

Hebron Museum



Hebron Museum: The Mamluk Bathhouse of Ibrahim al-Khalil in Harat al-Dariyya

The **Hebron Museum** is a Palestinian museum in **Harat al-Dariyya** in the old city of **Hebron (al-Khalil)**, near Khan al-Khalil, and one of the city's important waqf (endowment) and heritage properties. The building was originally a public bathhouse known as **Hammam Ibrahim al-Khalil**, popularly called the "Turkish bath", although it dates from the Mamluk period: it was built between 1266 and 1294 CE and is one of the oldest Islamic bathhouses in Palestine. By decision of the late President Yasser Arafat it was converted into a museum, restored by the

Hebron Rehabilitation Committee with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, and opened in 1997. The bathhouse still preserves its original form, charm and sections, which justified its conversion into a museum. But Israeli forces closed it after the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, settlers looted it, and its roof was turned into a military post. This guide covers the building's history, architecture and fate.

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Quick facts

The Hebron Museum at a glance

Arabic name	متحف الخليل (حمام إبراهيم الخليل)
Location	Harat al-Dariyya, near Khan al-Khalil, old city of Hebron
Origin	Hammam Ibrahim al-Khalil
Built	Mamluk period, between 1266 and 1294 CE
Builder	Emir Ala' al-Din Aydughdi
Area	More than 450 square metres
Status	Waqf and heritage property
Bathhouse closed	1980s

Museum opened	1997, by decision of the late President Yasser Arafat
Closure	2000, after the Al-Aqsa Intifada

Location

The museum stands in Harat al-Dariyya in the heart of the old city of [Hebron](#), near Khan al-Khalil and close to the Ibrahimi Mosque and the old city's markets. Its original entrance was on the south-western side; in 2005 a back entrance was opened on the northern side after the main entrance was closed.

Hammam Ibrahim al-Khalil: history

The bathhouse was built in the **Mamluk period**, between 1266 and 1294 CE, by order of **Emir Ala' al-Din Aydughdi**, who is said to have helped lay its first foundations with his own hands. It is one of the oldest Islamic bathhouses in Palestine, and its revenues were endowed for the city's benefit, so it remained one of Hebron's waqf properties. The bathhouse drew its water from the springs that supplied the old city, including Ain al-Arab and Ain al-Summaqiyya, storing it in two wells. It operated for centuries until public bathhouses declined in the 1980s, as private bathrooms spread and running costs rose, and it closed.

Architecture and sections of the bathhouse

The bathhouse façade is distinguished by **ablaq** masonry in alternating colours and **muqarnas** decoration, in the Mamluk style. It consists of the traditional sections of a Levantine bathhouse:

- **Al-Barrani:** the cool outer hall, with a central octagonal fountain, surrounding benches, and a dome pierced with coloured-glass openings.
- **Al-Wastani:** the warm middle hall, for acclimatising and resting, with an area for hair removal and taps for cold and hot water.
- **Al-Juwvani:** the hot hall, with three iwans, hot-water basins and

coloured-glass openings for light.

- **Al-Qamim:** the external furnace that heated the water and floors through a network of channels and clay pipes.

Life in the bathhouse

The bathhouse was part of Hebron's social life, and its staff included the **mu'allim**, the owner or tenant who ran it and collected fees; the **natur**, who served customers in the outer and middle halls; the **rayyes**, who helped customers wash; the **tabba'**, who worked throughout the bathhouse and assisted others; and the **qammimi**, who tended the fire and heated the water.

From bathhouse to museum

After the Palestinian National Authority entered Hebron in 1997, the late President **Yasser Arafat** decided to convert the bathhouse into a museum for the city. The **Hebron Rehabilitation Committee** restored the building in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, and it opened as a museum in 1997. Its conversion was justified by the fact that the bathhouse still preserved its original form, charm and sections, so the building itself became part of the exhibits, alongside archaeological pieces telling the story of Hebron.

Closure and looting under occupation

The old city of Hebron has been under occupation since 1967, and its residents have faced pressure that forced many of them to leave. After the Al-Aqsa Intifada broke out in 2000, Israeli forces closed the museum's main gate, settlers looted its contents, and its roof was turned into a military barracks. In 2005 a back entrance was opened on the northern side, and in 2014 restoration resumed with funding from the Italian government to convert the building into a visitor centre, with a plan to open a back entrance linking it to the main market.

The museum today (2026)

Hammam Ibrahim al-Khalil remains one of the most important Mamluk landmarks in the old city of Hebron, which has been inscribed since 2017 on UNESCO's World Heritage List and its List of World Heritage in Danger. It is distinct from the **Old Hebron Museum**, opened by the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee in 2021 in the old Palestine Hotel building on al-Shallala Street, an interpretive museum telling the city's history. Through the closure and looting it has suffered, the bathhouse bears witness to the siege and settlement that threaten the old city's heritage and people.

Frequently asked questions

Where is the Hebron Museum?

In Harat al-Dariyya in the old city of Hebron, near Khan al-Khalil and the Ibrahimi Mosque.

What was the museum building originally?

A public bathhouse known as Hammam Ibrahim al-Khalil, built in the Mamluk period between 1266 and 1294 CE.

Why is it called the Turkish bath if it is Mamluk?

Because people commonly call all public bathhouses "Turkish baths", but Hammam Ibrahim al-Khalil predates the Ottoman period and dates from the Mamluk era.

When was the bathhouse turned into a museum?

In 1997, by decision of the late President Yasser Arafat, after the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee restored it with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

What happened to the museum after 2000?

Israeli forces closed its main gate after the Al-Aqsa Intifada, settlers looted it and

its roof was turned into a military barracks; restoration resumed in 2014 with Italian funding.

Conclusion

From a Mamluk bathhouse used by Hebron's people for more than seven centuries, to a museum the Palestinian leadership intended as the city's memory, to a closed building looted by settlers, the Hebron Museum sums up the story of the whole old city. Its domes, coloured glass and basins still bear witness to an ancient Arab city whose people hold on to its heritage despite the occupation.

Sources

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