

Israeli Activities in Archaeological Sites in East Jerusalem and the West Bank: Five Case Studies

The case of Jerusalem's Underground Tunnels, Channels and Spaces:

In Brief:

In the battle of narratives between Israel and the Palestinians, Jerusalem's archaeological sites - particularly in the area defined Jerusalem's historic basin (the Old City and its environs) - carry great symbolic significance. As the national struggle increasingly takes on a religious dimension, the excavations in this area - particularly in the tunnels and spaces abutting the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif - carry greater explosive potential. It is important, however, to note that while we are concerned about the underground excavations in the areas surrounding the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, there are, to the best of our knowledge, no tunnels or other underground spaces currently being dug beneath the holy precinct itself.

Since the 1967 War when Israel captured East Jerusalem, the historic basin has been key to entrenching Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem. The destruction of the Mughrabi Quarter shortly after the war in order to create the present-day Western Wall Plaza marked the first substantial step towards creating a mainly Jewish identity for the Western Wall area. The underground excavations that ensued in the historic basin, including more recently underneath the Muslim Quarter and in the nearby Palestinian village of Silwan, use the archaic excavation method of digging in galleries, a method now generally in disuse in archaeological practice. Unlike the stratigraphic method of excavating top to bottom, it preempts an understanding of the historical development of a site. These excavations are carried out by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), a professional government body responsible for the country's antiquities, but are initiated by other entities with a strong ideological and political agenda. The result is that certain historical periods are consistently preserved and highlighted, while other archaeological layers are played down or effaced, which, in turn, has a decisive impact on the way ancient Jerusalem is presented to the public and used to forge a collective identity around it.

The tunnel and channel excavations center around two sites: the Western Wall area, and the village of Silwan/City of David just outside the Old City walls. Both sites had been excavated already in the 19th century by the first European archaeologists who dug deep in the heart of the holy city in order to establish its ancient topography. For a detailed history of excavations in Jerusalem's historic basin see our report [Underground Jerusalem: The excavation of tunnels, channels, and underground spaces in the Historic Basin](#).

While the first archaeologists excavating in Jerusalem used the method of excavating in horizontal galleries, this method was abandoned with the development of scientific archaeology. Instead, the central goal of every excavation now became revealing the sequence of historical layers from top to bottom. During the British Mandate and Jordanian rule, the ancient layers were peeled back systematically from the surface down. Israeli archaeology in Jerusalem from 1967 for the most part followed this stratigraphic method of excavating. But in 1969 excavations began on what is now known as the Western Wall tunnels. Since 2004, excavating the tunnels has continued

almost non-top in the Western Wall area and Silwan, and the method of digging laterally has once again become common practice. The excavations are carried out beneath land owned by Jewish organizations and under the houses of Palestinians who live in the Muslim Quarter¹, and underneath the entire neighborhood of Wadi Hilweh in Silwan.

While underground excavations are being carried out at disparate points in the historic basin, it seems very likely that the ultimate goal is to create single interconnected network of underground tunnels and spaces running from the Siloam pool in Silwan, under the Old City Wall, along the Western Wall and through the Muslim Quarter, possibly even reaching Zedekiah's Cave near Damascus Gate.

The organizations responsible for the excavations in the historic basin:

A handful of organizations are in charge of the works in Jerusalem's historic basin. The main body is the Office of the Prime Minister, which has direct responsibility for the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, which, in turn, manages the Western Wall and its environs including the underground spaces. One of the most powerful statutory bodies in the Old City is the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), which is responsible by law for approving or denying any construction or development of ancient sites. The IAA has an annual budget of millions of shekels for excavations, which it derives from two main developers in the Old City: the aforementioned Western Wall Heritage Foundation, and the Elad Foundation, a private right wing NGO which operates mainly in Silwan/City of David. This relationship puts the IAA in a direct conflict of interest between its mandate to preserve the antiquities on the one hand, and political pressures and economic interests, on the other.

The sites in Silwan/City of David are under the overall management of the Nature and Parks Authority (Silwan is part of the Jerusalem Walls National Park) and the Elad Foundation. While the East Jerusalem Development Company is the body in charge with managing Zedekiah's cave. ²

The Temple Mount/Haram-al Sharif compound itself is managed by the Islamic Waqf (under Jordanian jurisdiction), the strongest Islamic authority in Jerusalem. The Islamic Waqf has changed its policy in recent years. In the 1990s it was responsible for the destruction of antiquities on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound³, but in recent years it has increased its cooperation with the Israel Antiquities Authority.

The Narrative:

The Western Wall and the Temple Mount are the most holy sites in Judaism. The central significance of the Western Wall Tunnels for the Jewish people is that they exposed the northward extension of the Western Wall foundations associated with King Herod's

¹ The first excavation began in 2004. See: H. Barbé and T. De'adle (2007), Jerusalem, Ohel Yizhaq Synagogue, Archaeological News 119, Jerusalem; Regarding excavations in 2007-2010 see A. On, S. Weksler-Bdolah and R. Bar-Nathan (2011), Jerusalem, The Old City, Wilson's Arch and the Great Causeway, Archaeological News 123, Jerusalem.

² For more specific information about these underground tunnels and spaces please see our report [Underground Jerusalem: The excavation of tunnels, channels, and underground spaces in the Historic Basin](#).

³ The works on the Marwani Mosque involved using heavy machinery and caused significant damage to antiquities. No archaeologists were involved in the works. J. Seligman, "[Solomon's Stables, The Temple Mount, Jerusalem](#)," 'Atiqot 56, p. 42.

renovation of the temple in the first century BCE. The wall is the most impressive testimony to the magnificence and size of the Second Temple, destroyed in 70 CE.

The Western Wall tunnel tour deals almost exclusively with the history of the Temple Mount. The route includes several stations which feature the Temple Mount at the center of the story: the enormous foundation wall for the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif, doorways blocked over the years and identified as entrances to the Temple, and more. The story told by the guides almost completely ignores pagan-Roman or Byzantine Jerusalem, which form the foundations of the Old City today, and the impressive remains from Islamic periods.

Currently the main underground passage in Silwan is an ancient Roman drainage channel. Once it is fully developed, it will be possible to walk on a circular tourist route through underground Jerusalem, the beginning (or end) of which will be in the vicinity of the Western Wall, to an area in Silwan/the City of David called “the Givati parking lot”. From here the visitor will enter a network of passages that comprise Jerusalem’s ancient water system - the Siloam Tunnel and Warren’s Shaft, at the end of which s/he will find her/himself at the Siloam Pool. At this point s/he will continue on the underground route to the Herodian pilgrim road, and will return via the ancient drainage channel that ends at the Davidson Center. This route is intended to create the experience of visiting a Jerusalem dominated by artifacts from two periods: the Judean monarchy, and the period of the Second Temple. Jerusalem’s story thus loses both its beginnings, in the time before the kingdom of Israel, and its later periods, when it became the Holy City of the Christians and the Muslim Al-Quds.

The Local Palestinian Residents:

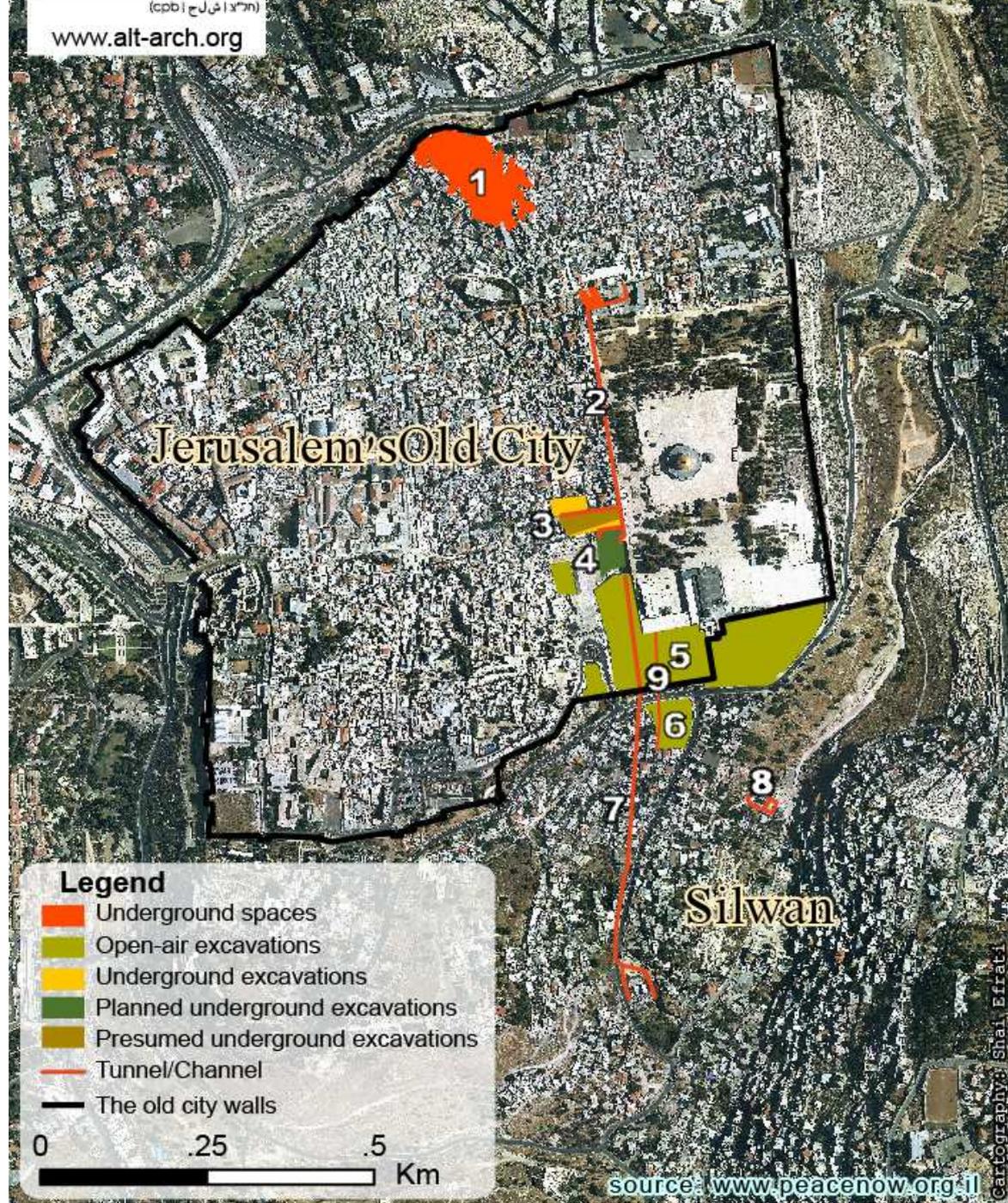
Although the Palestinian residents living above and around these tunnels are key stakeholders in these excavations, the IAA usually does not engage with them or informs them of the excavations taking place in their neighborhoods and underneath their homes. The residents of Wadi Hilweh neighborhood of Silwan, for example, where a tunnel has been excavated underneath the main street, report damage to their homes including cracks in the walls⁴. The IAA has denied responsibility for the damage claiming, that the clearing out of the ancient drain underneath the houses in the village is little more than the rediscovery and cleaning of a channel whose existence has been long known⁵.

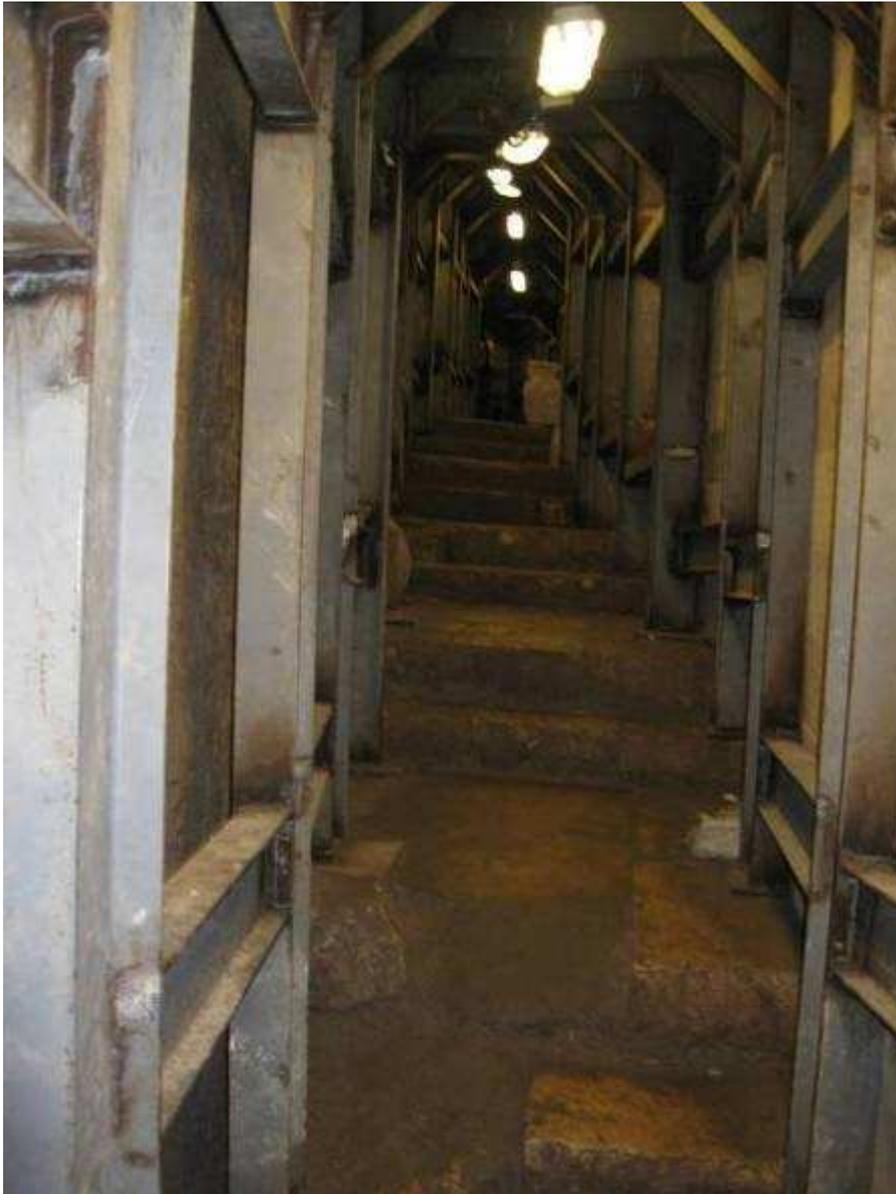
Today, Silwan has a population of about 40,000 Palestinian residents, most of them Muslim, who live in a few neighborhoods. Alongside them live about 400 Jewish settlers under the auspices of the Elad Foundation. Most of the settler houses are located in the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood, near the City of David archaeological site. Wadi Hilweh alone has some 5,000 Palestinian residents. As in the rest of the neighborhoods in the village, there are no public buildings and there is no governmental or municipal investment in the needs of the inhabitants.

⁴ Nir Hasson, [Jerusalem's Time Tunnels](#), Haaretz, 24th April, 2011.

⁵ Israel Supreme Court 1308/08 – response of the IAA re: the drainage channel in Silwan

Underground excavations in Jerusalem's Old City and Silwan





Steps to Herodian road underneath Silwan

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The Givati Parking Lot

In Brief:

The site known as the “Givati Parking Lot” is another controversial antiquities site within the historic basin. It is an open area at the north end of the Wadi al-Hilweh neighborhood of Silwan, a few hundred meters from the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and across the street from the entrance to the visitor’s center of the City of David Archeological Park. Prior to the excavations it was used as a parking lot for visitors to the Old City and as a open space by the residents of Silwan. Salvage excavations funded by the right wing NGO, the Elad Foundation, which also manages the City of David Archaeological Park, have been ongoing since 2003. The excavations themselves have been conducted by the IAA with the intention of preparing and authorizing the area for development by the Elad Foundation, which, in turn, plans to build a 16,000 sqm visitor’s center, called the Kedem Center, on the site.

The Finds:

Throughout the years of excavating, there have been reports in the media about extraordinary findings, from the greatest cache of gold coins dating to the Byzantine era⁶, to the Akra, a Hellenistic citadel built by the Seleucid conquerors, after they first destroyed the city in 168 BCE⁷. Exposed for the first time at the site were remains of residential compounds (Karaite or Jewish), from the Abbasid period (8th–9th centuries C.E.); impressive foundations of Byzantine or Roman structures; a large residential structure from the late Roman period (2nd–3rd centuries C.E.); a two-story structure from the 1st century C.E.; remains of the destruction of the Second Temple (perhaps from 70 C.E.), and more⁸.

The Kedem Center:

Like the City of David Archaeological Park, the planned Kedem Center will be managed by the Elad Foundation – an NGO working to settle Jews in East Jerusalem. Together with the City of David, it will create a single tourist zone under settler and Israeli governmental control. Construction of the building will be significant in determining the political future and the character of the Old City of Jerusalem and Silwan. The center is planned as the starting point for most of the subterranean and above-ground passageways in the historic basin.

We believe that this project is one of the most prominent examples of how archaeology is used as a political tool to facilitate the appropriation of a public space while excluding one of the most important stakeholders in the area - the local Palestinian population and in violation of their heritage rights. The creation of an exclusively Jewish narrative for the site, we believe, also violates the heritage rights of the general public in its broadest sense: members of all cultures and faiths for whom Jerusalem's past constitutes part of their cultural identity and heritage.

As it stands at the moment, despite various appeals to, and decisions by the National Council for Planning and Building, the Kedem Center is slated to go ahead as planned. An earlier decision by the Council to reduce the size of the proposed structure was overturned following political pressure by the Ministry of Justice⁹.

The Palestinian Residents:

The manner in which the authorities conduct themselves vis-à-vis the Palestinian population in Wadi Hilweh is described by resident Ahmed Qara'in, whose house overlooks the Givati Parking Lot excavations site: "This place used to be a public lot. Suddenly a group of people came, closed it off and began to excavate. Who were these people? Who supports and what were they up to? We had no idea. We asked at the municipality and the Antiquities Authority and nobody wanted to tell us. After a few months it became clear it was an NGO called the Elad Foundation, which is a settler's organization that came here to conduct the excavations of the settlement....Now they

⁶ [1] "[Tourists Uncover hidden golden Treasure in Holy Land](#)", Youtube, December 23, 2008.

⁷ [Nir Hasson, Haaretz, November 3, 2015](#)

⁸ Ben-Ami and Y. Tchekhanovetz, "[Jerusalem, Giv'ati Parking Lot: Preliminary Report](#)," *Hadashot Arkheologiyot—Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 122 (2010).

⁹ [Nir Hasson, Haaretz, 07 January 2016](#)

want to build here a center called the Kedem Center. With floors for archaeology, leisure and settlers' organizations offices. There is not one meter that is for my benefit. Not one. 16000 meters, and not even one meter for me or my kids."¹⁰



Givati Parking Lot excavation site looking west

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The case of Tel Shiloh:

In Brief:

Tel Shiloh (Shiloh Mound) is situated near the Israeli settlement of Shiloh and the Palestinian village of Qaryut, between Nablus and Ramallah. The ancient site is included within the settlement's borders. It is an important archaeological site containing remains from the 18th century BCE, including a Canaanite city on the multi-layered mound (*tel*). Tel Shiloh is identified with the Biblical Shiloh as the place of the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant and the spiritual center of the tribes of Israel in the period before the Kingdoms of Israel (the pre-Monarchic Period). Impressive mosaic remnants of churches testify to the wealth of the city during the Byzantine period. The residential structures from the Byzantine period continued to be in use during the early Arab period, the Abbasid period, and even during the Mamluk period (13th Century CE). The fact that some of the churches became mosques during the Arab period demonstrates Tel Shiloh's significance as a place of worship passed on from one religion to another. At least one of the mosques was in use by the residents of Qaryut and neighboring Palestinian villages until the 1970s. The name of the ancient settlement has been preserved over time in the Arabic name for the site, "Khirbet Seilun."

In 2010 a private Israeli settlers' foundation called the "Mishkan Shiloh Association," took over management of the site along with the Binyamin Regional Council¹¹. Excavations at the site were conducted by the Staff Officer for Archaeology at the Civil Administration and the University of Ariel. Tel Shiloh is partially situated on privately owned Palestinian land, and until the beginning of the 1970s, families from the village of

¹⁰ [Interview with resident Ahmed Qara'in](#), 2013.

¹¹ The regional council of the Israeli settlements in the southern Samarian hills of the West Bank.

Qaryut cultivated the site. In the 70s some of the land was declared State land. Soon after, an excavation began, and the settlement of Shiloh was founded near the site. Gradually the Palestinians of Qaryut were barred from their land and eventually they were unable to work their agricultural plots or access the site for any other reason. In August 2015, following an objection by the residents of Qaryut and Emek Shaveh to the Israeli Civil Administration Planning and Building subcommittee, it was decided that Palestinians must be allowed entry to the site of Tel Shiloh. At the beginning of March 2016, an order was issued to enforce this decision.

Today, Tel Shiloh is one of the most highly invested-in archaeological-tourist sites in the West Bank. The Binyamin Regional Council regards the site as a central feature in the development of tourism in the area. Developing the tel has received full endorsement by recent governments¹². In 2014, development plans for a 11,000 m² visitors' center were submitted to the Central planning Bureau of Judea and Samaria – an unprecedentedly large facility for an antiquities site. Its goal is to strengthen the settlements and the Israeli presence in the area through tourism.

The Visitors Experience at the Site:

The site as it is presented to the visitor describes the biblical Shiloh, the story of the Tabernacle and its significance for the Jewish people throughout time with very little reference to the other peoples and cultures who left their mark at the site. For example, the signpost beside al-Yatim Mosque mentions the possibility (that has no archaeological basis) that a synagogue once stood on that spot, and almost completely ignores the importance of the mosque to the history of the place.

One of the central structures in Tel Shiloh is the Ha'roeh lookout tower. Built on the highest point in the tel which overlooks the surrounding area, the guides at the site talk about the view as "stretching all the way to the city of Ariel (one of the largest Jewish settlements in the West Bank)." The name of the tower called "Ha'roeh" alludes to the Prophet Samuel. The tower is a round two-story cast concrete structure rising to a height of some 9 meters. The construction of the tower caused significant damage to the archaeological finds beneath and adjacent to it.

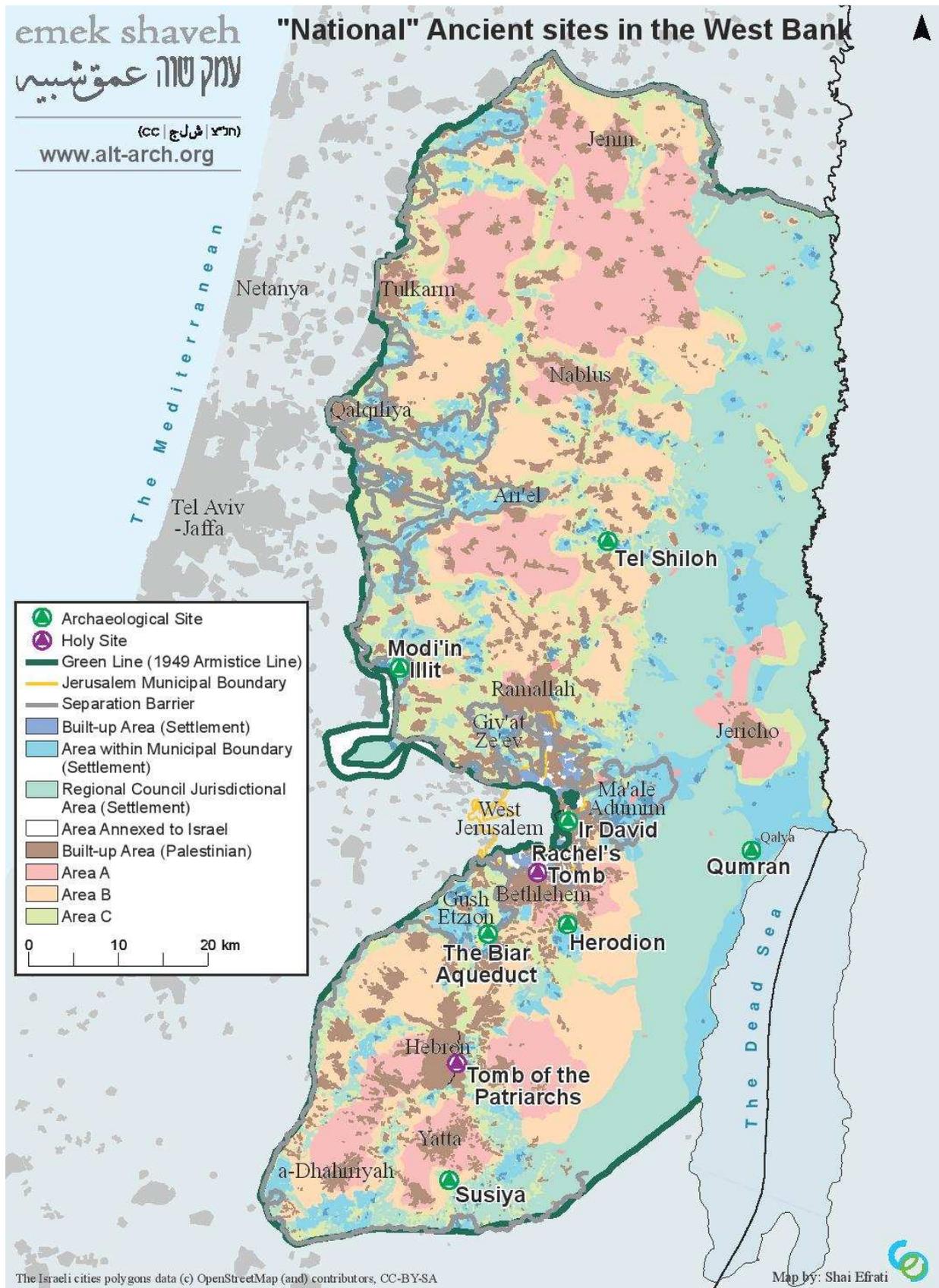
For further information about the themes underlying the presentation of the site see our [report on Tel Shiloh](#).

Conclusion:

Tel Shiloh is an example of how an ancient site is used to serve the agenda of the settlement enterprise in the West Bank while dispossessing the local Palestinians from their land and excluding them (and others) from the historical narrative. The presentation of Tel Shiloh as a site which belongs almost exclusively to one people, creating for the visitor an irresistible link between a single version of history and a national identity, conveys a powerful message that Jews should never give up their right to the site of Tel Shiloh. On the other hand, the Palestinians who have lived in and

¹² For example, in 2013, the ceremony inaugurating the new lookout tower called "Migdal Haroeh" in Tel Shiloh, was attended by two government ministers and a former chief of staff. Photographs from the inauguration of the Migdal Ha-Ro'eh, Ancient Shiloh's Facebook Page; M. Miskin, "This Has Been Our Land for Almost 4,000 Years," Arutz 7, 24th July 2013.

around the site for generations have no claim over the land, its heritage or a place in its history.





The Ha'roeh lookout tower at the top of Tel Shiloh

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The case of Nabi Samuel (Mount of Joy)/a-Nabi Samwil

In Brief:

The Nabi Samuel National Park is one of the largest national parks in the West Bank. Located just north of Jerusalem, The Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions identify it as the burial place of the prophet Samuel. This tradition first emerged in the Byzantine period and probably became firmly established during the Crusaders period. It was from here that the pilgrim soldiers first viewed the city, during the conquest of Jerusalem of 1099. Muslim sources of the 8th-10th centuries (al-Muqaddasi) also attest to the existence of a settlement and worship at the site.

The original Palestinian village of Nabi Samuel, in Arabic, “a-Nabi Samwil,” was built on the hilltop, around the mosque and in and amongst the archaeological remains. Until 1967, the village was home to over 1,000 people but most fled during the Six Day War. In 1971, the village was demolished by the Israel Defense Forces and its remaining residents were evicted to an area near the hill, east of the heart of the site¹³. Today, some 200 residents live there.

From a legal standpoint, the Civil Administration is responsible for the site, and the archaeological excavations are carried out by the Civil Administration’s Staff Officer for Archaeology (SOA). In excavations carried out between 1992-1999, it was discovered

¹³ United Nations General Assembly, 67th session, [Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories](#), September 14, 2012, Paragraph 46.

that the site was first settled in the 7th century BCE. Remains from a large settlement from the Hellenistic period (4th-1st century BCE) were also found. Excavations revealed a large production house and residences from the Byzantine period (5-6 century CE), which remained in existence throughout the early Islamic period (8th-10th century CE). The main findings, and most prominent among the remains, are a fortress and trench from the Crusader period (12th century CE). During the Mamluk Period (13-16th century CE) and the Ottoman period (16-20 century CE) the site continued serving its Muslim residents. A mosque was built there, and the Palestinian village developed around the mosque and on top of earlier layers.

The antiquities site today is used as a place of prayer for Jews and Muslims and is also a tourist site. The site's location, approximately one km. north of Jerusalem, makes Nabi Samuel accessible to thousands of mainly Ultra-Orthodox Jewish-Israeli prayer-goers and visitors. During holidays and anniversaries related to Jewish sages ("hilula" celebrations), such as the anniversary of the death of the Prophet Samuel which takes place in the spring, the site is frequented by thousands of prayer-goers.

In 1995, the site was declared a national park, with an area of approximately 865 acres (3,500 dunams) even though the actual area of the antiquities site is only approximately 7.5 acres. The national park boundaries encompass the archaeological site, the residents' homes, and agricultural lands that belong to them.

The declaration of the site as a national park places the Palestinian residents in an anomalous situation. According to the National Parks Law, lands may remain in the possession of their owners, but any activity in the declared area requires the approval of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority and the permission of the Civil Administration's Staff Officer for Archaeology. Activities such as new construction on one's own land or adding to existing buildings, cultivating agricultural lands and shepherding require permission from the IAA and the Civil Administration. [8] Usually, such requests are refused, on the grounds that they threaten to damage the national park and the antiquities. For example, a temporary goat pen, donated by the French government was slated for demolition and residents who planted olive and fruit trees on their private lands received written orders to uproot them. In effect, the protection of archaeological sites and the national park prevents residents from conducting their lives in a reasonable manner, even though most of their activities do not involve harm to the antiquities or to the unique flora.

Presentation of the Site to the Public:

The site is used mainly for Jewish and Muslim prayer but it is also a tourist destination. Entrance to the site is currently free. The course through the site is concentrated around the area of the mosque and the archaeological excavations surrounding it. The information sheet handed out at the entrance describes the remains of the fort, the trench, and structures from ancient periods, mainly from the Hellenistic period (2nd century CE). The descent to Hannah's spring lies on its northern side; the spring is located in a tunnel that emerges from an ancient burial cave carved out of the rock (apparently from the Early Roman Period). Bordering the excavation area from the north is a Muslim cemetery, which belongs to the village and is enclosed by a fence. The information sheet includes historical quotes only from Jewish and Christian sources. The Muslim story of the place does not appear, with the exception of the history of the

mosque. There is no reference to the history of the original Palestinian village and its fate, even though its remains are visible and they are better preserved than earlier remains¹⁴.

Conclusions:

Nabi Samuel is the most obvious case where village lands have been incorporated into a national park under the National Parks Law, without any accompanying satisfactory professional substantiation.

The site of Nabi Samuel is a sad example of the use of archaeology and a holy place to effect dispossession of the local residents both in terms of their basic land rights and their historical ties to the site. The draconian restrictions made possible by the National Parks Law and Antiquities Law makes the lives of the small community who still live near the site impossible on almost every level.



Nabi Samuel archaeological site and mosque

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The case of Tel Rumeida in Hebron:

In Brief:

The archaeological site called “Tel Rumeida: (Rumeida Mound) is located in the West Bank city of Hebron on a slope descending eastward from Jebel Rumeida, west of Hebron’s old city center. The site dates back to the Chalcolithic period.

Hebron is the only Palestinian city in the West Bank that contains a Jewish settlement within it; tensions between Jews and Palestinians in the city are particularly high. Hebron is holy to both Jews and Muslims and is second after Jerusalem in its importance. It is home to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, where according to tradition the

¹⁴ Nabi Samuel National Park Information Sheet, Har Shmuel, Mount of Joy, Nature and Parks Authority.

biblical Patriarchs and Matriarchs are buried. Most of the Jewish visitors to Hebron – who number in the hundreds of thousands every year – are either traditional or religious and regard the Tomb of the Patriarchs as a holy site.

Tel Rumeida mound is located at the Western edge of the area under Israeli control (H2) and essentially protrudes into a populated Palestinian area. Several Palestinian homes are situated at the apex of the tel. Another cluster of Palestinian houses can be found at the foot of the northern section of the tel. A Jewish settlement is also located here (called by the settlers “Admot Yishai” or “Jesse’s Lands”). Several Palestinian homes stand on the eastern side, near the spring. On the northwest section is a “Karaites cemetery.” At the summit of the tel on its Western side is an ancient structure called “Dir el-Arba’in”. At some point it was converted into a mosque and remained in this capacity until the mid 1990s. Following Baruch Goldstein’s massacre of Muslims praying at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in 1994, the army declared the site a closed military zone. Subsequently the space was then converted into a synagogue. The Jews of Hebron call the place the “Tomb of Ruth and Yishai (Jesse).”

Three lots, two on the northwest side and one in the south, are considered to be Jewish-owned, bought by residents of the old Hebronite Jewish community in the middle of the 19th century¹⁵ (lots 52 and 53 are the better known among them).

The site was first excavated by American archaeologist P. Hammond during Jordanian rule, between 1964-1966. Israel conducted excavations again in the 1980s which were then stopped. In 1999, following the settlers’ demand to build permanent homes in the Jewish settlement of Tel Rumeida, the IAA conducted excavations in the area. A group of senior archaeologists opposed these excavations, as they constituted a preliminary step towards authorizing construction on an important ancient archaeological tel, something that has always been contrary to archaeological principles. The group petitioned the High Court of Justice to prevent construction, but the High Court rejected the petition, approving excavation and construction on the site¹⁶.

The settlement and the site:

Today the neighborhood of Admot Yishai (Jesse’s Lands) is on the site excavated in the 1980s and 1990s, and includes two residential clusters for settlers. An apartment block was built over the excavation area, in such a way that allows the public’s access to the archaeological layer. Another cluster of homes, in the form of caravans, is situated at the edge of the excavation area.

A new archaeological excavation in Tel Rumeida on the plots considered under Jewish ownership, commenced in early January 2014 at the top of the tel, in an area above the Jewish settlement and in-between Palestinian homes (southwest of the settlement). The excavation is led by the IAA and the University of Ariel as part of the development of an archaeological park in Tel Rumeida.

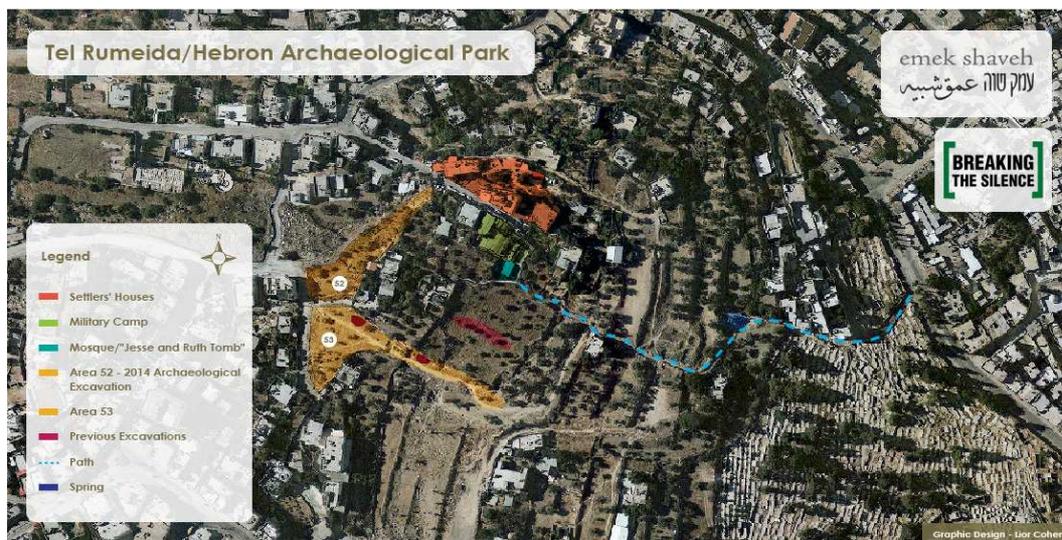
¹⁵ For the history of the Jews in Hebron see: Hebron: City of the Patriarchs and its settlement through the ages, Oded Avishar (editor), Jerusalem: 197

¹⁶ M. Reinfeld, “The High Court rejected the petition against construction for the settlers in Tel Rumeida, Hebron,” **Walla!** newswebsite, 14 August, 2001.

In the past few years the Jewish community in Hebron has worked to create tourist routes, signposting the area and generally developing facilities for tourism. The settlers call the route “the path of biblical Hebron” and focus on the layers identified with the age of the biblical patriarchs and other biblical events. The route as a whole is saturated with traditional-religious content (ritual immersion in the spring, biblical events, stories of those deceased or murdered, a holy tomb featuring a synagogue and more), and appeals particularly to a traditional or religious public that is familiar with this content and identifies with it. The plan to build an archaeological park which highlights biblical agriculture is designed to draw a whole new public to visit or work at the site¹⁷.

Conclusion

Today the settlers in Hebron number in the several hundreds. In the past two decades, the main market in Hebron has been closed down and the streets controlled by Israel are almost empty of people. Bringing thousands of visitors to Hebron on a tour branded as “apolitical” and “educational” will fill its empty streets with Israelis. After decades of attempting to attract people to Tel Rumeida, it appears the settlers have discovered that an archaeological park could be an effective way to create a link between the biblical Hebron and the Jewish settlement in Hebron today.¹⁸



¹⁷ Tel Hebron: expecting to discover important archaeological finds” (Hebrew), Arutz 7, 23 January 2014.

¹⁸ For our report on Tel Rumeida [click here](#)



Neighborhood of Admot Yishai built over the archaeological remains