and Social Development Fund, the Swedish, Irish, Norwegian, Spanish and Canadian governments, as well as the Palestinian Authority (Mr. Eng. Hilmi Maraqa, pers. comm. November 2009; for more information see De Cesari, 2008: 122-123 and [www.hebronrc.org/](http://www.hebronrc.org/)).

### **3. The Welfare Association (WA)**

The WA was founded by a group of Palestinians in Geneva in 1983, and in 1994 it established a new headquarters in Jerusalem. Then due to the severe challenges caused by the construction of the Apartheid wall around Jerusalem, in 2006 the association opened a branch of its headquarters in Ramallah. The five main aims of the WA are to promote sustainable development among the Palestinian people both in Palestine and in Lebanon, to contribute toward preservation of Palestinian cultural heritage, to preserve the living culture of today's Palestinian people, to restore and rehabilitate the most distinguished historic features and sites within the Palestinian Territories, especially in the Old City of Jerusalem, and to promote education and the acquisition of technical skills among Palestinians. The most significant conservation and rehabilitation projects carried out by this association in Jerusalem have included dar al-Aytam al-Islamiyya, al-Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya, al-Aqsa Library and the Islamic Museum, Suq al-Qattanin, al-Madrasa al-Jawhariyya, al-Madrasa al-Jalaqiyya, al-Budeiriyya Library, al-Mawlawiyya, Burj al-Luqluq, and Ribat Ala'addin al-Baseer. The annual budget of WA is met by funding from international agencies, governments and individual contributions, including the World Bank, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the Islamic Development Bank, Sida, UNESCO, the European Union, the Arab Monetary Fund, the Ford Foundation, and the governments of Canada, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, France and Saudi Arabia among others. WA in turn supports several NGOs and community organizations implementing projects and activities in institution-building, human resource development, and cultural heritage conservation and restoration (Mr. Samer Rantisi, pers. comm. November 2009; see also [www.welfare-association.org/](http://www.welfare-association.org/)).

### **4. The Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation (CCHP)**

The CCHP was established in 2001 in Bethlehem as an offshoot of the Bethlehem 2000 project. The two main objectives of the centre are to enhance awareness of the value and importance of cultural heritage among the inhabitants of the area, and to rehabilitate the most valuable historic buildings throughout the Bethlehem district. The centre currently includes three units: Rehabilitation, Public Awareness and Community Development, and Research and Training. The CCHP has already successfully implemented more than 20 rehabilitation projects involving traditional residential structures in Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour. It has also conducted several awareness campaigns with the intention of promoting a sense of shared responsibility for preserving the cultural heritage in the district. The funding sources of this centre consist of several governmental and non-governmental institutions, such as Sida, the German Development Bank, the Consulate General of France in Jerusalem, the British Consulate General, the Ford Foundation, and the French, Italian, Australian, and Portuguese governments (for more information see De Cesari, 2008: 123-125 and [www.cchp.ps/](http://www.cchp.ps/)).

### **5. The Mosaic Centre of Jericho (MCJ)**

The MCJ was established in Jericho in 2002 as an outgrowth of the extensive Hisham Palace restoration project. The three main objectives of this centre are to train a number of Palestinian youth in modern mosaic production, to conserve, restore and rehabilitate ancient mosaic pavements within their original cultural environment, and to raise awareness among Palestinians about the historic and aesthetic value of mosaic art as a distinguished, tangible component of their cultural heritage. After its establishment, the MCJ quickly initiated a three-year training project for a group of students in mosaic production, conservation, preservation and rehabilitation. In conjunction with this, over the past 7 years it has carried out several conservation and rehabilitation projects throughout the West Bank, including work on mosaic pavements in Saint Andrew's Church, the Shahwan Building and A'in Duk Synagogue in Jericho, the Milk Grotto Church in Bethlehem, the Church of Saint George in et-Tayba, Khirbet Bir Zeit, and a range of other rehabilitation projects involving traditional buildings, such as Khan el-Wakala in Nablus, an Ottoman house in Tulkarm, a large house in Nusf Jubayl village, and several more in Sabastia. The centre has also conducted several awareness and training campaigns in different locations throughout the West Bank for various target groups, especially women and children, in order to engage them in protecting their local heritage and provide them with the basic skills of mosaic production. In addition, each year the MCJ conducts in cooperation with the Madaba Mosaic School and the Jordanian and Syrian Departments of Antiquities, a summer training course in mosaic restoration, at venues in Palestine, Jordan and Syria. One of the most impressive products of the MCJ has been their work based on the interior mosaics of Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock, in connection with the observance of "Jerusalem Capital of Arab Culture, 2009". The Centre's team faithfully replicated a number of panels from the famous Islamic shrine's distinguished original decoration, and these were exhibited at various places throughout the Palestinian Territories. The main donors to the centre's projects are the Italian Cooperation, several other Italian associations, the European Union, and the European Commission Technical Assistance Office for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It is also noteworthy that the Centre conducts small projects out of its own budget, i.e. funds realized from its private activities (Osama Hamdan, MCJ Director, pers. comm. October 2009; see also [www.mosaiccentre-jericho.com/](http://www.mosaiccentre-jericho.com/)).

### **6. The Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange (PACE)**

PACE was established in 1997 in Ramallah, with the mission of safeguarding and promoting local cultural heritage, through conservation and restoration projects, education and awareness, research and publication, documentation of oral history, and encouraging traditional handicrafts. PACE has carried out several preservation and conservation projects in the rural environment, in places such as: Sabastia, Tel en-Nasba, el-Jib, Beiteen, Tel et-Tell, Tel Balata, Bir Zeit, Shuqba Cave, Jifna, Beit Rima, A'tara, Deir Ghassana, Habla, and Kufr Ni'ma. PACE has also conducted several training courses aimed at preserving and promoting traditional handicrafts in different villages, and it has carried out many short-term awareness campaigns among school students and local village councils concerning the importance of heritage resources for Palestinian identity. All of the Association's projects have been funded by foreign foundations, including the Friedrich-Nauman Foundation, UNDP, Sida, UNESCO, the Palestine Development Fund, the U.S. Institute of Peace, the French Consulate, the German Development Agency, and the above-mentioned Welfare Association (Adel Yahya, PACE Director, pers. comm. October 2009; see also [www.pace.ps/](http://www.pace.ps/)).

### **7. The Civil Society of Nablus Governorate (CSNG)**

The CSNG was established in 2000 in Nablus city with the mission of reducing the suffering of civilians in the Nablus governorate caused by the actions of the Israeli occupying power. The five main objectives of the society are giving food assistance, providing shelter, offering medical relief services and compensation for families of victims, operating a reconstruction program, and the conservation of the historic city. This NGO was founded as a joint effort of the Municipality of Nablus, the Engineering Department of An-Najah University and several local intellectuals. CSNG has never managed to effectively carry out any rehabilitation projects of its own, however it has supported those undertaken by the engineering unit of the municipality and the conservation and urban planning units of An-Najah National University within Nablus. The committee has conducted or supported several activities aimed at protecting and conserving local heritage resources, including some awareness campaigns for school students, plus support for the conservation and rehabilitation of some historic buildings in the city. Most of the projects and activities of the society have been funded by the Welfare Association along with various Norwegian, Japanese and Dutch agencies (Nasser Arafat, CSNG Director and engineer, pers. comm. November 2009; see also [www.nabluscivilsociety.org/](http://www.nabluscivilsociety.org/)).

An analysis of the objectives, activities and distribution of the seven above-mentioned NGOs indicates the following:

- a. Three of these seven heritage-oriented NGOs (HRC, CCHP and CSNG) are city-based institutions operating at the local or provincial level, while the rest conduct projects across the West Bank.
- b. All of them are focusing on raising the awareness of local people, in both urban and rural environments, of the importance of cultural heritage. To this end, they have all carried out a series of awareness campaigns, but without an acceptable level of coordination between their various efforts.
- c. None of these NGOs has focused on preserving *natural* heritage — landscapes, flora and fauna etc. — even though this constitutes the other, critical half of Palestine's heritage. From my point of view, this negligence is unjustifiable and, in the future, Palestinian natural heritage should gain the attention of these and other NGOs.
- d. The main purpose of all these NGOs has been to preserve and conserve historic features, but mainly from Ottoman period. None of them has ever undertaken to preserve an archaeological site. The one exception was when PACE preserved a water system in al-Jib (Gibeon), which is one small part of a much larger site, however. (The JMC, for its part, works with particular archaeological *features* — mosaics — but not with sites as a whole.)
- e. The focus of four of the organizations — the Riwaq Centre, the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee, the Welfare Association, and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation — is the rehabilitation of traditional buildings. The Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange is oriented toward the preservation and promotion of handicrafts, as well as documenting the oral history of Palestinians. The main purpose of the Mosaic Centre of Jericho is specifically the preservation of ancient

mosaic pavements. Finally, the efforts of Civil Society of Nablus are centered on providing local poor people with medical and alimentary assistance.

- f. All of these NGOs are carrying out projects funded by grants from the international community and supranational development agencies. It thus seems that in the event of the withdrawal of foreign grants, the majority of these NGOs would be closed or forced to drastically scale back the number and size of their activities.
- g. All of these NGOs are working independently of each other. Every NGO has its own agenda and implements its projects without an adequate level of inter-agency coordination, especially in terms of assessing priorities and ensuring non-duplication of efforts.
- h. Six of these NGOs are headquartered in the central or southern West Bank, and only one in the north (Nablus). The absence of any such organizations in the Gaza Strip, and the very limited number in the northern part of the West Bank, clearly indicates that the distribution of cultural heritage centres and associations in the Palestinian Territories is unbalanced.

## Research Publications

It is enormously difficult to catalogue and assess all of the research publications concerning Palestinian archaeological heritage which have been issued since the signing of Oslo Accord I, a problem due largely to the absence of any database, either formal or informal, concerning the related academic and research projects. This section will therefore focus only on the academic and research publications from projects carried out by *local Palestinians* in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, in the 16 years from 1993 to the present. For purposes of analysis, the publications will be classified into three categories: Masters and PhD theses and dissertations, refereed articles, and books and booklets. The field research, carried out by the author during September and October 2009, indicated that the total number of Masters theses concerning Palestine's archaeological heritage is 56, of which 39 are products of the Institute of Archaeology of Al-Quds University, two are from the Urban Planning Department of al-Najah National University, with the rest written at Arab or Western universities abroad. The total number of PhD dissertations concerning Palestine's archaeological heritage is 13, and all have been written and defended at Arab or Western universities, outside the country. As for the second category, the total number of articles concerning Palestine's archaeological heritage — written by Palestinians of the Palestinian Territories (the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem) and published either as a single author or in collaboration with others in peer-reviewed journals or edited books — is less than 140. Finally, the total number of published books and booklets is about 50. These publications are written in several different languages, including Arabic, English, French, German and Italian.

The volume of research articles produced by professionals in the Palestinian Territories has been, undeniably, relatively low. Interviews with twenty Palestinian archaeologists, conducted by the author during October and November 2009, suggest several reasons for this relative dearth of academic and scientific publication:

- (1) The academic staff of Palestinian universities suffer from several dilemmas, such as lack of available time for research and the scarcity of financial support for research projects. All of the archaeology faculties are overloaded, with each professor teaching no less than eight courses of about 24 credit-hours per year, besides taking part in departmental activities and meetings. Furthermore, local universities in general are suffering from financial crises and thus are seldom able to support research projects, and in this atmosphere many researchers have carried out their projects at their own expense.
- (2) The Israeli occupying power has imposed severe, unjustifiable restrictions on movement within the Palestinian Territories, by installing both permanent and temporary military checkpoints, cutting off many roads with earth-mounds, large stones or other obstacles, and by carrying out military incursions — at will, repeatedly, and unpredictably — into various parts of the Territories. This political crisis has thus caused researchers to waste a lot of time in travel, often on unsafe roads, ultimately hindering their work.
- (3) Palestinians in general are not interested in reading archaeological publications. Interviews carried out by the author from September to November 2009 with 100 persons from Nablus, Ramallah and Jericho districts, none of them graduates of archaeology programs, indicate that 90% of the interviewees have never bought or borrowed an archaeological book or an archaeology-related journal. Further, only 36% of the interviewees stated that they had read one or more short articles in the local newspapers. In this frustrating atmosphere, some archaeologists have been obliged to shift their focus from publication to other pursuits within the archaeological sphere.
- (4) The increase in tuition fees for graduate students at Palestinian universities, especially compared with salary levels in the Palestinian Territories are a further problem. The depressed economic conditions of the Palestinians and the relatively high academic fees may prevent many potential students from enrolling in graduate programs, at both Palestinian universities and abroad, unless they are granted scholarships.
- (5) The extreme lack of professional publications dealing with archaeology in the libraries of Palestinian universities, and the absence of electronic access to such periodicals and journals for the majority of the archaeologists is a serious challenge that prevents or delays these professionals from completing the publication of their own research (see Al-Houdalieh, 2009b: 170-176).

At the same time, very few Palestinian archaeologists have succeeded in attending overseas conferences organized by international committees or universities, whether in Arab nations or other foreign countries, due to the financial difficulties of Palestinians and the restrictions imposed by certain governments on some of the archaeologists. In order to solve this problem, and to give the entire community of Palestinian archaeologists the chance to attend such a conference, present their research, and meet with colleagues from around the world, the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) organized an inter-congress in Ramallah,

between August 8th and 13th 2009, under the title “Overcoming Structural Violence”. More than 55 local participants — archaeologists from various institutions plus students enrolled in the archaeology programs of Palestinian universities — attended this conference, and 23 of these presented papers. Interviews conducted by the author during the conference with the majority of the Palestinian attendees indicate that all of them were very happy to be able to attend and participate in the sessions of the conference, and they were grateful to the organizers of the inter-congress for holding it in Ramallah.

### **The Palestinian Archaeology Association**

This Association was established in 1994 through the personal initiative of several Palestinian archaeologists and registered in the West Bank. The three main aims of this association are to gather Palestinian archaeologists into one official and well-organized national body, to participate effectively in safeguarding Palestine’s cultural heritage, and to encourage the publication of research. The total attendance at its plenary sessions has always been less than 30 persons, while the administrative board consists of seven individuals, a membership that has never changed since its inception. From the association’s establishment until today, the administrative board has held very few meetings and a PAA plenary session has never been open to the general public. During its 15-year history, the Association has published just one booklet, consisting of three articles. Three years ago, the Palestinian Authority contacted all registered non-profit organizations for the purpose of status verification, and the PAA did respond to that inquiry (Dr. Ghassan Muheibish, PAA administrative board member, pers. comm. October 2009). Nevertheless, in interviews conducted by the author in October and November 2009 with Palestinian archaeologists, the members of the Association (10 of the 30 interviewees) indicated that it had essentially ceased to function several years ago. The two main reasons cited for this situation were the absence of a culture of teamwork, leading to a pattern of internal disagreement among local members; and the desire of several archaeologists, mostly recent graduates, to reactivate this body but along different lines.

### **Conclusions**

Since the signing of Oslo Accord I in 1993, laudable efforts have been made by Palestinians to protect, safeguard and conserve Palestine’s cultural heritage, to document its heritage resources and explore the long, rich history of the land from primary sources, and to teach and train Palestinian specialists in the field of archaeology in order to meet the (anticipated) growing need for more professionals in the field. Most of the implemented projects that have aimed at promoting Palestine’s cultural heritage have been funded by grants from a range of foreign governments and organizations. However, despite the strenuous efforts being made, without full coordination between the relevant parties concerned with Palestinian cultural heritage the immediate and future prospects for protecting this are still under real threat. In this atmosphere, most local archaeologists are completely aware of the gravity of the current situation and the inadequacy of efforts to protect archaeological and historic sites and features. In order to enhance the protection of cultural heritage resources, to raise awareness among ordinary Palestinians of the value, importance and socio-economic benefit of preserving these resources, and to remedy the specific risks threatening archaeological heritage throughout the Palestinian Territories, the author offers the following series of recommendations:

### **1. Raising awareness and education**

A commonly recognized problem is the lack of awareness among the Palestinian populace about the importance of their archaeological heritage, both in the everyday life of society and for its future generations. Public and private awareness activities therefore need to be carried out, specifically targeting at least three audiences, namely the leadership of the PNA, the PLO and of all national and Islamic work organizations and movements, school students, including public, private and sectarian institutions, and the rural peasant population, along with their families. The two main desired outcomes of such campaigns would be, first, to firmly establish the issue of archaeological heritage preservation among the constellation of societal and governmental priorities on the national level, and second to engage a wide sector of the local community in effectively supporting and participating in the preservation and safeguarding of heritage resources. Furthermore, it is of great importance to provide elementary and secondary schools with educational programs concerning Palestinian cultural heritage, because today's school students are the leaders of the future.

### **2. Improving oversight**

Since the signing of the second Oslo Accord, responsibility for the protection and rehabilitation of heritage resources within the PNA (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) has resided with DACH. However, DACH is currently faced with an insurmountable obstacle in the presence of the Israeli occupying power, which restricts the movement of DACH employees within their national territories. This challenge is exacerbated by the low priority given to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities compared to other government ministries, limiting its annual budgetary resources and ultimately the number of ministry employees. The annual budget of this ministry in 2009 is about 12 million US dollars, with roughly half of that coming from designated, budget-based projects funded by foreign governments and NGOs. Of the other half, which comes out of PNA funds, approximately 90% is allocated to the employee payroll. To ensure a minimal level of oversight of heritage resources, the Palestinian National Authority should *triple* the Ministry's annual budget within the next five years, in order to attract new, well-qualified team members, to enhance and upgrade the skill levels of Ministry personnel, to improve the working environment, and to supply the Anti-theft Unit with qualified personnel and sufficient equipment. This should go hand-in-hand with more effective enforcement of the prevailing antiquities laws, and with efforts to legislate a new Palestinian cultural and natural heritage law.

### **3. Enhancing coordination of efforts**

The Palestinian cultural heritage landscape is characterized by a lack of meaningful coordination between the parties concerned with these issues, which has led to a wide diversity of policies and to the fragmentation of efforts. The author is convinced that the protection, conservation and promotion of Palestine's cultural heritage should be one of the main priorities of local communities and not limited to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities only. Toward this end, it is proposed to establish a national multidisciplinary steering committee, drawing from several relevant institutions and individuals, including the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Public Works, academic institutions, local NGOs, politicians, heritage professionals, conservators and restorers, planners, developers, lawyers, intellectuals and archaeologists. The main duties of this committee would be

to draw up a comprehensive, strategic national policy for the protection and promotion of Palestine's cultural heritage, to track and follow up on all practical activities related to the fulfilment of that policy, to carry out negotiations with Israeli authorities toward the goal of repatriating all artifacts, along with all documentation related to their excavation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and to review all existing laws, political understandings and agreements dealing with Palestine's cultural heritage.

#### **4. Supporting academic programs in archaeology, conservation and urban planning**

The programs being offered by local academic institutions are a critical asset because they supply the Palestinian Territories with well-qualified and highly skilled specialists. The ideal ways to support these programs are, first to fund the research projects carried out by these schools' students and faculties, and second to ensure meaningful, full-time employment opportunities for the graduates, especially within the relevant governmental agencies and institutions.

#### **5. Enhancing the role of the NGOs**

The Palestinian NGOs dealing with the preservation, conservation and promotion of the cultural heritage have made good progress in these areas and implemented several hundred varied projects and activities. However, most of these NGOs are not subsidized adequately from local sources and therefore have come to depend largely on foreign financial aid. The stakeholders in the relevant governmental institutions, side-by-side with the proposed national multidisciplinary steering committee, should find the necessary resources to ensure the continued, efficient operation of the existing NGOs and their projects, and also to create and support new NGOs in the under-served northern West Bank and Gaza Strip. Moreover, all NGOs should implement their private projects as part of an integrated, well-managed national policy. Finally, in order to assess the projects carried out to date by the existing NGOs, especially their impact on Palestinian society and Palestine's heritage resources, a detailed study should be conducted, taking into account the socio-economic, political, cultural and physical changes that have occurred during the past 16 years.

### **References**

- Abu el-Haija, I** 2008 The Threading Factors of the Archaeological Sites in the West Bank (the Apartheid Wall as Study Case). Unpublished MA Thesis, an-Najah National University, (Arabic).
- Al-Houdalieh, S** 2006. The Destruction of Palestinian Archaeological Heritage: Saffa Village as a Model. *Near Eastern Archaeology* 69(2):102-112.
- Al-Houdalieh, S** 2009a Political Crises and Palestine's Cultural Heritage: A Case Study from the Khirbet el-Lauz Site in Area C. *Journal of Field Archaeology* 34(3):337-350, doi:10.1007/s11759-009-9097-9.
- Al-Houdalieh, S** 2009b Archaeology Programs at the Palestinian Universities: Reality and Challenges. *Archaeologies* 5(1):161-183, doi:10.1007/s11759-009-9097-9.
- Al-Houdalieh, S and R Souders** 2009 Building Destruction: The Consequences of Rising Urbanization on Cultural Heritage in the Ramallah Province. *International Journal of Cultural Property* 16(1):1-24, doi:10.1017/S0940739109090043.

- Amnesty International** 2003 *Israel and the Occupied Territories Surviving under Siege: The Impact of Movement Restrictions on the Right to Work* (MDE 15/001/2003). London.
- De Cesari, C** 2008 *Cultural Heritage Beyond the "State:" Palestinian Heritage Between Nationalism and Trans-nationalism*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Stanford University.
- Greenberg, R** and **A Keinan** 2007 *The Present Past of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Israeli Archaeology in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 1967*. The S. Daniel Abraham Center for International and Regional Studies, Research Papers No. 1. Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv.
- Kersel, M** 2007 *Transcending Borders: Objects on the Move*. *Archaeologies* 3(2):81-98, doi:10.1007/s11759-007-9013-0.
- Kersel, M** 2008 *The Trade in Palestinian Antiquities*. *Jerusalem Quarterly* 33:21-38.
- Taha, H** 2005 *A Decade of Archaeology in Palestine*. In L Serra (ed.) *Tutela, Conservazione E Valorizzazione Del Patrimonio Culturale Della Palestine*, pp. 63-72.
- Taha, H** 2008 *The Antiquities and the Law in Palestine*. Paper presented at the conference on the protection of cultural heritage in local law, 12th February 2008. Al-Quds University.
- Yahya, A** 2008a *Looting and Salvaging, How the Wall, Illegal Digging and the Antiquities Trade are Ravaging Palestinian Cultural Heritage*. *Jerusalem Quarterly* 33:39-55.
- Yahya, A** 2008b *Managing Heritage in a War Zone*. *Archaeologies* 4(3):495-505, doi:10.1007/s11759-008-9087-3.