Design and Contestation in the Jewish Settlement of Hebron, 1967–87

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In June 1967, Israel was drawn into a war with Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The war ended with Israel capturing from Jordan a large territory to the west of the Jordan River, including the eastern half of Jerusalem, which was divided between the two states in 1948. Israeli government officials moved swiftly to annex the Jordanian half of the divided city they claimed as their nation’s capital, but they failed to reach a decision about the administrative fate of the remaining parts of the West Bank. At the time, the West Bank was home to more than half a million Palestinians, and the Israeli government did not want to absorb this population by annexing the territory—nor did it want to give the land up and retreat to the pre-1967 borders.

As the state refused to annex or withdraw, an opening emerged for groups of Israeli civilians who sought to settle in the occupied territories. In the months after the war, these groups began advocating for settlement plans. They organized protests and circulated petitions, demanding that the state allow them to move to Palestinian towns and other sites across the West Bank. Within a couple of years, their activism paid off when the government commissioned a team of architects to design a Jewish settlement near the Palestinian town of Hebron, home to the reputed burial place of the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah.

The ensuing encounter between the architects and the settlers was vexed. From the beginning, the architects, who had been appointed through the Ministry of Housing, were opposed to the idea of building the settlement. They argued that it would interfere with the natural development of the town, which then housed some 39,000 Palestinians, and that it would cause clashes between Jewish settlers and Hebron’s predominantly Muslim inhabitants. Once planning got under way, the architects found the settlers difficult to work with. The architects were accustomed to having unquestioned control over the design of buildings in their country. In prior work for the Ministry of Housing they typically produced standardized plans for uniform housing blocks that were indifferent to individual preferences. The settlers, however, refused to be treated as anonymous users, and they were exceptionally assertive and well organized in their efforts to gain the kind of housing they wanted. Over the course of design and construction, then, the settlers clashed not only with Palestinians but also with the government’s architects.

The story of the settlement of Hebron is not just one of bitter confrontation, however. Although settlers quarreled with some of the government’s architects and planners, they formed unexpected alliances with others, members of a new generation who, as architectural historian Alona Nitzan-Shiftan has shown, were keen on challenging the high modernist ethos that had dominated Israeli architectural practice since the 1930s. To do this, these predominantly Tel Aviv-based architects often drew on Palestinian vernacular architecture. Partnering with settlers provided these architects opportunities to work in Hebron, where such architecture was abundant. The settlers, for their part, were eager to live in Palestinian-inspired housing compounds, which they saw as comparable to those of ancient Israel—a political entity they sought to re-create. For a short while, then, settlers and architects shared an aesthetic vision and collaborated on the design of settlement housing. But once the settlers...
took up residence in their Palestinian-inspired quarters, they began battling with their Palestinian neighbors; in the process, they added new political meanings to their dwellings that the architects had not considered.\(^8\)

In this article I explore how the settlers of Hebron both clashed and collaborated with Israeli architects over the two decades between 1967 and 1987. I first trace the emergence of the various groups that advocated for settling Jews in Hebron and their initial settlement attempts. I then focus on two housing projects that the settlers negotiated: Kiryat Arba, built right next to Hebron in 1971, and the Avraham Avinu Quarter, constructed in the heart of the city in the mid-1980s. I conclude with the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising in 1987 and the walling off of the Avraham Avinu Quarter.

In unearthing the architectural history of what is today one of the most contentious settlements in the West Bank, I have two main goals. First, I wish to challenge the received history of settlement design as the outcome of a clear political ideology or military strategy and emphasize instead the uncertainty that characterized the settlement's design.\(^9\) Second, I want to show how the religious settlers of Hebron, often depicted as radical and dangerous in their break with Zionism and secular Israeli culture, fashioned their identities in part by drawing on an architectural culture formulated by avowedly secular designers based in Tel Aviv.\(^10\)

### The Settlers

The Jewish settlement of Hebron grew from a widespread euphoria apparent among Israelis in the weeks following the Six-Day War. During this period, thousands of triumphant Israelis began flocking to Hebron and other Palestinian towns, such as Nablus and Bethlehem, every weekend. In the summer of 1967, newspapers reported that some twenty thousand Israelis visited Hebron in just one weekend.\(^11\) Wandering around the colorful markets near the Tomb of the Patriarchs—an ancient site sacred to both Muslims and Jews—visitors were mesmerized by the city's narrow alleyways, its unique skyline dotted with vaulted domes, and its tall minarets (Figure 1). For some Israelis, these excursions resulted in feelings of spiritual awakening: \"It was as if the stories of the Bible came to life,\" one later recalled.\(^12\) With this came a powerful sense of belonging. As another visitor explained: \"When we first drove to Hebron I had this strong feeling of I remember this landscape from years ago. . . . I was amazed to see how many other Jews felt the same. . . . It was a feeling of returning home, to our childhood landscape.\"\(^13\) Exotic but strangely familiar, Hebron produced strong emotional responses among many Israelis.

The sense of attachment Israelis felt to Hebron and its biblical history was unsurprising. Secular Zionists were eager to find biblical sites in Palestine even in the first decades of the twentieth century. The Bible provided a much-needed collective past for people who had recently come to Israel from many other parts of the world. Later, in order to further national cohesion, David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, advanced in his public rhetoric a biblical imaginary marked by strong attachment to the land of Israel.\(^14\) Ben-Gurion secularized this imagery, using the Bible not as a religious document but as a tool of nation building.\(^15\) It was to be expected, then, that Israelis would feel at home in Hebron, the presumptive burial place of the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs, where King David established his first capital some three millennia earlier.

Following the war, some Israelis began to organize into groups to advocate for concrete settlement plans in Hebron. The most vocal were members of the religious Zionist faction. Until the 1960s, religious Zionists were considered marginal in Israeli society. They abided by a moderate ideology that aimed at mitigating the gap between secular Zionism (which sought to establish the state of Israel through mundane human initiative) and Jewish orthodoxy (which followed traditional customs and saw as flawed any earthly attempt to constitute that state and bring redemption to its people).\(^16\) Religious Zionists embraced Zionism as but one step in a larger, nonearthly path to redemption, insisting that the journey could not be achieved through military force alone.\(^17\) Like followers of traditional orthodoxy, they rejected secular Zionists' biblical-cum-political ideology. They did not rejoice in attempts to consecrate archaeological findings from biblical times, for example. In their minds, such moves were part of a flawed attempt to sanctify an earthly landscape.\(^18\) Religious Zionists' conciliatory approach, however, failed to gain much traction beyond their limited cohort, and they had little influence on Israeli state agencies after independence.\(^19\)

Yet, in the years leading up to the Six-Day War, some religious Zionists began advancing a less conciliatory attitude—one that elevated the settling of the land of Israel to a religious commandment. Central to this ideological transformation was Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, who edited the arguments of his late father, former chief Ashkenazi rabbi of Palestine Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, and converted them into a concrete political program.\(^20\) According to Yehuda Kook, settling the land of Israel was a matter of “divine politics.” It thus took precedence over mortal and moral considerations.\(^21\) By the 1960s, Yehuda Kook had gathered around him a circle of young followers who shared his views.\(^22\) When the Six-Day War broke out, they saw it as a religious moment, their moment. It was God, they believed, who secured Israel's victory in the war, paving the way to redemption.\(^23\) And now it was up to them, the people of Israel, to take the final step on that path by populating the West Bank with Jewish Israelis and rebuilding the ancient kingdom of Judea.\(^24\)
The Movement for the Whole Land of Israel, founded immediately after the war by intellectuals associated with both the Left and the Right, also advocated for mass settlement of the occupied territories. The group’s members believed that settling Jews in the West Bank was a necessary step toward building a strong and durable country. According to the political scientist Ian Lustick, the movement was a manifestation of secular ultranationalist Zionism, though it was less militant than some other, more religious groups. The movement gained the support of notable university professors, artists, writers, military generals, and politicians; its members organized rallies, circulated petitions, and printed a journal featuring essays advocating for settlement plans.

At the same time, the Canaanites, or the “Young Hebrews”—an ideological affiliation popular among leading Israeli artists since the late 1930s—based their settlement advocacy on mythical origins. The Canaanites aimed at reviving a long-forgotten Hebrew nation that, before the rise of Judaism, had stretched across the Levant to encompass multiple ethnic groups. In order to re-create that imagined nation, they argued, the Jewish people must sever themselves from Judaism and return to a more authentic, place-based culture. Some Canaanites believed that settling the West Bank, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Gaza Strip with Jewish Israelis would be an important step in facilitating the formation of a new regional identity, a mixture of Jewish Israeli and Palestinian cultures.

Members of Hebron’s Jewish community joined these disparate groups. A small Jewish community had existed in Hebron at least since medieval times, residing in a gated compound beginning in the sixteenth century. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several families began moving from this compound, which came to be known as the “old Jewish quarter,” into three nearby areas. By the early 1920s, more than four hundred Jews were scattered across these four zones. In 1929, Hebron’s Jewish community suffered great losses during the Arab riots in Palestine, and in 1936, the Jews were permanently expelled from the city. After Israel captured the West Bank in 1967, descendants of Hebron’s Jewish community began claiming rights to properties in the city once owned by their parents and grandparents. They founded the Committee for the Restoration of Hebron and demanded that the Israeli government clear the decimated Jewish cemetery in Hebron, remove new houses and facilities built atop their properties, and reinhabit the area with Jewish Israelis.

For a short while, members of these diverse civilian groups—representing a broad range of conflicting ideologies and visions—joined forces. Together, they met with government officials, toured the old city, and even attempted to rent houses from the native Palestinians. But their attempts were in vain. The Israeli government had no interest in having Jewish Israelis settle in the old city. Officials were not moved by the activists’ religious or artistic sentiments, and they feared that the activists’ plans would provoke the Palestinians and foreclose possible future negotiations between Israel and neighboring Arab countries.
“Jewish Hebron”

In April 1968, after the government repeatedly rejected their requests to settle in Hebron, some settlement activists decided to try an unconventional tactic. Posing as tourists, they rented all seventeen rooms of the Park Hotel, a Palestinian-owned lodging house located in the heart of Hebron, and once installed there, they refused to leave. In a matter of days, they transformed the hotel into an almost fully functioning settlement. They opened a school and yeshiva in the communal spaces, transformed the kitchen into a kosher one, and even provided work for the residents by setting up an assembly line in the staircase where they constructed prefabricated cardboard boxes. The hotel was now their home.

Some hotel residents chose to ignore the recent, predominantly Muslim, history of Hebron. As they walked around the streets surrounding the hotel, they imagined that the city’s massive stone buildings, with their large arches and vaulted domes, had been there since King David’s rule. In other words, they imagined that the architecture of Hebron’s Palestinians was really the architecture of the ancient Israelites. This was a view expressed by both secular and religious activists. Rabbi Shmuel Avidor HaCohen, who visited the town, for example, noted the “view of all the houses” and stated, “The beauty of the city, and the way it sits on the natural topography, can perhaps explain why it was chosen to be the capital city of King David.” In his mind, Hebron remained untouched for three millennia. In order to continue this uninterrupted history, however, the settlers had to find ways to expand their settlements. After all, as one of them commented, “one cannot live for such a long time in a hotel.”

Architect David Cassuto was a recent graduate of Haifa’s Technion—the Israel Institute of Technology. He joined the settlers in the hotel and soon proposed a way of expanding their settlement and making it permanent. An observant Jew, Cassuto believed that Jewish Israelis had the right to settle in the West Bank, especially in Hebron, the town of the patriarchs. In addition, he saw the situation as an opportunity to experiment with a historic urban fabric that fascinated him. Early in his career, he had developed an interest in pilgrimage and heritage sites. In 1968, he published an architectural survey of the Palestinian town of Bethlehem in which he praised its “Eastern atmosphere” and “miraculous alleyways.” Cassuto was thus keen on the possibility of working in Hebron. Why not, he asked, build a Jewish neighborhood in the heart of the old city?

Together with his partner, Israel Levitt, Cassuto quickly drew up plans for the neighborhood he called “Jewish Hebron” or “Upper Hebron,” paying careful attention to the city’s historic fabric (Figure 2). He arranged settlers’ houses there in two sections, and between them he laid out two greenbelts that flanked an area allocated for public buildings. At the outer edge of the neighborhood, he placed an industrial zone. Cassuto thought that individual buildings should replicate those in other neighborhoods in Hebron and follow the mountainous topography of the region.

By the summer of 1968, Cassuto had sent his plan to several government officials. At the same time, some of his fellow settlers shared details of the plan with news reporters. Before long, politicians, such as Minister of Labor Yigal Allon, took interest in the project. To the settlers’ disappointment, however, officials at the Ministry of Housing dismissed...
the plan. Cassuto was not surprised. Considering the dovish views of architects and other officials at the Ministry of Housing, he argued, their opposition was inevitable. And after all, he later reflected, “it was a plan without a father or a mother,” commissioned by no one.45

Nevertheless, the plan had a lasting effect on Hebron. It captured the attention of the public and of several politicians. Upon hearing that the plan had been dismissed by the Ministry of Housing, Minister Allon and a couple of other politicians pressured the government to find an alternative solution, ultimately forcing the ministry to develop a substitute plan for the settlement.46

Reluctant Architects

In September 1968, a special ministers’ committee commissioned a team of architects and planners to design a Jewish neighborhood near the Tomb of the Patriarchs, close by the area where Cassuto had planned his “Jewish Hebron.”47 After a quick study of the surroundings, the team members realized that the site was too small. At best, they reported, it could house 150 to 180 Jewish families, packing them into high-density units with minimal communal amenities.48

The committee then asked another team of architects to “find a site for a settlement, separated . . . [but] at a reasonable distance from the city of Hebron.”49 The team conducted a comprehensive study of Hebron, analyzing social and economic trends common among the Muslim residents of the city, the topographic and climatic conditions of the region, land rights, road systems, building styles, and other urban issues the members deemed important.50 In just a few weeks, the team produced a thirty-six-page report and identified three potential sites for a settlement capable of housing fifty thousand residents: one adjacent to Hebron, the other two at a distance from the old city.51 Building on any of the three sites, the team members warned, would be likely to harm the local Palestinian community to some degree. As they explained in their report’s introduction: “Such a settlement, no matter what, will damage the local fabric: At first, the local economy will be damaged, and then, gradually, a change in the relations between the different local Arab settlements, followed by a change in the [cultural] values of the local residents that will occur.”52 The site closest to Hebron was the least suitable, the architects warned. It would interfere with the existing town’s development, require the confiscation of privately owned Palestinian lands, instigate conflicts with the Islamic religious trust, and result in a “clash of cultures.”53

To the architects’ dismay, this was the site that government officials selected, and where they soon found themselves at work.54 In an attempt to reduce the settlement’s potentially negative effect on the region, the architects tried to integrate it with the old city. If handled correctly, they believed, an integrative design approach might encourage the cultural melding of adjacent sites—one for Jews, the other for Muslims, a pairing they had originally opposed.55 They divided the new Jewish settlement into seven neighborhoods, the first one extending to the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the old city (Figure 3).56 One of the architects, Rita Dunskey-Feuerstein, proposed a grand boulevard that would start at the Tomb of the Patriarchs and proceed northward through the settlement to its northernmost neighborhood, ultimately bringing the two cities together into one. She named it “400 Shekels Boulevard,” for the amount of money that Abraham was asked to pay for the tomb, according to the biblical story.57

When Palestinian officials finally saw the architects’ plans, they were outraged. They found the architects’ suggestions for integrating the new Jewish settlement with Palestinian Hebron offensive, even explosive. Such interventions, they warned, would not only undermine their right to shape their city but also risk inciting the local population. Thus, Israeli officials immediately deleted all elements connecting the two sites and demanded that the new settlement be completely separate from its Palestinian counterpart.58 In what was likely a symbolic gesture aimed at eliminating any association between the two zones, it was decided that the Jewish settlement would be named not Upper Hebron or Jewish Hebron but Kiryat Arba (Town of Four), a name that appears in the Bible as a nickname for Hebron.59 According to biblical archaeologist Benjamin Mazar, the name refers to the four geographic sections that constituted the ancient city. Nevertheless, as Mazar explains, and as the officials must have known, the name Kiryat Arba does not carry the same significance as Hebron: it is not as old a name, and it appears less commonly in Jewish scriptures.60

Over the next few months, architects at the Ministry of Housing drafted new plans for a settlement that was separated—both physically and aesthetically—from Hebron (Figure 4).61 In stark contrast to the vaulted domes and tall minarets of Hebron—a cityscape dear and familiar to the settlers—all 250 units of the settlement’s first neighborhood were organized in repetitive, prefabricated, multistory apartment buildings set amid pedestrian-oriented green spaces (Figures 5, 6, and 7). All buildings were clad with thin stone sheathing, referencing the thick stone walls common to Hebron.62 Other than that, as one of the architects involved in the settlement’s planning concluded, “the design of Kiryat Arba, its shapes and forms, didn’t draw anything from Hebron, not a single element.”63

It was not simply that the architects had ignored the settlers’ aesthetic preferences. In fact, they copied much of the new settlement’s design from an earlier ministry-led project for low-income Palestinian refugees forced from the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967 (Figure 8). The refugees, the ministry explained, “were unable to procure suitable
Figure 3  Plan for a settlement for fifty thousand residents, 24 June 1970; neighborhoods of the Jewish settlement are shaded, and the white dot marks the location of the Tomb of the Patriarchs (5648/11-GL, Israel State Archives).

Figure 4  Aerial view of Kiryat Arba and Hebron, 1984 (photo by Werner Braun, Photo Collection, General Collection, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem).
Figure 5  Aerial view of Kiryat Arba, ca. 1984 (photo by Werner Braun, Photo Collection, General Collection, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem).

Figure 6  Bitush Comorti, site plan of Kiryat Arba’s first neighborhood, ca. 1971 (Amiram Harlap, ed., Israel Builds 1973 [Tel Aviv: Ministry of Housing, 1973], 128).
living quarters through their own endeavors.\textsuperscript{64} To better understand the refugees’ special needs, architects at the ministry had consulted with representatives of the Palestinian community. The resulting units, said a ministry publication, “were planned according to the Arab way of life, i.e. their layout was based on enclosed spaces with a maximum amount of privacy” and minimum open or in-between spaces.\textsuperscript{65} The small and claustrophobic units may have suited the immediate needs of the Palestinian refugees in Wadi el Joz, but the same design was at odds with the needs of the predominantly middle-class Jewish settlers in Kiryat Arba.

The repetitive, multistory apartment blocks of the new settlement were especially inadequate for those religious settlers who had been gaining influence in the months leading up to the project’s construction. Following the initial squatting activity at the Park Hotel, the government moved the settlers to a nearby military base while the construction of housing proceeded.\textsuperscript{66} During their time at the base, Moshe Levinger, former rabbi of Moshav Nehalim and a disciple of Tzvi Yehuda Kook, emerged as the settlers’ secretary. Levinger took special care of his followers’ religious needs. Under his command, for example, the settlers were granted the right to open a yeshiva for thirty students at the military base.\textsuperscript{67} The new apartments, however, could not easily accommodate the large families typical of religious Jews.\textsuperscript{68} They also lacked basic features required for religious practices, such as the double sinks needed for kosher cooking, as well as a third one for hand-washing rituals, and balconies that could serve as sukkahs—temporary outdoor ritual huts—during the holiday of Sukkoth.
Making things worse, the architects had arranged the housing units in ways that rendered the settlement dense and bleak. Without enlarging staircases, they had added a third floor atop all two-story buildings, initially designed to hold four units, so that each now accommodated six units. In the original refugee neighborhood on which Kiryat Arba was based, the buildings were scattered, “so as to create framed views of the natural and built up landscape.”\textsuperscript{60} But in Kiryat Arba, the buildings were attached to one another in ways that blocked the views of the Tomb of the Patriarchs and the old city—views that might have brightened the otherwise dreary neighborhood.

**Rebellious Users**

Trouble began almost immediately after settlers moved into the new neighborhood in 1971. The housing complex, the settlers explained to visiting reporters, was problematic not only because it was removed from the old city but also because the apartments were too small for their needs. Two large families, one with ten members and the other with eleven, found themselves in three-bedroom units.\textsuperscript{70} Further, many of the middle-class settlers found the design of the neighborhood monotonous and inappropriate. As one complained: “Among us are people of means who came here because of our dedication to the idea of renewing the Jewish settlement in the town of the patriarchs. . . . Many [of us] don’t want to live in standardized public housing apartments.”\textsuperscript{71} What may have been accepted by other, more passive or vulnerable ministry clients did not satisfy the residents of Kiryat Arba.

The settlers were equally frustrated with the Ministry of Housing’s management and admissions process. Since all apartments in the settlement were built and owned by the ministry, anyone wanting to rent one—excluding the original squatters from the Park Hotel—had to submit an application to an admissions committee managed by the ministry.\textsuperscript{72} Favoring families with no more than three children, young couples, and individuals with the professional skills required for settlement maintenance, the committee effectively privileged secular Jews over religious ones, undermining the wishes of many settlers who envisioned a pious community.\textsuperscript{73} Settlers also complained about the lack of adequate public buildings, especially those needed for religious practices. Architects had not allocated space for a mikveh—a public bath for Jewish purification rituals—and had designed a 150-seat synagogue, which was too small to allow the entire community to meet simultaneously.\textsuperscript{74} Residents began conducting prayers in informal spaces, such as underground shelters and temporary shacks.\textsuperscript{75} Moreover, because of legal constraints, the settlement’s master plan had never been officially approved, which meant that the architects had to work on just one section of the settlement at a time, with no clear and comprehensive vision for the whole.\textsuperscript{76} Settlers feared this lack of formal approval signaled the government’s disinterest in the project, and that Kiryat Arba might be nothing more than a small-scale experiment.\textsuperscript{77}

Settlement founders even began to wonder if the planners and architects had intentionally sabotaged the settlement. “These are houses built like a fortress by the Ministry of Housing,” one settler wrote across a drawing she made of the apartment buildings. “These are apartments built [in such a way] so no one would live in them.” Above the sketched settlement she drew seven single-story Palestinian houses. Between these houses she wrote: “This is a beautiful valley that separates Hebron, the city of the patriarchs, from the ‘housing solution’ known as ‘Kiryat Arba.’” Above a serrated line marking the skyline of Hebron, she wrote: “This is the air of Hebron, the clearest and purest in the land of Israel. This is the place where Jews are not allowed to walk and breathe freely” (Figure 9).\textsuperscript{78} Similarly, settlement founder Elyakim Haetzni wrote a letter to the daily newspaper Mauer in which he lamented that “Kiryat Arba has no hope” and wondered, “If Kiryat Arba was so unwanted, why did the government decide to build it in the first place?”\textsuperscript{79}

The suspicions of Kiryat Arba’s settlers were not without cause, nor were the conditions that raised them unique. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Ministry of Housing designed numerous similar housing projects, including the neighborhoods of French Hill and Neve Yaacov in East Jerusalem and Sanhedria Murhevet near the pre-1967 border between Israel and Jordan (Figure 10).\textsuperscript{80} Architects working for the ministry rarely gave much consideration to residents’ unique needs—religious or otherwise—before the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{81} This was true even though some architects working for the ministry actively supported the settlement movement. Israel Levitt, involved in planning Kiryat Arba, helped David Cassuto draft the initial plan for “Jewish Hebron”; five years later, he also drew plans for the settlement of Ofra in the northern part of the West Bank.\textsuperscript{82}

Many residents of Kiryat Arba and other settlements, however, were unaware of these factors or indifferent to them. In their minds, the ministry had intentionally mis-treated them. Some religious settlers saw this as related to the largely secular government’s efforts to marginalize religious Zionism.\textsuperscript{83} According to architect Lou Gelehrter, hired by the ministry to oversee the development at Ofra during the 1970s, settlers associated with the national-religious faction were unlike other clients the ministry was accustomed to working with. They saw themselves as national heroes, tasked with extending the nation’s borders, and believed themselves to be more entitled and deserving than others.\textsuperscript{84}

The settlers of Kiryat Arba expressed their feelings of entitlement in petitions sent to architects and government...
Figure 9 Annotated drawing of Kiryat Arba and Hebron by a Kiryat Arba settler, ca. 1979 (12852/12-GL, Israel State Archives).

Figure 10 Site plan of Sanhedria Murhevet (left) and houses in Neve Yaakov (right), ca. early 1970s (Amiram Harlap, ed., Israel Builds 1973 [Tel Aviv: Ministry of Housing, 1973], 139, 145).
officials, in which they requested a number of changes, including the enlargement of residential units, relocation of the synagogue to a more prominent site, and an increase in worship spaces. They also pressed for changes in the composition of the admissions committee and for individuals to be allowed to purchase plots in the old city. They complained about the lack of commercial amenities and asked officials to give private settlers permission to open small stores and restaurants in their residential units. When their requests were denied or went unanswered, some settlers became more aggressive, organizing rallies and petition drives to prohibit ministry employees from entering their settlement. At one point the residents of Kiryat Arba went on strike, shutting down all health, commercial, and educational facilities. They formed an alternative admissions committee, squatted in empty units, and began drafting their own plans for the settlement. They also began enforcing religious laws and blocked the entrance to the settlement on Saturdays, making it a vehicle-free, Shabbat-observing zone.

These efforts were short-lived and failed to yield lasting results. Ministry planners, architects, and officials refused to surrender to the settlers’ demands. As one newspaper story asked, “The funds invested in the neighborhood were state money, so why should a small group of yeshiva students, followers of Rabbi Levinger, be given the right to decide on the nature of the place?” At one point, Prime Minister Golda Meir intervened and expressed unwavering support for the settlement. She told the settlers, and the government, that if he did so, the government would be forced to rebuild it, or at least to confiscate the site. It would be difficult, he believed, for the government to oppose the preservation of one of the city’s holiest Jewish sites. Cassuto was confident that he could determine where the synagogue had been located, and that if he did so, the government would be forced to rebuild it, or at least to confiscate the site. It would be difficult, he believed, for the government to oppose the preservation of one of the city’s holiest Jewish sites. Where resettlement strategies had failed, archaeology and heritage conservancy might yet prevail. Using aerial views from the 1920s and architectural drawings from the 1930s by the architect and archaeologist Jacob Pinkerfield, Cassuto was able to identify the synagogue’s approximate location. Surveying the site, he found an old Hebrew plaque covered with sand and dirt, buried underneath a sheepfold. Soon, he found remnants of a thick stone wall that matched Pinkerfield’s plan drawing. Cassuto was convinced that he had discovered the lost synagogue.

Cassuto’s findings thrilled the residents of Kiryat Arba. One, a recent immigrant from the Soviet Union named Ben Tzion Tavger, demanded that something be done. Against the protests of the Palestinian shepherd who had leased the land, Tavger began conducting unofficial excavations in 1975, going to the site daily to clear layers of dirt and rubble. Police officers repeatedly arrested him for conducting an illegal dig and disturbing neighboring Palestinians. Yet, inspired by his dedication, yeshiva students from Kiryat Arba soon joined him at the site; within a few months, they revealed large portions of the synagogue and the adjacent housing complex that had once accommodated worshippers. With findings in hand, Cassuto approached a special ministers’ committee and demanded the synagogue’s restoration (Figure 11). By 1976, the committee acceded to his request. Jewish settlers had achieved a foothold in the heart of Hebron, “and it was a big victory,” Cassuto later recalled.

Offered the restoration project, Cassuto refused, believing it inappropriate that he accept it. “I didn’t fight this war in order to get a design commission,” he later explained. In his stead, the government commissioned Dan Tanai, an expert
on synagogue design, to oversee the work. To Tanai’s disappointment, however, he had little control over the project. Excavation and construction works were carried out by a group of settlers from Kiryat Arba, who expanded the excavations to nearby plots and dug in areas that Tanai had insisted should remain untouched.¹⁰⁹ He found that there was little he could do on his weekly visits to the site.¹¹⁰

With construction under way in 1977, settlers began conducting religious rituals on the synagogue site. Military officials would sometimes stop them, citing safety concerns, but by 1980, the restoration was completed and settlers took full control of the synagogue (Figure 12).¹¹¹ Praying there daily, they were now an undeniable part of the city’s fabric.

Renewing the Jewish Quarter

After the ascension to power in Israel of the right-wing party Likud in 1977, settlers living near Hebron began relocating to houses in the area surrounding the synagogue.¹¹² They wanted to live in the old city, not just pray there.¹¹³ In March 1980, after an Arab resident of Hebron shot and killed a yeshiva student from Kiryat Arba, Israeli government officials decided to extend the synagogue project and renovate the adjacent housing compound, the Avraham Avinu Quarter, along with several other buildings in the old city.¹¹⁴

Planners and architects at the Ministry of Housing again found themselves drafting plans for the settlers of Hebron. This time, their clients followed the design process carefully. Upon seeing preliminary plans for the Avraham Avinu Quarter, they complained that the proposed buildings looked too modern and were foreign to Hebron’s biblical landscape.¹¹⁵ They demanded that the ministry start over and hire Saadia Mandel, a Tel Aviv–based architect known for his involvement in numerous preservation projects. The settlers had never met Mandel, but because he had worked on projects in old Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Acre, they believed he would be a sympathetic collaborator.¹¹⁶ What most probably did not
know was that Mandel was among the Ministry of Housing’s favored architects, and that he had worked on several of its flagship projects. After some negotiations, therefore, ministry officials readily acceded to the settlers’ demands and commissioned Mandel—along with Erol Packer, a Turkish-born architect and sometime collaborator of Mandel’s—to take over the project.¹¹⁷

Mandel and Packer were keen to work in Hebron. They belonged to a generation of architects who, as Nitzan-Shiftan has observed, sought to supplant the modernism that had dominated Israeli architecture since the first half of the twentieth century. Inspired by criticism of the modern movement, including the post–World War II work of Team 10 and the New Brutalism, these architects argued that modernism had failed to account for the cultural diversity of those who immigrated to Israel after independence. They also argued that the standardized forms of modernist architecture hampered the efforts of immigrants to establish bonds with their new land. Thus, they sought to replace these with a language drawn from local building traditions, which often meant those of the Palestinians. By the 1970s, these architects had gained significant influence over the Israeli architectural scene, and they oversaw many projects incorporating Palestinian building elements, including several in Jerusalem.¹¹⁸ By the early 1980s, related work started to appear in West Bank settlements, including Alfei Menashe and Immanuel (Figure 13). For Mandel and Packer, Hebron was the perfect setting for experimenting with the kind of architecture that fascinated them, providing them with an opportunity, as Packer later described it, to connect to “the spirit of the place.”¹¹⁹

Before they drew any plans, however, Mandel insisted that he and Packer meet with the settlers. “I had to understand these strange people who wanted to live in a place surrounded by hostile Arabs,” he later explained. Despite opposition from the head of the Jerusalem region within the Ministry of Housing, he contacted the settlers’ representatives and scheduled a meeting with them in Hebron’s old city. Sitting with them on a dilapidated rooftop overlooking the city, Mandel asked about their aesthetic preferences and religious needs. “What did you come to do here?,” he asked. “Did you come to live with the Arabs? Next to the Arabs? Instead of the Arabs?”¹²⁰ Mandel and Packer learned that most settlers believed they could live alongside Palestinian residents, buying groceries at the old city’s market, taking their babies to the local clinic, using facilities operated by their Arab neighbors. At the same time, they wanted their privacy, even if that required keeping some distance from the Palestinians.¹²¹

In response, Mandel and Packer developed an introverted scheme, organizing all the housing units in their plans around a couple of patio spaces. They did not suspect that by granting settlers the privacy they wanted, their design would contribute to a more hostile and eventually violent form of segregation. On the contrary, they thought that an enclosed compound fit the urban fabric of Hebron, and that it resonated with the traditional Arab patio house.¹²² Their plans resembled other recent projects designed by their peers for Jerusalem and elsewhere.¹²³ Mandel and Packer used small alleys to connect the compound’s patio spaces to the city. The alleys branched out from the two roads flanking the compound from the north and south. The northern one was the old city’s main thoroughfare, crowded with vendors, kiosks, and shops. The architects imagined that it would link the compound to the Tomb of the Patriarchs and other settler housing projects (Figure 14).¹²⁴ It was obvious, Packer later noted, that he and Mandel would rely on Hebron’s existing infrastructure and roads system.¹²⁵

When considering building materials and aesthetic language, Mandel and Packer faced an obstacle: the head of the Civil Department at the Israeli State Attorney’s Office insisted that they use lightweight, modular, prefabricated housing components. The site, she told them, was divided into small subplots, and, although Jordanian records registered

Figure 13 Yaski-Gil-Sivan Architects, residential units inspired by Palestinian architecture, Immanuel, 1983 (City Planning Division, Immanuel).
some of these as Jewish-owned, it was unclear who owned the remaining ones. Several subplots were named for Muslim families, but government officials had been unable to find the families. Light construction was necessary, the head of the Civil Department explained, because it could be easily moved if any owners were suddenly to appear and demand the removal of anything standing on their property.

Mandel and Packer drew some sketches for prefabricated units, but they soon realized another solution was needed (Figure 15). Such units reiterated the mistakes of Kiryat Arba and were at odds with the architects’ preferences. After seeking the advice of a legal consultant, they converted all subplots whose owners were unknown into patio spaces. By doing so, they removed the danger of future demolition orders and rendered the project part and parcel of Hebron’s urban fabric. The project now followed historical subdivision lines, with an irregular pattern common to other areas of the city (Figure 16). Further blending the settlement into its surroundings, Mandel and Packer employed flat roofs and covered external walls with thin stone veneers (Figures 17 and 18). They designed some units with one room hovering over the inner courtyard to resemble forms that they associated with Arab culture. In other areas, they modeled three-dimensional shapes that echoed traditional domed structures (Figure 19).

In designing residential units, Mandel and Packer paid close attention to future residents’ religious needs. On the advice of settler representatives, who served as project managers and construction workers, they provided each unit with a balcony, a sink outside the washing room for hand-washing rituals, and two sinks in the kitchen for kosher cooking (Figure 20). They also replaced the living rooms of most units with expansive dining spaces that could accommodate large Shabbat dinners. According to Packer, the...
project shared nothing with the standardized housing projects that the Ministry of Housing typically commissioned.131

By the end of 1987, a few families had moved into the complex. At an inauguration ceremony in 1989, a female settler holding two babies, one in each arm, approached Mandel. She reminded him that she had been among those settlers who had met with him before construction began. She admitted that she had been skeptical, never imagining that an architect would listen to the settlers’ requests. But the complex, she said, was exactly what they needed.132

Perhaps it came too late. While construction was under way in 1987, the First Intifada—a Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation—broke out. Clashes between settlers and Palestinians became an everyday occurrence in Hebron.
By the time the Avraham Avinu Quarter was completed, many of the original settlers had left the settlement. Far more radical ones took their places, which led to even greater violence between the two populations.133

To limit interaction between the two sides, authorities asked Mandel and Packer to block some of the alleyways connecting the settler compound to the city at large. Ironically, while their enclosed layout had been intended to blend the project into the city's fabric, it now served the exact opposite purpose: the alleys could be easily blocked to separate the two groups in conflict. Arguably, the compound's introverted layout heightened the settlers' sense of alienation from the Palestinians, paving the way for the site's ultimate fortification, achieved through the sealing off of some of the small gates on the pathways branching out from Avraham Avinu's patio spaces.

The architects initially thought the conflict would be temporary, that things would calm down, and the blocked entryways would be reopened. Packer optimistically called one of these the “Peace Gate.”134 But peace never took hold, and eventually the entire area surrounding Avraham Avinu and the other Jewish compounds was closed to non-Jews.135 Today, there are more than 1,000 soldiers protecting the 800 settlers in Hebron's old town.136 Meanwhile, Kiryat Arba has been struggling with high poverty rates and negative
migration, with more people leaving the settlement than moving into it. With approximately 7,200 settlers—surrounded by hostile Palestinians and removed from Israeli economic centers—it is home to barely 10 percent of the original projected population.¹³⁷

Conclusion

The violent clashes between the settlers and the Palestinians, and the walls and military checkpoints that now dot Hebron, make it hard to evaluate the architecture of Kiryat Arba or Avraham Avinu Quarter. When I interviewed Rita Dunsoky-Feuerstein, one of the architects involved in the design of Kiryat Arba, she did not understand why an architectural historian would want to study the settlement. “This is a project for someone studying politics, not architecture,” she insisted. Architects had nothing to do with the settlement of Hebron.¹³⁸

Dunsoky-Feuerstein is both wrong and right. As I have demonstrated here, architects proposed various plans for the settlement across two decades, and some of these were realized: Cassuto sketched plans for “Jewish Hebron”; architects at the Ministry of Housing designed a settlement separated from the old city; Mandel and Packer envisioned the integration of two urban populations. And yet Dunsoky-Feuerstein is correct in that the architects regularly encountered unexpected obstacles and politically motivated actors who altered and undermined their plans. Those at the Ministry of Housing found themselves negotiating with amateur archaeologists and volunteer architects. Mandel and Packer—and perhaps even Cassuto—saw radicalized settlers undo their visions of urban coexistence. Dunsoky-Feuerstein’s observation, then, does not imply an absence of architects or architecture from Hebron’s settlement story. Rather, it reminds us that the settlement’s design was the product of a single state-led planning authority but of negotiations among officials, architects, and settlers, with the last of these often having the upper hand.

The settlers’ interventions also complicate our oftencelebrated historical narratives of bottom-up design processes. Inspired by Michel de Certeau’s notion of “tactics” and ideas developed by Henri Lefebvre regarding the production of space, recent work in architectural history and urban studies has highlighted how users, through lasting design interventions “from below” or ephemeral everyday practices, coauthor built environments.¹³⁹ These accounts describe how—in places like São Paulo, Los Angeles, and Stockholm—users’ practices represent the fight of subaltern groups for their right to the city, endowing these groups, in turn, with a sense of active citizenship. Common to most such accounts is the understanding that users’ practices make spaces more inclusive. The practices of Hebron’s settlers, who saw themselves as marginalized by Israeli policies, however, promoted spaces of exclusion. The settlers’ perceived right to transform the city—in the face of existing Palestinian built fabric and property rights—implied an autonomous space where basic social contracts between people might be ignored. The case of Hebron reminds us that the user, while intervening from below and actively making a claim to the city, can simultaneously engender spatial domination over others.¹⁴⁰

But Hebron’s settlers did not simply rebel against the authority of architects at the Ministry of Housing or deny the Palestinians’ right to the city. They also forced Israeli architects to face a people they had previously ignored. Although architects of Mandel and Packer’s generation were fascinated with Palestinian architecture, they often turned a blind eye to the Palestinians themselves prior to that time. In Muslim-dominated Hebron, it was hard to ignore Palestinian opposition to the construction of the Avraham Avinu Quarter, especially once Arab people were excluded from it by barbed wire and military checkpoints. It was also difficult to ignore the fact that the elements Israeli architects adopted from Palestinian design helped to block Palestinian people from the settlers’ compound. The project thus surface many of the contradictions that have characterized Israeli architects’ turn to the architecture of Palestinians.

By the 1990s, as Nitzan-Shiftan has shown, Israeli architects had abandoned their interest in Palestinian architecture.¹⁴¹ The settlers of Hebron, it seems, had contributed to yet another turn. This change in aesthetic preferences was the last in a chronicle of unexpected turns, bitter clashes, and surprising alliances that characterized the short architectural history of the Jewish settlement of Hebron.

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Notes

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2. For an excellent architectural account of the unification of Jerusalem, see Amana Nitzan-Shiftan, Seizing Jerusalem: The Architecture of Unilateral Unification (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).


Shadar, believing these would nurture a sense of community. However, according to Talpiot during the 1970s, see Nitzan-Shiftan, *Hakirya hahasidit behatzor haglilit* (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuhad, 1999). In the 1960s, architects at the ministry began experimenting with building clusters, believing these would nurture a sense of community. However, according to Hadas Shadar, these efforts did not accord with residents’ wishes; see Hadas Shadar, “Mekehilat meutelet lemezdiviladim babinui ha’iruni hatziburi,” *Iyunim Betkumim Yisrael* 23 (2013), 204–20. On participatory planning in East Tülpiot during the 1970s, see Nitzan-Shiftan, *Seizing Jerusalem*, 116–23. See also Oryan Shachar, Alona Nitzan-Shiftan, and Rachel Sebba, “Gvulot veptahim shel khusa: Hakiryah haahasidit behatzor haglilit,” in *Tiwur megurim: Adrikhelet ve-hagutah be-yisra’el*, ed. Shelly Cohen and Tulah ‘Amir (Tel Aviv: Hargol–Am Oved, 2007), 65–91.


27. For example, in 1967 the movement circulated a petition signed by poets such as Nathan Alterman, Uri Zvi Greenberg, and Haim Gouri. See Hatenua Lemaan Eretz Yisrael Hashlehem, “Lemaan Eretz Yisrael Haslema,” *Ma‘arav*, 9 Sept. 1967. Equally effective was *Zot Haaretz*, the official biweekly journal of the movement.


30. The compound was then referred to as “the court of the Jews.” Sephardic Jews referred to it as “el Cotizo.” See Gershon Bar-Kochba, “Harova hayehudi ha’atak beHevron bethilat hamme ha’asrim: Mivne, havai, vesuridim,” *Katshiba* 109 (Sept. 1987).

32. According to the geographer Ghazi Falah, in 1834, there were 241 Jews residing in Hebron; in 1881, there were between 1,000 and 1,200; by 1931, their number had dropped to 135. See Ghazi Falah, “Recent Jewish Colonisation in Hebron,” in *Newman, The Impact of Gush Emunim*, 246–48.


34. Some twenty plots of land and twenty-four buildings were registered under the names of exiled Jews in Hebron. Avishar, *Sefer Hermon*, 471; Falah, “Recent Jewish Colonisation in Hebron,” 248.


37. On the different approaches of various groups—including religious Zionists—to monuments and history, see Nitzan-Shiftan, “‘Yesh avanim im lev.’” On religious Zionists’ interest in the Bible, see Aran, “Return to the Scriptures in Modern Israel.” On Palestinians as custodians of a biblical landscape, see Nitzan-Shiftan, *Seizing Jerusalem*, 63–67.


41. On Cassuto’s involvement in the debates surrounding the renovation of the Western Wall plaza, see Nitzan-Shiftan, *Seizing Jerusalem*, 264–71.


43. Cassuto, interview by author; David Cassuto to Yigal Alon (minister of labor), 18 Apr. 1968, 15/Alon/18/4, Yad Ben-Tsin Archive, Ramat Efal.


45. Cassuto, interview by author.

46. Cassuto, interview by author.

47. Government and military officials researched old Jewish properties in other parts of Hebron, along with Palestinian-owned plots near the Tomb of the Patriarchs. See Rural Center in Gush Etzion and Hebron Settlement Ministers Committee, “Merkaz kafri beGush Etzion vehahu-yeshuv beHermon,” 30 Sept. 1968, 7900/26 A, ISA; Binyamin Lubetkin to Aharon Harsina (senior officer, Israel Defense Forces), 11 Oct. 1968, 6610/6-C, ISA.

48. Aharon Harsina to Moshe Dayan (minister of security), 16 Oct. 1968, 6610/6-C, ISA.


50. Shmuel Shaked, former chief architect at the Ministry of Housing, led the team, which included among its members Amos Livnat and Rita Dunsky-Feustein.

51. Shaked and Livnat, “Urban Settlement in Mount Hebron.”

52. Shaked and Livnat, 3.

53. Shaked and Livnat, 33.

54. See Government Decision, “Founding and Administering Kiryat Arba,” 9482/2-GL, ISA.


84. See Elyakim Haetzni to Yehiel Kadishe (secretary to Prime Minister Menachem Begin), “Kiryat Arba,” 6 Sept. 1977, 12852/12-GL, ISA. Attesting to the radicalization of Kiryat Arba was the decision made by Brooklyn-born ultranationalist Rabbi Meir Kahane to open his election campaign center there. See “Mate habhirot shel Harav Kahana yukan beKiryat Arba,” Davar, 11 Feb 1977, 3.

85. Zeral and Eldar, *Lords of the Land,* 28. According to the settlers, in January 1978 there were only 130 empty units. The remaining ones were either occupied or still under construction. See Ronni Shitarzberg (secretary to Prime Minister Menachem Begin), “Kiryat Arba,” 6 Sept. 1977, 5648/11-GL, ISA; Edri Meir to Secretary of the Prime Minister, 24 May 1971, 6722/28-G, ISA. The settlers’ suspicions were bolstered when Minister of Housing Avraham Offer added to the name Kiryat Arba. See Yitzhak Gvirtz to general manager, Judea and Samaria military headquarters, 30 Aug. 1972, 47113/13-GL, ISA.


91. Menachem Begin, 1 Jan. 1978, 12852/12-GL, ISA.

92. Cohen (head of the Hebron team) to Kiryat Arba Religious Committee, 12 July 1972, 8352/6-GL, ISA.

93. See Elyakim Haetzni, Annotated drawing by a Kiryat Arba settler, ca. 1978, 12852/12-GL, ISA.

94. According to Ghazi Falah, two-thirds of the abandoned buildings were demolished by 1967. The remaining ones were leased out. See Ronni Shtarsberg (Kiryat Arba administrator), “Gush Emunim daftar kesher.”

95. See Cassuto, interview by author.

96. According to Ghazi Falah, two-thirds of the abandoned ruins. Houses in the northern edge of the compound and adjacent Arab-owned houses were not demolished. Bar-Kochba, “Harova hayehudi ha-itaikut beHevron,” 46. According to Ghaizi Falah, two-thirds of the abandoned buildings were demolished by 1967. The remaining ones were leased out. See Falah, “Recent Jewish Colonisation in Hebron,” 248.

97. Cassuto, interview by author.

98. Casusto, interview by author.

99. Attesting to the radicalization of Kiryat Arba was the decision made by Brooklyn-born ultranationalist Rabbi Meir Kahane to open his election campaign center there. See “Mate habhirot shel Harav Kahana yukan beKiryat Arba,” Davar, 11 Feb 1977, 3.

100. She is working as a guard in the nearby Jewish cemetery in Hebron where she buried her baby there in 1975. See Auerbach, *Seizing Jerusalem* – 46.

101. The Ofra settlement was founded in 1976 by a group of religious Zionists associated with the organization Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful).


103. Menachem Begin, 1 Jan. 1978, 12852/12-GL, ISA.

104. Lou Gelehrter (architect in charge of landscaping and development at Ofra) interviewed by author, 8 Aug. 2016. The Ofra settlement was founded in 1973 by a group of religious Zionists associated with the organization Gush Emumim (Bloc of the Faithful).

105. Hebron Committee Meeting,” 28 June 1972, 5648/11-GL, ISA; Shmuryahu Cohen (head of the Hebron team) to Kiryat Arba Religious Committee, 12 July 1972, 8352/6-GL, ISA.

112. One settler told Minister of Agriculture Ariel Sharon: “Abraham our father came to Hebron, not to Kiryat Arba. King David came to Hebron, not to Kiryat Arba. So did we [the settlers] come to Hebron, to build it from its ruins, not to live in a fenced ghetto called Kiryat Arba.” Quoted in Aharon Dolev, “Neshot hadasash bematzar,” Maariv, 4 May 1979, 13.


117. For master plans and planning guidelines in Hebron, see Renewing the Jewish Settlement in Hebron (Jerusalem: Ministry of Construction and Housing, 1983), Erol Packer private collection; Saadia Mandel et al., Sikum tikhum bavevun hayehudi beHevron: Hammatzut lehemkeb haatzun (Jerusalem: Ministry of Construction and Housing, Sept. 1984), Erol Packer private collection.

118. In 1946, members of the Jewish community prepared a list of Jewish-owned properties in Hebron and presented it to the Registrar of Lands in Hebron. The registration process, however, was interrupted by the 1948 Arab–Israeli War. See Shaltai Tevet, The Curved Blessing: The Story of Israel’s Occupation of the West Bank (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), 269; Avishar, Sefer Hevron, 510–11.


121. Several municipalities on a scale of 1 to 10, placed Kiryat Arba in the second cluster, the most notorious act of violence was carried out by Baruch Goldstein, a settler from Kiryat Arba, who massacred twenty-nine Muslims in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in 1994.