

THE CAVE OF MACHPELA

ROOTS OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE



From left to right: General Uzi Narkis, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and General Rehavam Ze'evi at the entrance to Ma'arat HaMachpela following the city's liberation during the Six Day War (1967).

Ma'arat HaMachpela (or, "The Ma'ara") rich in 4,000 years of tradition, is a unique site, in fact, one of the most outstanding and important sites in Eretz Yisrael. It possesses world-class importance from many perspectives - spiritual, religious, national, cultural, archeological and historic. In terms of its importance and holiness for the Jewish People, it ranks second after the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Most of mankind views it as very significant as well, as the burial place of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, who were simultaneously the founders of the Jewish People and the heralds of faith in the One G-d.



THRESHOLD TO THE GARDEN OF EDEN

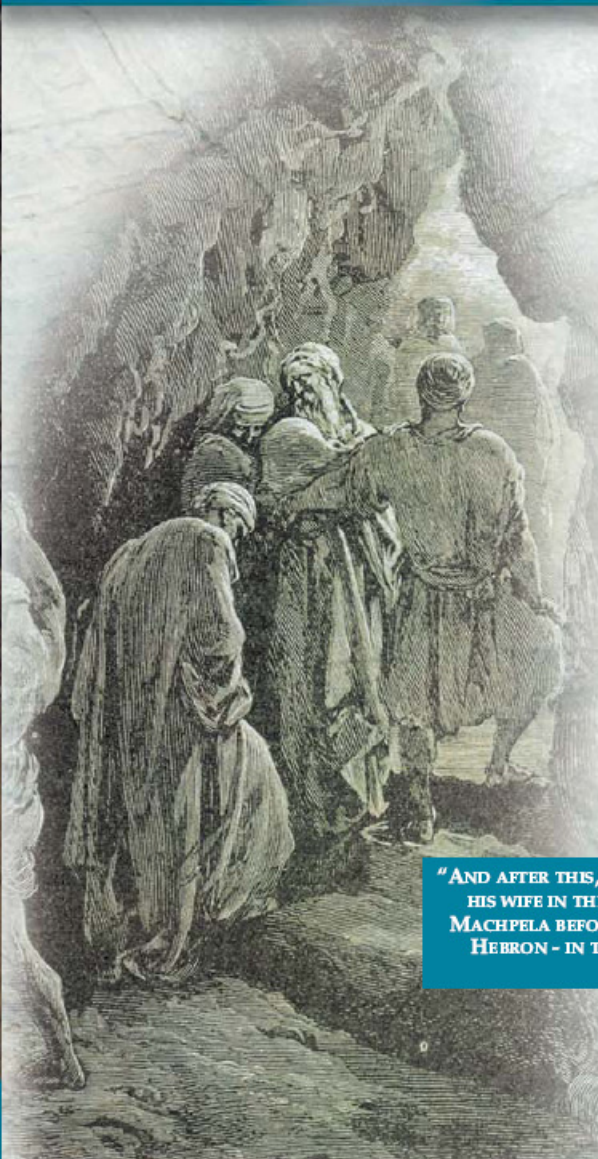
Delving into the Biblical story arouses a question: Why did Abraham insist on purchasing precisely this cave, regarding which nothing had been related previously? The Torah offers no explicit response to this question, but the Midrash answers it in an original manner: According to the main source of Jewish Kabbalistic mysticism, the book of Zohar, the **Cave of Machpela is the threshold to the Garden of Eden, the place where prayers ascend On High, and the place where the souls ascend to the celestial realm.** According to the Midrash, the ancient sacred Jewish legends, it was Adam who discovered the secret of the place. Moreover, it was he who dug out the cave and buried Eve in it. Later on, Adam himself was buried there. That same source relates that Abraham saw "the light of Eden" bursting forth from the cave and therefore prayed there and desired it as a burial site. Yet since he was a mere "stranger and sojourner" (Genesis 23), he was not allowed to purchase land, and his hope was fulfilled only many years later, following Sarah's death.

The cave's specialness and the holiness attributed to it brought about its transformation into a preferred place to pray and worship, to which both Jew and non-Jew would arrive for prayer and communion with G-d, down through the generations.

...**"THE CAVE OF MACHPELA IS ON THE THRESHOLD TO THE GARDEN OF EDEN. WHEN EVE DIED, ADAM CAME TO BURY HER THERE, AND THERE HE SMELLED THE SCENT OF EDEN."**

(Zohar, Bereshit)





The Ma'ara's importance is already very evident in the Torah, where we find full and detailed descriptions of it, unparalleled in regard to other sites. The process of acquiring the Ma'ara is described at picturesque length in Genesis at the start of Parashat Chaye Sarah (Chapter 23). There it is told that following Sarah's death, Abraham approaches "the children of Heth," i.e., the Hittites, seeking a piece of land on which to bury his wife. The Hittites invite Abraham to bury her "in their best burial site" (Genesis 23:6), yet Abraham stands firm in his desire to purchase specifically The Cave of Machpela, and he addresses his request to its owner, Ephron the Hittite. Ephron expresses his willingness to grant the field and the cave within it as a gift, but Abraham, intent on the transaction being complete and unassailable, refuses to accept the land for free and pays its full worth, four hundred pure silver shekels in negotiable currency. (During that period, the coin had not yet been invented. The "shekel" was a small bar of silver weighing approximately eighteen grams, and worth much more than an equal amount of silver today.)

Together with its description of the purchase of the field and the cave, the Torah also provides elaborate details about the site, while emphasizing the ownership, the purchase and the witnesses:

"AND AFTER THIS, ABRAHAM BURIED SARAH HIS WIFE IN THE CAVE OF THE FIELD OF MACHPELA BEFORE MAMRE - THE SAME IS HEBRON - IN THE LAND OF CANAAN"

(Beresheit)

"Ephron's field in Machpela adjoining Mamre thus became Abraham's uncontested property. This included the field, its cave, and every tree within its circumference. It was Abraham's purchase, with all the children of Heth who came

to the city gate as eyewitnesses. Abraham then buried his wife Sarah in the cave of Machpela Field, which adjoins Mamre, also known as Hebron, in the land of Canaan. This is how the field and its cave became the uncontested property of Abraham as a burial site, purchased from the children of Heth." (Genesis 23:17-20)

The field and cave are further described at length, and more details are provided, later in Genesis. At the end of Genesis we have Jacob's final words, his last will and testament to his sons:

"Jacob then gave his sons his final instructions: 'I am going to be gathered unto my people,' he said. 'Bring me to my fathers to be buried in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite. This is the cave in Machpela Field, bordering Mamre, in the land of Canaan. Abraham bought it along with the field from Ephron the Hittite as burial property. This is where Abraham and his wife Sarah are buried; this is where Isaac and his wife Rebecca are buried; and this is where I buried Leah.' The purchase of the field and its cave from the children of Heth is still recognized." (49:29-32).

The elaborate descriptions and the many verses devoted to Ma'arat HaMachpela and to the field surrounding it attest to the enormous importance attributed to it and to its acquisition. In the Midrash as well, Ma'arat HaMachpela is mentioned for all time as the first place purchased in Eretz Yisrael on behalf of the People of Israel, and as one of the three pillars of our acquisition of the Land: "Rav Yudan bar Simon said, 'There are three places the nations cannot say we stole: the Cave of Machpela, the Temple Mount and Joseph's Tomb'" (Bereishit Rabbah 79:7).



THE SITE'S LOCATION AND IDENTITY

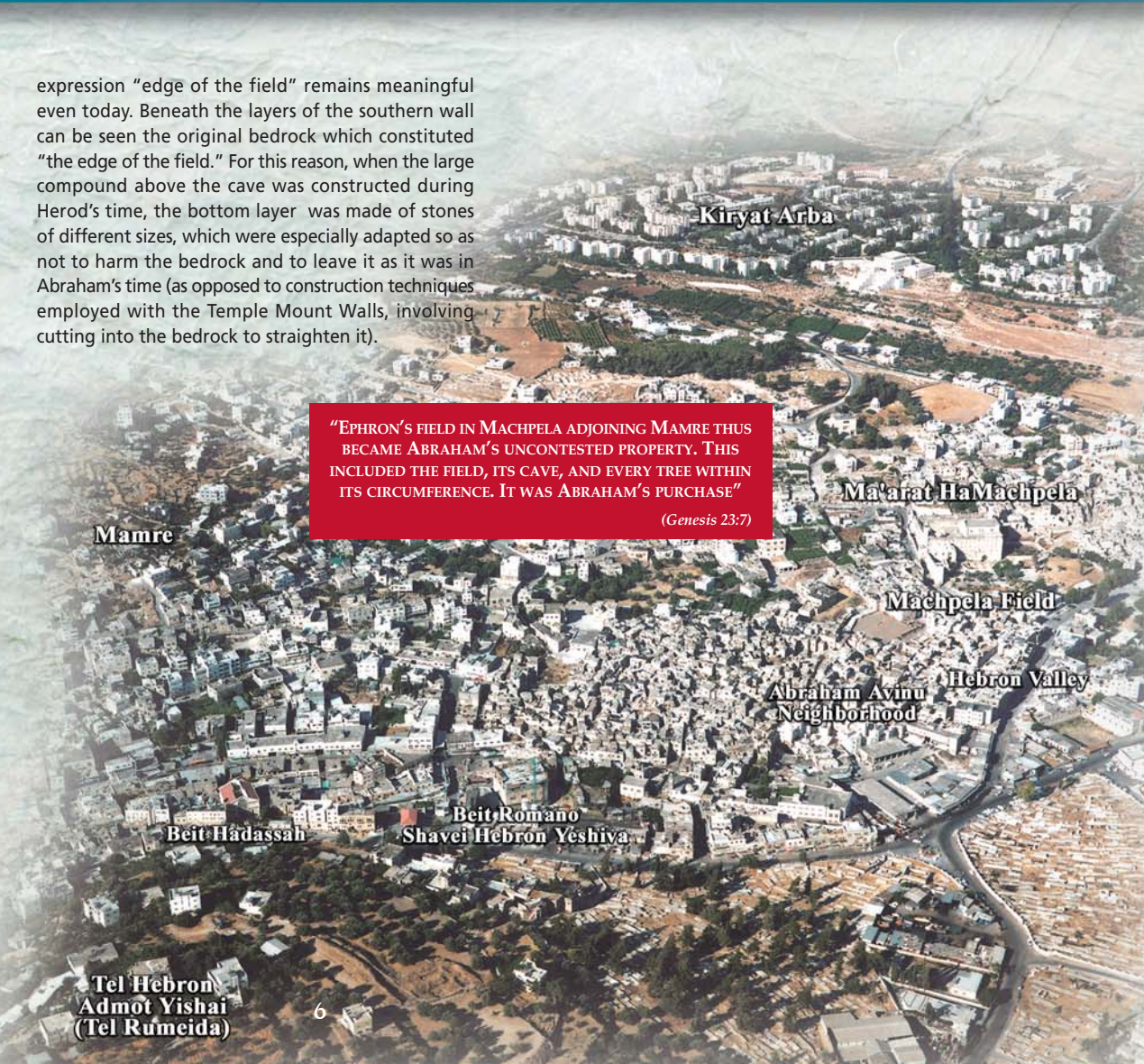
According to every accepted standard of measurement, it can be said that the site's identity as the place where the Patriarchs were buried is almost absolutely certain. It is described in numerous sources and in ancient traditions, and the data fits both the Bible's descriptions, the geographical and topographical data, as well as the archaeological findings. The site's location precisely fits the Torah's descriptions.

In the period under discussion, that of the Patriarchs (which according to conventional archaeological methods of dating, corresponds to the Middle Bronze Period, 3700-3800 years ago), the city of Hebron was located on the ancient hill now called "Tel Hebron," or "Tel Rumeida," where the city's walls from the Patriarchal era have been discovered and excavated. During this period, the valley was unpopulated, and included agricultural fields. **As the Bible tells us, the cave was situated "at the edge of Ephron's field" (Genesis 23:9), on the eastern side of the valley. This "field," is certainly the large square to the south of the edifice (1).**

At the northern edge of the square, at the foot of the wall, archaeological excavations were carried out in 1969-70 by the archaeologist Dr. Zeev Yevin. In those excavations, a pool was discovered from the Roman period, and under it a cave, identified as a **burial cave from the Middle Bronze period** (circa 3700-3800 years ago) **(2)**. This discovery reinforced the view that the field did in fact serve during that period as a burial site. This is hinted at in the Bible by the Hittites having said to Abraham, "Bury your dead in our **best burial site**" (Genesis 23:6).

The words "**adjoining Mamre**" (Genesis 23:17) connotes (in Hebrew) **east of the hill of Mamre**, where Abraham lived. Today, this hill is identified with "Jebel Nimra," which lies northwest of the cave. The

expression "edge of the field" remains meaningful even today. Beneath the layers of the southern wall can be seen the original bedrock which constituted "the edge of the field." For this reason, when the large compound above the cave was constructed during Herod's time, the bottom layer was made of stones of different sizes, which were especially adapted so as not to harm the bedrock and to leave it as it was in Abraham's time (as opposed to construction techniques employed with the Temple Mount Walls, involving cutting into the bedrock to straighten it).



"EPHRON'S FIELD IN MACHPELA ADJOINING MAMRE THUS BECAME ABRAHAM'S UNCONTESTED PROPERTY. THIS INCLUDED THE FIELD, ITS CAVE, AND EVERY TREE WITHIN ITS CIRCUMFERENCE. IT WAS ABRAHAM'S PURCHASE"
(Genesis 23:7)



THE UNDERGROUND CAVE

Without a doubt, the very heart of the site is the mysterious cave, hidden under the gigantic edifice which was constructed during the Second Temple Period.

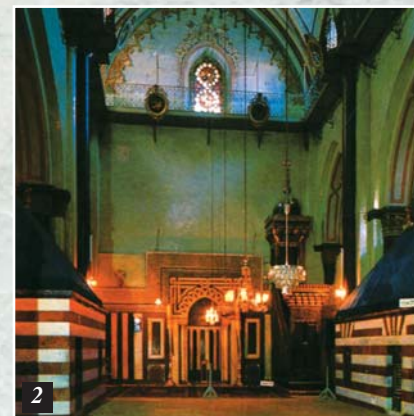
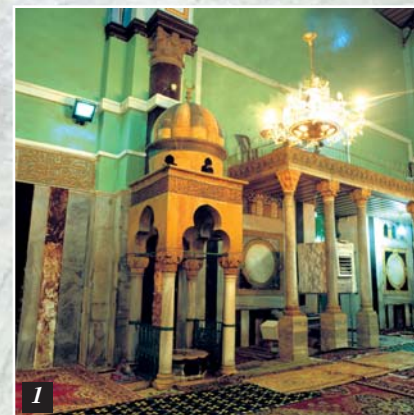
For many years there were rumors that whoever entered this cave would not come out alive. For hundreds of years entering the cave was in the realm of an impossible dream, since the Muslims who conquered the site seven hundred years ago and transformed it into a mosque, forbade Jews and Christians from entering the entire compound, and entirely prevented entrance into the cave itself. The "Lamp Aperture," a round opening in the floor of "Isaac's Hall" (16), is treated as the cave's threshold. This is a narrow opening with a 28 centimeter diameter, crowned with a marble ring and closed off with a copper cover. Above it is a domed canopy. Each morning, the cover is removed

by the Wakf [Moslem Religious Council] guards and oil lamps are lowered into the underground space.

There is a legend about how four hundred years ago the Sultan's sword fell down this aperture. All attempts to extract it failed, and only the "Mekubal" [Rabbinic Mystic] Rabbi Avraham Azulai, author of the book "Chessed LeAvraham," succeeded in returning it, thereby saving the Jews of Hebron. In this last generation the shroud of mystery has been somewhat lifted regarding this underground area.

Left:
"The Lamp Aperture" through which oil lamps are lowered into the underground space each morning. This aperture leads to the cave itself. It is therefore called "The Threshold to the Garden of Eden"

Right:
1. The canopy over "The Lamp Aperture" in the Isaac Hall
2. Central part of the Isaac Hall containing both the "Lamp Aperture" and the "Blocked-off Aperture"



Note: Numbers appearing in the text in red relate to appropriate points in the aerial photo (page 3), the sketch (page 4), or the blueprint (page 22)



THE CAVE'S DISCOVERY IN OUR GENERATION



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2



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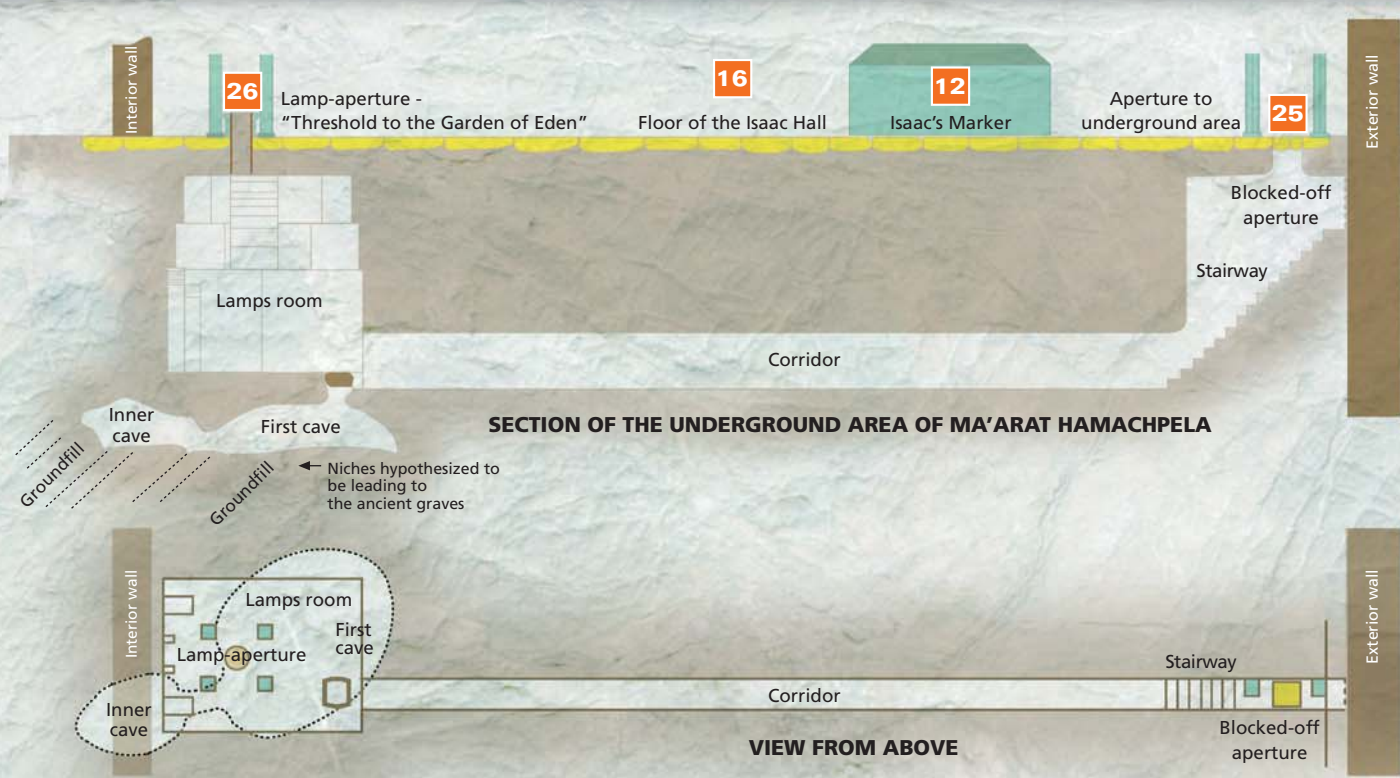


4

In 1968, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan lowered a slender girl named Michal through the "Lamp Aperture." Under the aperture, the girl discovered an underground room containing three monuments. From the room, a dark, narrow tunnel emerged, sixteen meters long. The girl walked the length of the tunnel and came to steps leading upward. She went up the steps but her path was blocked by a boulder held in place by iron nails which precluded its being moved aside (25). The girl returned via the tunnel to the "Lamps room," and from there she was brought back up by rope, after she had examined and photographed the passageway. The girl's description constituted a first step

towards our becoming familiar with the underground area, but did not include discovery of the cave itself. **Only in 1981 did a group of local Jews succeed in entering the cave, a unique and an unforgettable experience for them. This led, for the first time in modern history, to the discovery of the double cave hidden under the enormous edifice. It turned out that there are two floors beneath the area where we pray today. On the upper floor are the "Lamp room" and the corridor leading to it. Under them, on a deeper level still, is the cave.**

1. Twelve-year-old Michal is lowered down to the Cave of HaMachpela
2. The blocked-off aperture beneath the canopy whose top has been removed. Situated by the Eastern Wall of the Isaac Hall
3. The ancient steps leading to the underground tunnel
4. At bottom center: the entrance into the cave
At the top: The Candle Room (view from the tunnel)
5. A view of the cave's interior



Pottery discovered in the Ma'ara

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The cave is double [Hebrew "kefulah," hence "Machpela"]. It is composed of two caves, connected to each other by a narrow passageway. This form of burial is characteristic of the Patriarchal period (the Middle Bronze Age) and fits the Torah description. Today, the caves are packed with earth almost to their full height, covering the ancient graves. On top of this earth, broken bones and pieces of various pottery have been discovered, dating back to the Judean Kings (the "Ancient Israelite Period," about 2,900 years ago).

This discovery proves the existence of the double burial cave which has been there since ancient times, going back to the Patriarchal period. This cave was known to the Jews during that period. Then, bones and earthenware vessels were placed inside there, after the cave had been filled with dirt, (apparently out of respect for the Patriarchs' graves). There are probably additional caves and discoveries hidden at the site, yet at this stage it is impossible to research these things and to discover all of its secrets.



THE EDIFICE OVER THE CAVE

1. Circa 3750 years ago



"The field and the cave within it..."

The cave "at the edge of the field", to the northeast of "Emek Hebron", the Valley of Hebron

The gigantic edifice, which today marks the location of the Patriarchs' burial place, was built during the Second Temple Period (about 2,000 years ago) (4). There is no direct historical evidence regarding the identity of the builder.

Yet, relying on the style of construction which is identical to that of the Temple Mount, and on numerous other historical considerations, it is taken as a given that the builder was Herod, who ruled over Judea under the aegis of the Roman empire in the years 37 BCE. - 4 BCE. Herod was among the greatest builders in the history of Eretz Yisrael. Apparently, the unpopular King Herod, of Edomite convert origins, wished to glorify his own name, to propitiate his Jewish subjects, and to reinforce in their minds his links to the Patriarchs. For these reasons he built the gigantic edifice, **the largest Jewish monument on earth. The edifice is a majestic, superbly built, structure of dolomite. From many perspectives, it is the only one of its kind on earth. It remains and endures, totally intact, continuing its active use even today, after two thousand years, as a spiritual and religious center dedicated to the Patriarchs, their memory and their heritage.** The stones were cut out of hard chalk (Dolomite), hewn and polished with great effort, and fitted into place with great precision. Many of the stones are enormous, five to eight meters in length and weighing dozens of tons. The system by which they were transported and set in place is still not known with certainty.

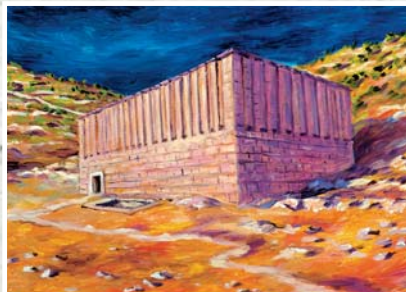
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Drawings: Shmuel Mushnik
The drawings are dedicated to the memory of Yehuda Novoselsky ז"ל

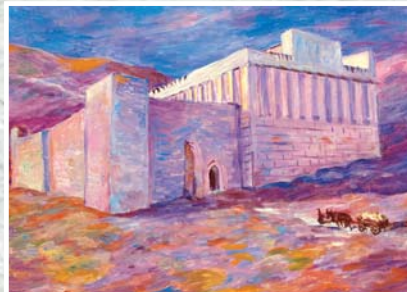


2. Circa 2000 years ago



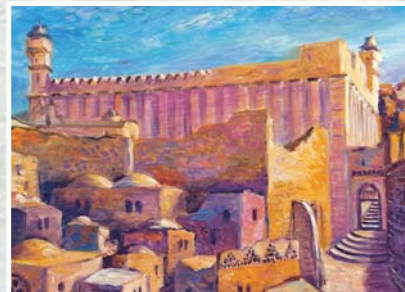
Herodian Period - Second Temple
The edifice over the cave, built in the style of the Temple Mount, has remained intact and in active use for 2000 years

3. Circa 900 years ago



The Crusader Period
A fortress was attached to the edifice over the cave. A church was built within

4. Circa 700 years ago



The Mameluk - Islamic Period
Minarets were added above the wall. A mosque was built inside the edifice. Steps were added on both sides

5. The site today



The crowded constructions surrounding the edifice were removed by the Jordanians.
The Field of Machpela was turned into a Garden

The rock's hardness and the precision employed in the stone cutting have afforded the edifice its longevity and strength. Despite the lack of cement as a bonding agent, the building has been standing for thousands of years, stable and strong, and unharmed. For the most part, even the stones' edges have not been worn away.

The edifice measures sixty-five by thirty-five meters, and the height of the southern wall is approximately twenty meters. The thickness of the walls approaches three meters.

The edifice is built of two floors. Entry to the first floor, containing the cave itself, is not possible today, due to restrictions imposed by the Arabs. In the past that floor apparently had a large entrance gate on the level of the square outside the edifice, at the southwestern side. There, visitors would enter, and they would ascend an interior staircase to the second floor (similar to the Hulda Gate on the Temple Mount). This gate was closed and locked by the Arabs during the tenth century c.e. Afterwards, it was covered over

by a building that was attached to the ancient wall. In order to grant some sort of historic context to this structure, the Arabs mistakenly called it "**Joseph's Tomb**". It can be seen today, attached to the wall, at the side of the large square (5).

The second floor of the edifice is today the main level, serving as the place for visits and assembly. This floor is built in a special style - "**cornrows**" - pillars protruding from the wall, alternating with sunken strips (6).

There is a remarkable similarity between Ma'arat HaMachpela and the Temple Mount. Herod's edifice is a perfect model of the Temple Mount, which was built at the end of Herod's reign. The Temple Mount copies the style of construction of the edifice here, which was a marvel of Jewish architecture. In the past, there were "cornrows" in the walls of the Temple Mount as well, but there the upper portion was destroyed, including those cornrows.

As noted, entrance to the edifice is possible today only to the second floor, by means of two relatively

small entrances. Both were breached in the walls at later dates, one on the north side and one on the south. Both became interior gateways as still later on, new structures were attached to the ancient walls. On the north side is the "**Ja'ulia**" mosque (24), nowadays earmarked for Muslim use. On the south side is the "**Yusufiah**" (7), which today serves for Jewish religious celebrations, Torah study and prayer, as well as providing Jews with entry into the edifice. Here in the Yusufiah one can see a section of original wall.

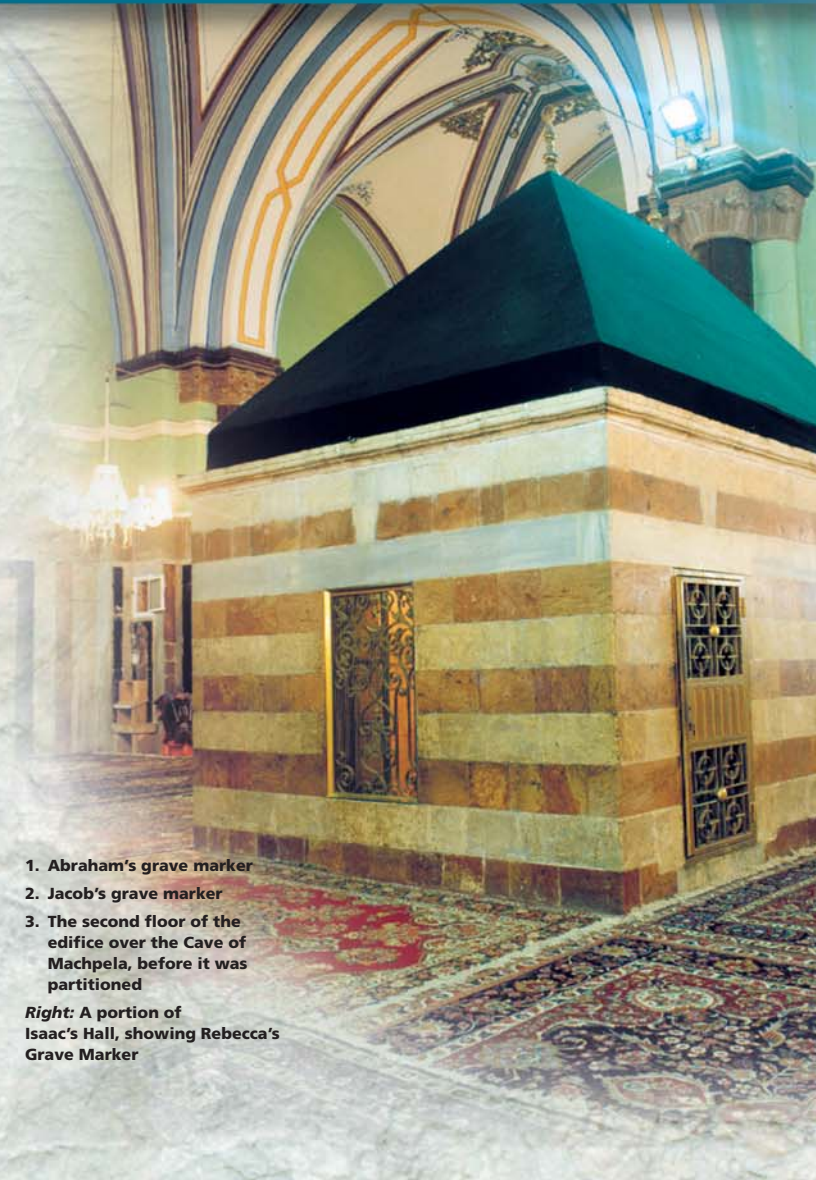
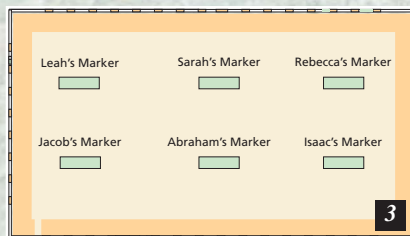
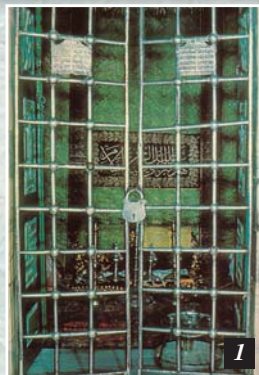
During the Crusader period (twelfth century c.e.), adjacent to the wall on the southern side, a **fortress** was built. Of this fortress, one wall has survived, its western wall, which today can be seen rising above the large square (9), and containing long apertures for shooting. The two **minarets**, which today stand prominently at the western and eastern corners of the edifice, were added by the Mameluks in the fourteenth century (10).



THE MONUMENTS

The second floor of the compound, earmarked for assembly and prayer over the graves of the Patriarchs, was built as a large courtyard, enclosed within a wall, without roof or covering, and without interior division into rooms or halls. In this open compound, six monuments, in three parallel pairs, were laid out symmetrically along the length of the compound. The central monument, lying above the ancient burial cave, was called **"Abraham's grave marker" (11)**. Next to it lies the monument dedicated to Sarah **(11a)**. To the right of Abraham's monument, on the eastern side, stands the monument called **"Isaac's grave marker" (12)**, and next to it is the **monument dedicated to Rebecca (13)**. To the left of Abraham's marker, in the northwest of the compound stands **the monument dedicated to Jacob (14)**, and next to it **the one to Leah (15)**. Obviously, these monuments are not graves, but memorial markers. **The location of the markers, equidistant from one another and from the outer walls, serves to attest to their ancient construction - they were apparently built when the compound itself was built, about two thousand years ago. Their arrangement is significant - Abraham in the center, Isaac to his right and Jacob to his left, with the Matriarchs alongside them.** This ordering is alluded to also in the Jerusalem Talmud (Ta'anit 4:2). Later on, the rooms and halls were built around them, and the markers themselves were covered over by the Arabs with tapestries bearing Arabic inscriptions.

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1. Abraham's grave marker
2. Jacob's grave marker
3. The second floor of the edifice over the Cave of Machpela, before it was partitioned

Right: A portion of Isaac's Hall, showing Rebecca's Grave Marker



THE HALLS

The ancient compound, which was originally large, open and unpartitioned, is today divided up into halls and rooms. The division into halls occurred later, and it is the result of an ongoing historical development.

It stems from the fact that the burial place of the Patriarchs, and especially, that of Abraham, herald of faith, was admired as well by other nations who had received from Judaism the tenets of their own faith. Following the fall of Judea, when foreign nations conquered Eretz Yisrael, they expressed this admiration by building prayer halls adjacent to or within the walls of the compound. The Byzantines, in the fourth century, partitioned the edifice into two parts: above the eastern section they added a roof, and transformed it into a church.

During that time, it became forbidden for Jews to enter that section, hence they prayed in the northwest corner of the compound. There, a small synagogue was built, and it was covered over with a tiled roof. The line connecting that roof and the wall can be seen even today (28). In this area there is a palm tree, in a place identified during that period as "Adam's Grave" (This "identification" is not certain and is only symbolic). After the Muslim Conquest, in the seventh century, the church was transformed into a mosque. During this period as well, Jews continued to pray in the edifice.

Following the Crusader conquest, in the year 1100, the Christians again turned

the mosque into a church. Then once more, the church was turned into a mosque by the Muslim Mameluks, who conquered Eretz Yisrael in the thirteenth century c.e. The structure, which had changed its function numerous times, exists until this day, and it is called **"Isaac's Hall" (16)**. The hall's name stems from **"Isaac's grave marker" (12)** which is found in it (and, obviously, which was there before the hall was built). In addition, the Mameluks built smaller halls over the *grave-markers of Abraham (17) and Sarah (18), and over those of Jacob (19) and Leah (20)*, as well as intermediate halls between them (21) (22).

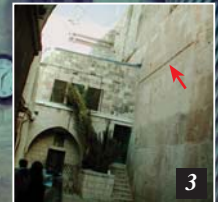
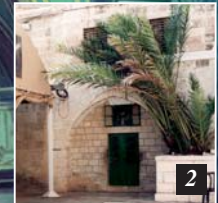
On the outside of the edifice, to the south, the structure called **"Joseph's Tomb"** was attached to the building during the tenth century (5), and on the north side, **the "Ja'uliah Mosque"** was attached during the fourteenth century (24).

With the return of the Jewish People to Ma'arat HaMachpela in 1967, and following ongoing efforts, some of these halls were restored to use as permanent synagogues, in which daily prayers take place. On Sabbaths and holidays, thousands of Jews fill the various halls, and prayers are conducted according to all the various customs and rites. On the intermediate days of Pesach and Succot, tens of thousands of Jews converge upon the Ma'ara and the building is too small to hold all the myriads who arrive.

"WHY IS IT CALLED 'MACHPELA' [MEANING 'DOUBLE']? CONSIDER THIS: THE WHOLE LAND OF ISRAEL WAS DOUBLED UP UNDER THAT CAVE, WHILE THE CAVE ITSELF REACHES STRAIGHT UP TO HEAVEN"
(Zohar Breshit 128:2)

1. Worshippers in Jacob's Hall, by Leah's Marker
2. The Palm Tree - "Adam's Grave" In the Inner Courtyard (see the blueprint on page 22)
3. The connecting line of the roof of the ancient synagogue (the Northwest interior edge of the edifice wall), marked by red arrow

Background: Abraham's Hall, the entrance to the Abraham Grave Marker. The Muslims added Muslim inscriptions around the halls, and they still exist (wide-lens photo)





Prayer in Isaac's Hall
(Wide-lens photo)



PRAYER AT MA'ARAT HAMACHPELA

The virtues and advantages of prayer at Ma'arat HaMachpela, which has drawn so many worshippers to it down through the generations, are greatly stressed in the Midrash, ancient, sacred Jewish legends. The bond between the Patriarchs and prayer is expressed in the prayerbook as well. In the Amidah ("The Eighteen Blessings"), the most central and important prayer, "the blessing of the Patriarchs" comes first:

"MAY THE COVENANT OF OUR FOREFATHERS ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB BE REMEMBERED BEFORE YOU, AND THEIR MERIT, AND THE MERIT OF THE HOLY MATRIARCHS BURIED HERE. MAY IT PROTECT US... SO THAT MY SOUL SHOULD BE WORTHY TO DWELL WITH THEIR SOULS IN EDEN."
(from a prayer for worshippers at Ma'arat HaMachpela)

"Blessed art Thou, O L-rd, our G-d and G-d of our fathers, G-d of Abraham, G-d of Isaac and G-d of Jacob... Blessed art Thou, O L-rd, Shield of Abraham." The

specialness of prayer in the Ma'ara is stressed in the Midrashic tale about Caleb ben Yefuneh, leader of Judea, who prayed at the graves of the Patriarchs, by virtue of which he was saved from the spies' plotting (Numbers 13-14).

According to the Midrash, the patriarchs who were buried in Ma'arat HaMachpela constitute the "chariot" of the Divine Presence. They are not dead, but only "sleeping." The Midrash calls them "the slumberers of Hebron." It is related that they rise to seek mercy for their children throughout the generations. Jews customarily prayed in Ma'arat HaMachpela in every age, even at the most dangerous times.

Rambam (Maimonadies), one of the greatest sages of all times, established a yearly holiday for himself and his sons, the 6th of the month of Cheshvan, commemorating the day he went

up to pray on the Temple Mount, and another holiday on the 9th of Cheshvan, the day he merited to pray at Ma'arat HaMachpela. Likewise, numerous great sages of Israel have noted the powerful experience involved in visiting and praying at this site. For many generations, Jews prayed within the edifice above the cave, even under the Byzantine and ancient Arab regimes. Only in 1267 did the Muslim

Mameluks forbid Jews and Christians to enter the compound. The Jews were forced to stand, humiliated, by the seventh step leading up to the edifice on the eastern side (3). The prohibition existed for seven

hundred years, until 1967, when Hebron and Ma'arat HaMachpela were liberated. The Chief Chaplain of the Israeli army, the late Rabbi Shlomo Goren, was the first Jew to return to the site and to fly the Israeli flag there. Two years later, all the steps along the eastern wall, including "the seventh step", were removed and destroyed, in an act symbolizing the blotting out of the humiliation, and the return of the children to their borders. While the Muslims continued their worship uninterrupted, the Jews had to struggle for their natural religious human rights. Only after numerous efforts and struggles were Jews permitted once more to establish a synagogue at the site, to place an Ark and a Torah Scroll there, and to pray there as in days of old. Still, however, despite the relative progress, numerous restrictions are imposed on Jews at the graves of their ancestors.

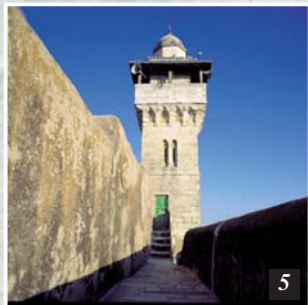
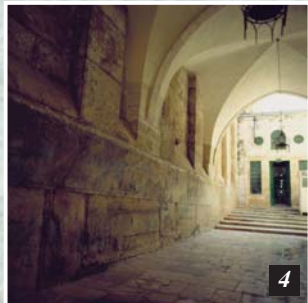
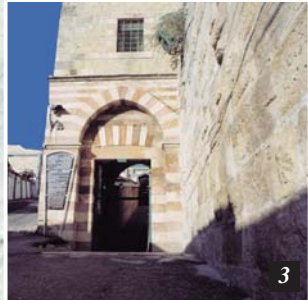
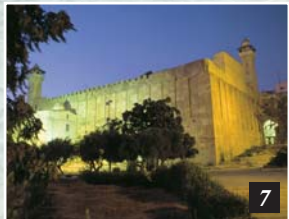


1. The Eastern Entrance in former times
2. Zalmen David Levontine (left), Chairman of the Anglo-Palestine Company Bank, and colleagues by the Eastern Gate (1907). The gate and steps were removed by the Israeli Army in 1968
3. Rabbi Goren waves the Israeli flag at the entrance to the Ma'ara (1967)
4. Jews praying at the seventh step
5. Site of the eastern steps. (The seventh step is marked off by an arrow)

Note: Numbers appearing in the text in red relate to appropriate points in the aerial photo (page 3), the sketch (page 4), or the blueprint (page 22)



PARTITION OF THE EDIFICE



1. Entrance gate to the eastern stairs, as it appeared following the Six Day War. The gate and the stairs were removed a short time afterwards, in 1968.
2. Masses visiting the Ma'ara during holidays and festivals
3. Western Entrance to the Ma'ara. (Isaac's Gate)
4. The Eastern entrance (closed today). Note the huge stone on the left wall. It is 8 meters long
5. Entrance to the eastern minaret. View from atop the northeast corner of the wall
6. Facade of the Crusader Struture
7. Ma'arat HaMachpela after dark

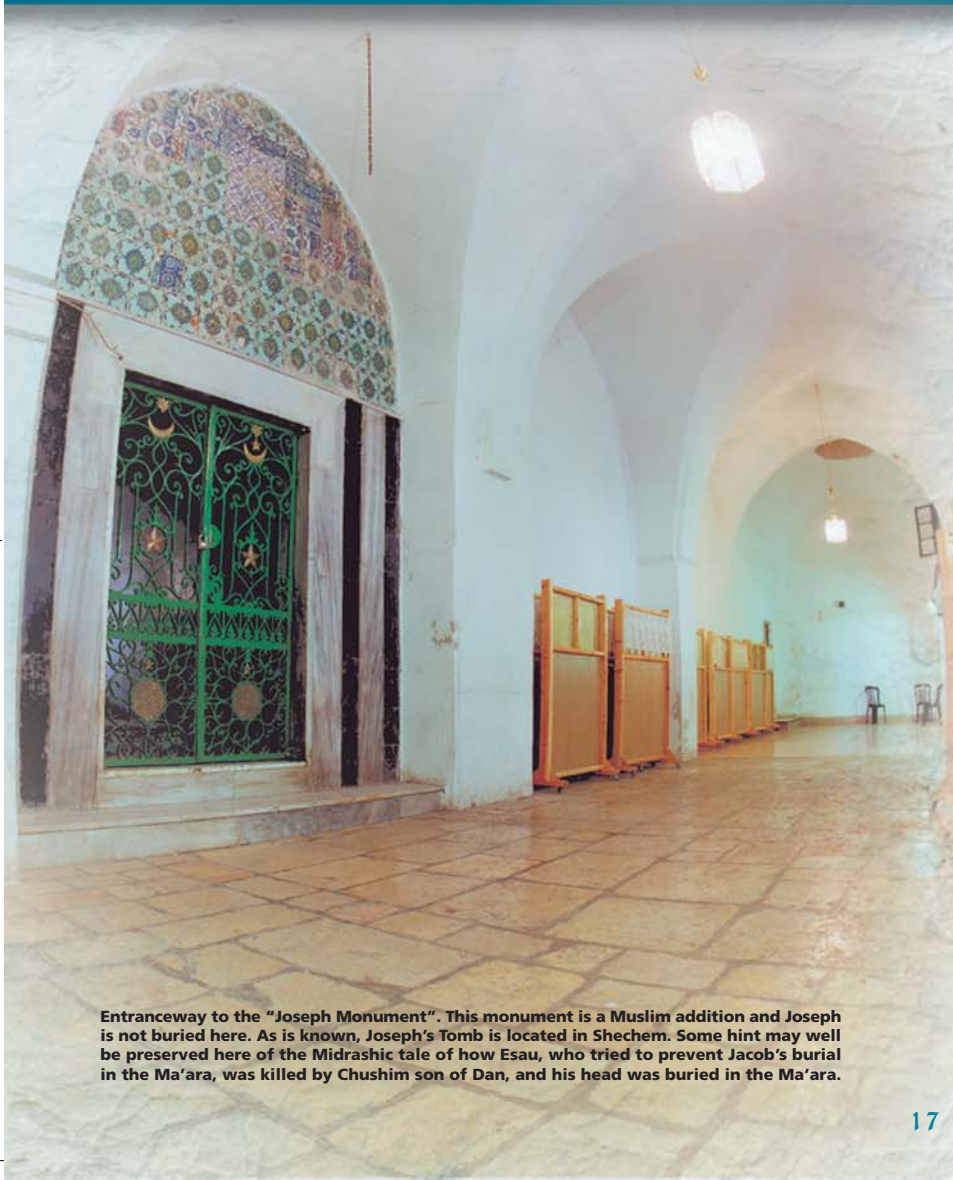
Following the events of Purim 5754, the Government decided in Cheshvan of 5755 (November '94), to partition the edifice over Ma'arat HaMachpela between Jews and Muslims. The partition created severe and conspicuous discrimination against the Jews. The Muslims were granted eighty-two percent of the total area of the compound, while the Jews were granted only eighteen percent. This situation has caused enormous crowding and severe difficulties for Jewish worshippers and visitors. In order to provide them with some sort of protection from rain and sun, a cloth awning has been set up in the open courtyard (8).

The area handed over to the Muslims includes "Isaac's Hall", largest and most important of all the halls in the Ma'ara (16). Here, as noted, we find the **apertures leading down to the cave itself (25-26)**. Moreover, this is the central, accepted place of prayer. According to the present limitations, Jews have almost no access to that spot, apart from ten days a year falling out on holidays and other special occasions. Conversely, ten days a year the entire edifice is handed over to the Muslims, and then Jews are entirely forbidden to enter.

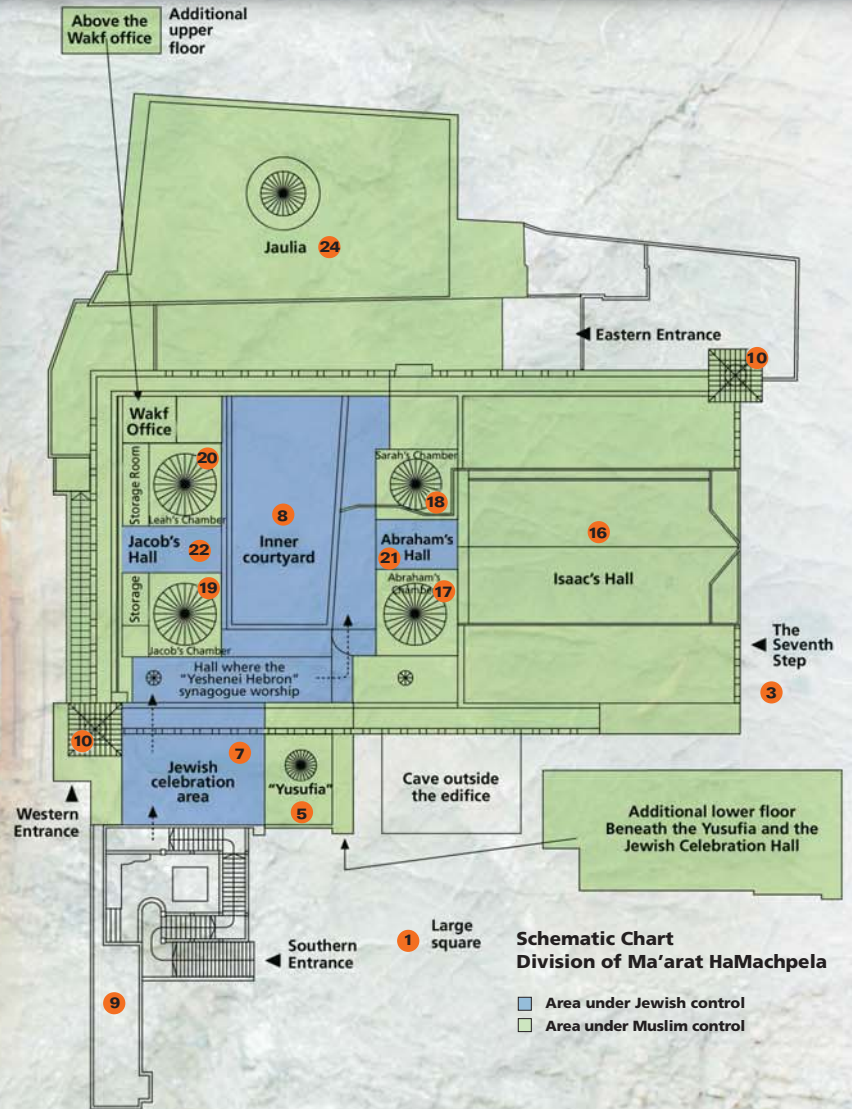
Other restrictions apply to the Jews. While they are forbidden to enter the area handed over to the Muslims, representatives of the "Wakf" [Muslim religious council] are entitled to enter the area handed over to the Jews, even during Jewish prayers. Likewise, the Muezzin continues to cross through the **Jewish prayer area (23)** to get to the **small adjoining room (31)**. There he issues his call to prayer via the powerful loudspeaker system situated at the top of the minarets. In doing so, he disturbs the Jewish prayers. Likewise, Jews are denied the right to carry out maintenance, repairs, or major development projects in the area placed under their authority. The result is a situation of neglect and disrepair on the Jewish side, in contrast to great care and luxury on the Muslim side, where enormous sums have been invested in care and beautification.

Even so, a visit to the Jewish side is interesting and special. In fact, this is one of the most interesting and important sites in the Holyland - the Land of the Bible.

Note: Numbers appearing in the text in red relate to appropriate points in the aerial photo (page 3), the sketch (page 4), or the blueprint (page 22)



Entranceway to the "Joseph Monument". This monument is a Muslim addition and Joseph is not buried here. As is known, Joseph's Tomb is located in Shechem. Some hint may well be preserved here of the Midrashic tale of how Esau, who tried to prevent Jacob's burial in the Ma'ara, was killed by Chusim son of Dan, and his head was buried in the Ma'ara.







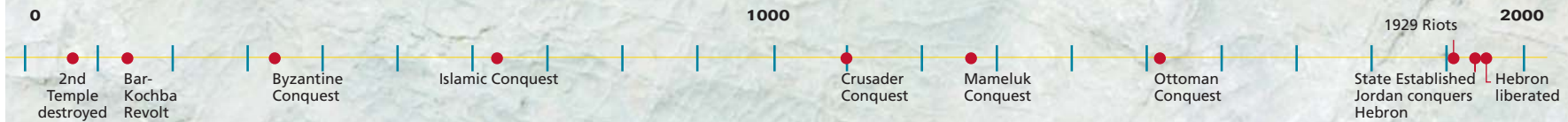
DATELINE OF HEBRON HISTORY

-2000

-1000



<p>1735 BCE</p> <p>Abraham comes to Canaan and settles in Hebron</p>	<p>1675 BCE</p> <p>Abraham purchases the cave</p> 	<p>1250 BCE</p> <p>Joshua leads Tribes of Israel. Caleb occupies Hebron</p>	<p>1007 BCE</p> <p>David is anointed king at Hebron</p> 	<p>587 BCE</p> <p>1st Temple destroyed Edomites settle Hebron area</p>	<p>445 BCE</p> <p>Return to Zion.</p>	<p>164 BCE</p> <p>Hasmonean Revolt. Judah Macabee conquers Hebron</p>	<p>30 BCE</p> <p>Construction of enormous edifice over Machpela Cave</p> 
<p>1166</p> <p>Rambam visits Hebron and prays at Ma'ara</p> 	<p>1260</p> <p>Mamluk Conquest</p>	<p>1267</p> <p>Jews banned from Ma'ara. Ramban visits Hebron "to acquire a burial site"</p>	<p>1489</p> <p>R' Ovadiah of Bartenura sojourns in Hebron</p>	<p>1517</p> <p>Ottoman Conquest Anti-Jewish riots</p>	<p>1540</p> <p>R' Malkiel Ashkenazi buys land and builds the Jewish Quarter and the Avraham Avinu Synagogue</p> 	<p>1583</p> <p>Mystics from Safed, including the "Reishit Chochmah", R' Eliyahu Di Vidas, move to Hebron</p>	<p>1630</p> <p>Decrees against Hebron's Jews The "The Purim-Window Miracle"</p>
<p>1901</p> <p>R' Chaim Chizkiya Medini, the "S'dei Chemed", moves to Hebron and is appointed city rabbi</p> 	<p>1909</p> <p>Yosef Avraham Shalom adds a floor on to the "Chessed LeAvraham" Clinic</p> 	<p>1912</p> <p>The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shalom Ber Schneerson buys Beit Romana and founds Yeshivat "Torat Emet"</p>	<p>1914</p> <p>WW I. Community weakened and impoverished</p>	<p>1918</p> <p>British Conquest</p> 	<p>1925</p> <p>Community recovers. Slobodka Yeshiva ("Knesset Yisrael") arrives</p> 	<p>1929</p> <p>1929 Riots Hebron Massacre Jews banished, community destroyed</p> 	<p>1931</p> <p>Part of community returns</p>
<p>April 1979</p> <p>Women and children enter Beit Hadassah</p> 	<p>Jan. 1980</p> <p>Residents move into Ramat Mamre</p>	<p>May 1980</p> <p>Six Jews murdered at Beit Hadassah. Govt. decides to renew Hebron community</p> 	<p>1981</p> <p>Dedication of renewed Avraham Avinu Synagogue</p> 	<p>Aug. 1984</p> <p>Tel Hebron settled. New "Admot Yishai" (or "Tel Rumeida") neighborhood</p> 	<p>1986</p> <p>Families move into renewed Beit Hadassah</p> 	<p>1989</p> <p>New homes dedicated in the Jewish Quarter</p> 	<p>Sept. 1990</p> <p>Residents move into "Givat Ha'avot" neighborhood</p>



<p>70 (Common Era)</p> <p>2nd Temple, Jerusalem, Hebron destroyed</p>	<p>132</p> <p>Bar Kochba Revolt Hebron in center of revolt area</p>	<p>330</p> <p>Byzantine Conquest. Church built over Ma'ara.</p>	<p>4th-6th centuries</p> <p>Jews continue to pray at Ma'ara and Elonei Mamre</p>	<p>638</p> <p>Islamic Conquest Mosque built in the Ma'ara. Jews still pray in Ma'ara synagogue.</p>	<p>10th century</p> <p>Arabs build "Yusufia", attached to Ma'ara</p>	<p>1100</p> <p>Crusader Conquest Hebron's Jews banished. Church built in Ma'ara</p>	<p>1171</p> <p>Visit by Benjamin Metudelah</p>
<p>1753</p> <p>The "Chidah", R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai goes to Europe as fund raiser on behalf of the Hebron's Jews</p>	<p>1811</p> <p>R' Chaim HaMizri buys the lands of Tel Hebron on behalf of Hebron's Jews</p>	<p>1819</p> <p>Fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe calls on his followers to settle Hebron. Many do so.</p>	<p>1834</p> <p>Earthquake Ibrahim Pasha Conquest. Attacks on Jews</p>	<p>1856</p> <p>R' Eliyahu Mani arrives from Baghdad and settles in Hebron</p>	<p>1871</p> <p>Yisrael Avraham Romano builds Beit Romano, "Istanbuli Synagogue"</p>	<p>1881</p> <p>The "Charif", R' Chaim Rachamim Yosef Franco, Chief Rabbinic Justice of Hebron</p>	<p>1893</p> <p>Ground for the "Chessed LeAvraham" Health Clinic</p>
<p>1935</p> <p>Gerrer Rebbe visits Hebron, prays on 11th step</p>	<p>1936</p> <p>Hebron Jews banished by British</p>	<p>1948</p> <p>State of Israel Hebron conquered by Jordan. Jewish Quarter and Cemetery destroyed. Avraham Avinu Synagogue becomes trashheap and animal pen</p>	<p>1967</p> <p>Hebron liberated R' Shlomo Goren waves Israeli flag at Ma'ara</p>	<p>1968</p> <p>Hebron settlers return. Pesach Seder at Park Hotel. After 5 weeks, they are moved to the Civil Administration Bldg. There, they set up a community, yeshiva and factories</p>	<p>Oct. 1969</p> <p>Grenade thrown at Jews by the Ma'ara. Dozens wounded Vice Premier Yigal Alon announces a Jewish city will soon be built near Hebron</p>	<p>Sept. 1971</p> <p>Residents move into Kiryat Arba</p>	<p>1975</p> <p>Prof. Ben-Zion Tavger begins to uncover remains of Avraham Avinu Synagogue</p>
<p>1994</p> <p>Hamas plans major terror attack against Jews in Hebron. Purim incident at Ma'ara.</p>	<p>1995</p> <p>Floors added to Beit Schneerson. Nahum Hoss and Yehuda Partush murdered at edge of Hebron</p>	<p>Jan. 1997</p> <p>Israeli Gov't abandons most of Hebron to P.A. Jews left surrounded by enemies, open to attack from hills</p>	<p>Sept. 1998</p> <p>R' Shlomo Raanan Zt'l murdered in Admot Yishai</p>	<p>1999</p> <p>"Beit Nahum Viyehuda" built in Avraham Avinu Neighborhood. Excavations uncover Tel Hebron treasures</p>	<p>2000</p> <p>"Beit Hashisha" built</p>	<p>2001</p> <p>"Oslo War." Arab terror rampant. Hebron Jews under constant fire. Shalhevet Pass - shot from Abu Sneineh Hills</p>	<p>The Present</p> <p>Despite constant attack, Jewish Hebron remains firm and even gets stronger. Shavei Hebron Yeshiva study hall dedicated. "Mitzpe Shalhevet" populated. Building of permanent housing begun at Admot Yishai</p>



TIPS FOR VISITORS TO MA'ARAT HAMACHPELA

● According to official data, between 1995-2000 more than half a million people visited Ma'arat HaMachpela every year.

● Next to the Ma'ara is a visitor's center - **the Gutnick Center**, with a restaurant, restrooms, a gift shop and tourist information. Telephone: **02-9963916**
02-9964015
052-4295550

● Visitors to the Ma'ara go through a sensitive metal detector. It pays to keep one's bags and metal objects to a minimum (these can be deposited in the Gutnick Center). Weapons are forbidden in the Ma'ara. They may be deposited at the entrance gate.

● At present, video cameras are forbidden in the Ma'ara, while regular cameras are permitted.



● **Shabbat and holidays**, guests can stay at the **Hebron Hospitality Center**. Telephone: **02-9960666, 052-8693873**, or make reservations at the **Midreshet Chevron Hostel/Field School** Telephone: **02-9961311**

● Those interested in **guided tours of Ma'arat HaMachpela** and other Hebron sites can call the Hebron Jewish Community at **052-4317257**

● The bus company "**Eged**" runs regular bulletproof bus service to Ma'arat HaMachpela - the 160 bus approximately once an hour. For details call "**Eged**" information at **03-6948888**

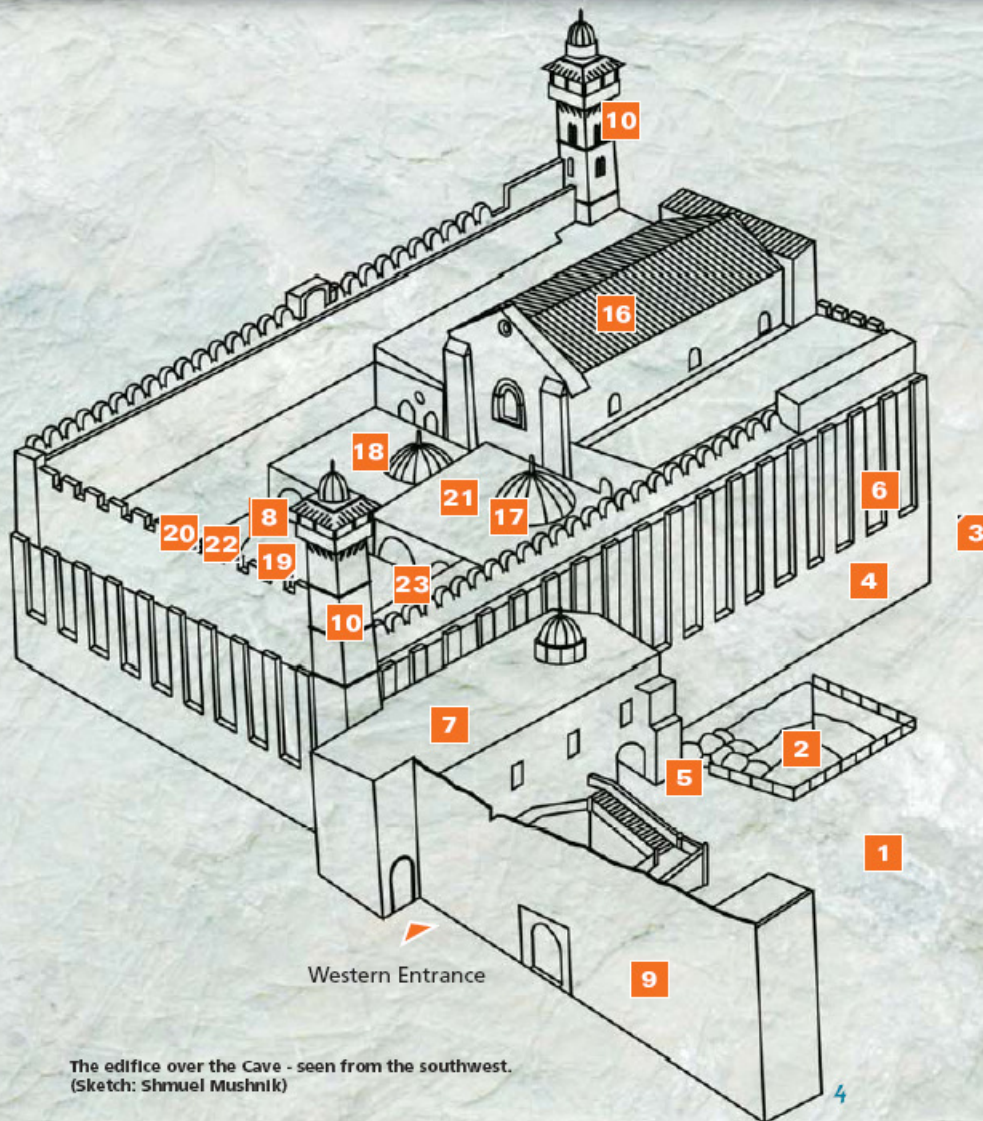
● For information on regular private bus service to Ma'arat HaMachpela, call **02-5401111** or **052-4295551**

● To order bulletproof buses for trips to Hebron, call **052-4295559**. (Ma'arat HaMachpela Authority)

Hebron Institutions, Other Numbers for Visitors

Emergency	02-9969530
Border Police	02-9969660
Ma'arat HaMachpela Authority	052-8990309
Hebron Jewish Community	02-9965333
Hebron Hospitality Center	02-9960666
Midreshet Hebron (tours, hostel, catering hall)	02-9961311
Kiryat Arba Town Council	02-9969555
Kiryat Arba Religious Council	02-9961083
Kiryat Arba Community Center	02-9961666
Gutnick Center	
Gift Shop	02-9963916
Cafeteria, Restaurant, catering hall	02-9964015
Hebron Municipal Committee	02-9963917 / 8
Yeshivat Shavei Chevron	02-9963838
Yeshivat Nir Kiryat Arba	02-9961775 / 6
Hebron Archives and Museum (in Beit Hadassah)	02-9960097
Eretz Yehuda Archeological Museum, Kiryat Arba	02-9605576
Jesse's Tomb, Admot Yishai	02-9964444
Kollel "Ohr Shlomo" (Admot Yishai)	02-9962227
Kollel "Rinat Shalhevet"	02-9963961
Kollel "Menucha Rachel"	052-4317299
Kollel Ma'arat HaMachpela	052-8693871
Kollel Nahalat Abraham	051-3800697



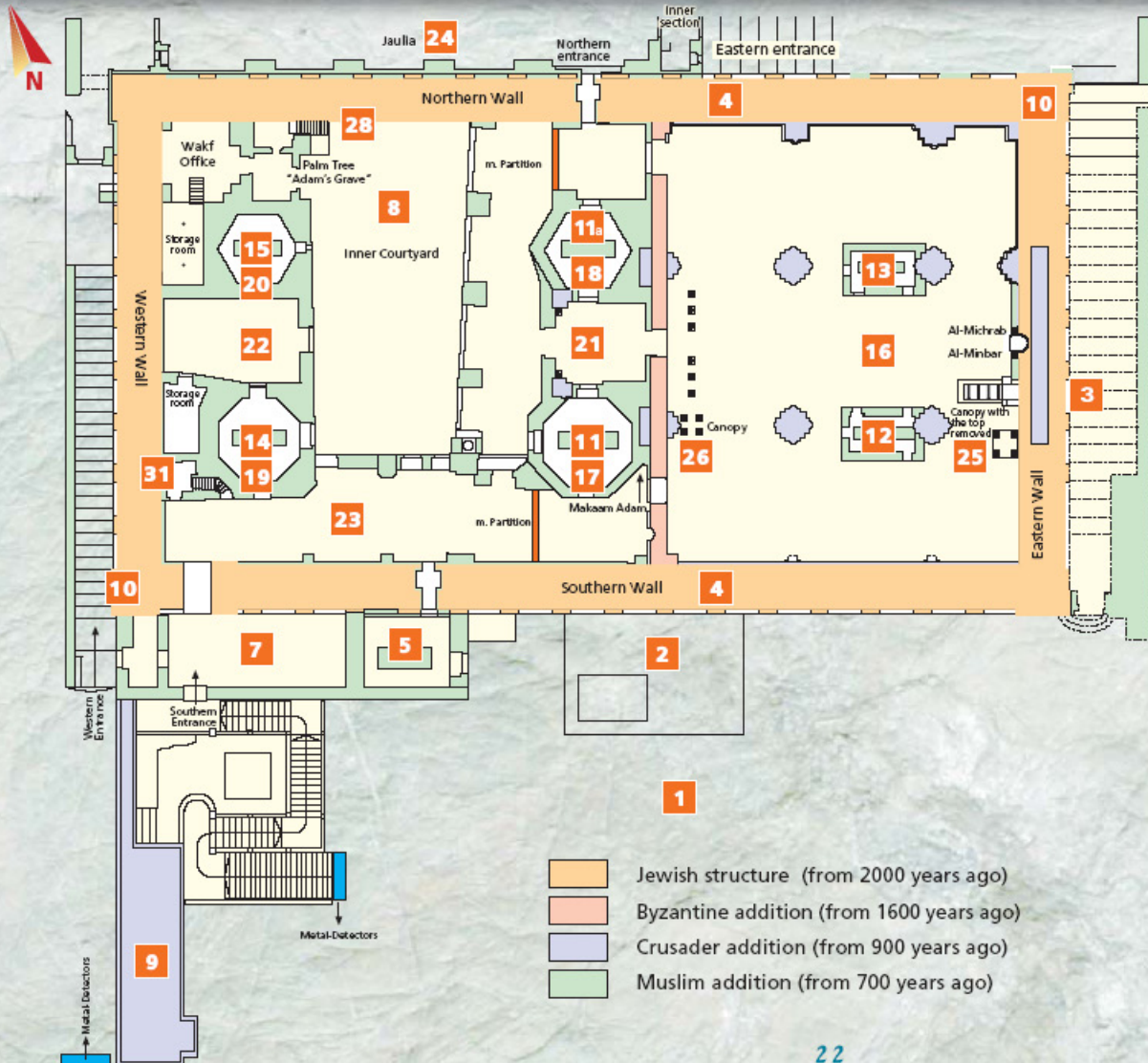


1. Machpela Field - The large square outside the edifice
2. The Outside Cave
3. The Seventh Step
4. The Foundation, built during the Second Temple Period
5. The Arabic Annex - "Joseph's Tomb"
6. Second Temple Construction: "Cornrows" on the second floor
7. The Hall used for religious celebrations, study and prayer; Jewish entrance to the site
8. The Courtyard - Main Jewish prayer area
9. Crusader fortress wall
10. Minaret from the Mameluk period (14th century)
16. Isaac's Hall
17. Abraham's Chamber
18. Sarah's Chamber
19. Jacob's Chamber
20. Leah's Chamber
21. Synagogue - Abraham's Hall
22. Synagogue - Jacob's Hall
23. "Yeshenei Hebron" Synagogue
24. "Ja'ulia" mosque
28. Line connecting the wall with the ancient synagogue tiled roof
29. Baruch Nachshon's Artist Gallery and Rabbi Ashlag's yeshiva
30. The Tomb of Abner ben Ner
32. Gutnick Center

The edifice over the Cave - seen from the southwest.
(Sketch: Shmuel Mushnik)

Note: Numbers relate to points that can be seen in the aerial photo and the sketch. Missing numbers will illustrated in later maps and sketches.

MA'ARAT HAMACHPELA - A GENERAL HISTORICAL BLUEPRINT

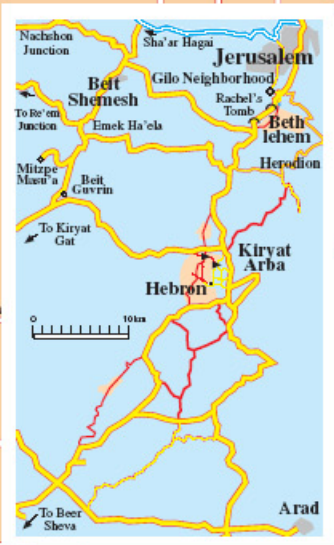


1. Machpela Field - The large square outside the edifice
2. The Outside Cave
3. The Seventh Step
4. The edifice from the Second Temple Period
5. The Arabic Annex - the so-called "Joseph's Tomb"
7. The Hall used for religious celebrations, study and prayer; Jewish entrance to the site
8. The Courtyard - Main Jewish prayer area
9. Crusader fortress wall
10. Minaret from the Mameluk period (14th century)
11. Abraham's Marker
- 11a Sarah's Marker
12. Isaac's Marker
13. Rebecca's Marker
14. Jacob's Marker
15. Leah's Marker
16. Isaac's Hall
17. Abraham's Chamber
18. Sarah's Chamber
19. Jacob's Chamber
20. Leah's Chamber
21. Synagogue - Abraham and Sarah's Hall
22. Synagogue - Jacob and Leah's Hall
23. "Yeshenei Hebron" Synagogue
24. "Ja'ulia" mosque
25. Aperture leading down to the underground area.
26. The Lamp Aperture, "Threshold to the Garden of Eden"
28. Line connecting the wall with the ancient synagogue tiled roof
31. Place where muezzin makes his call to prayer.

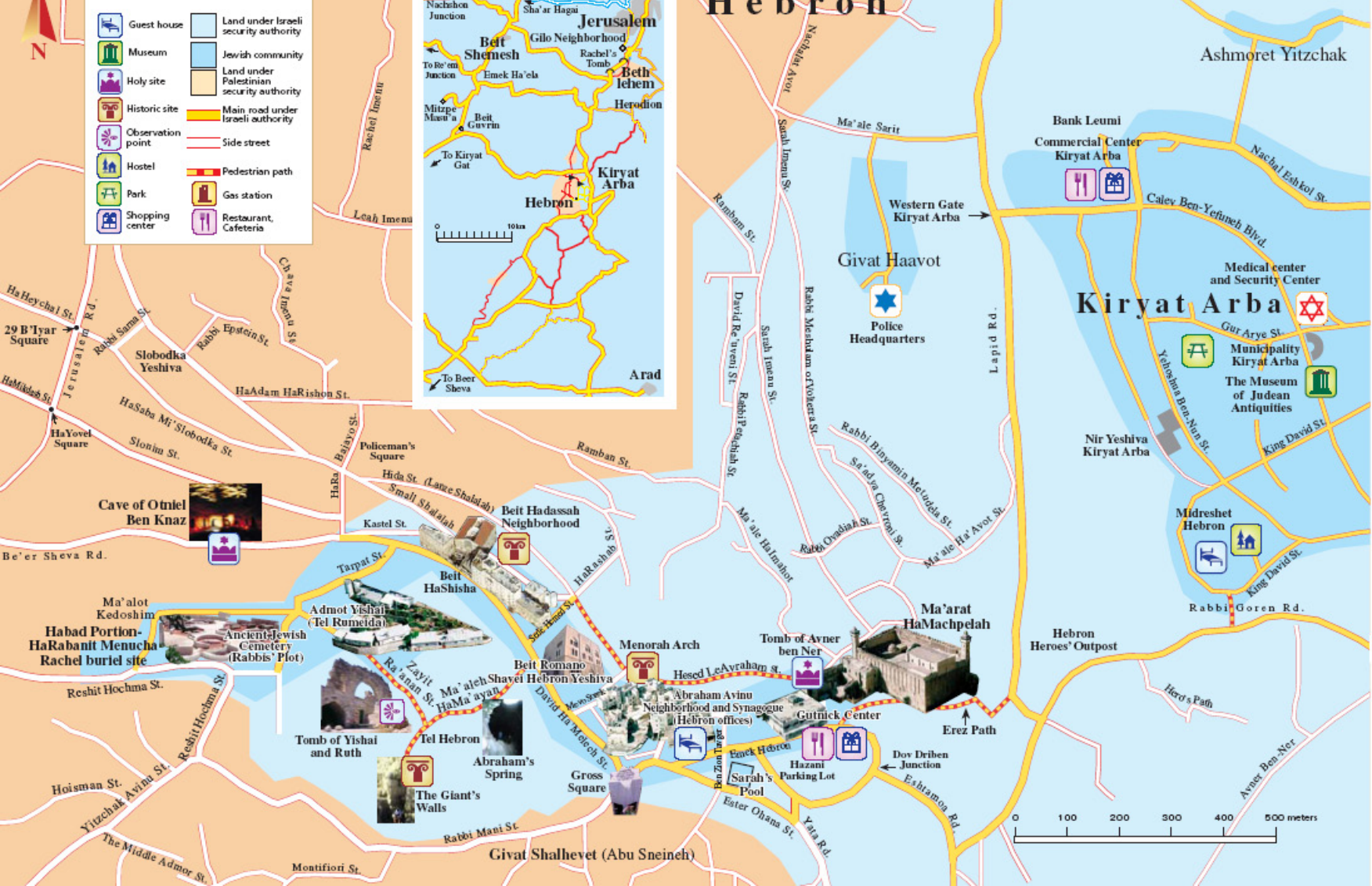


Source

-  Guest house
-  Museum
-  Holy site
-  Historic site
-  Observation point
-  Hostel
-  Park
-  Shopping center
-  Land under Israeli security authority
-  Jewish community
-  Land under Palestinian security authority
-  Main road under Israeli authority
-  Side street
-  Pedestrian path
-  Gas station
-  Restaurant, Cafeteria



Hebron



THE EDIFICE OVER THE CAVE



Aerial photo from above



From the north-west



From the west



From the north-east

Aerial photos of the Ma'ara by Yoav Alkalai, 'Tatzpit'.
Background Photo: South-east view of Ma'arat HaMachpela