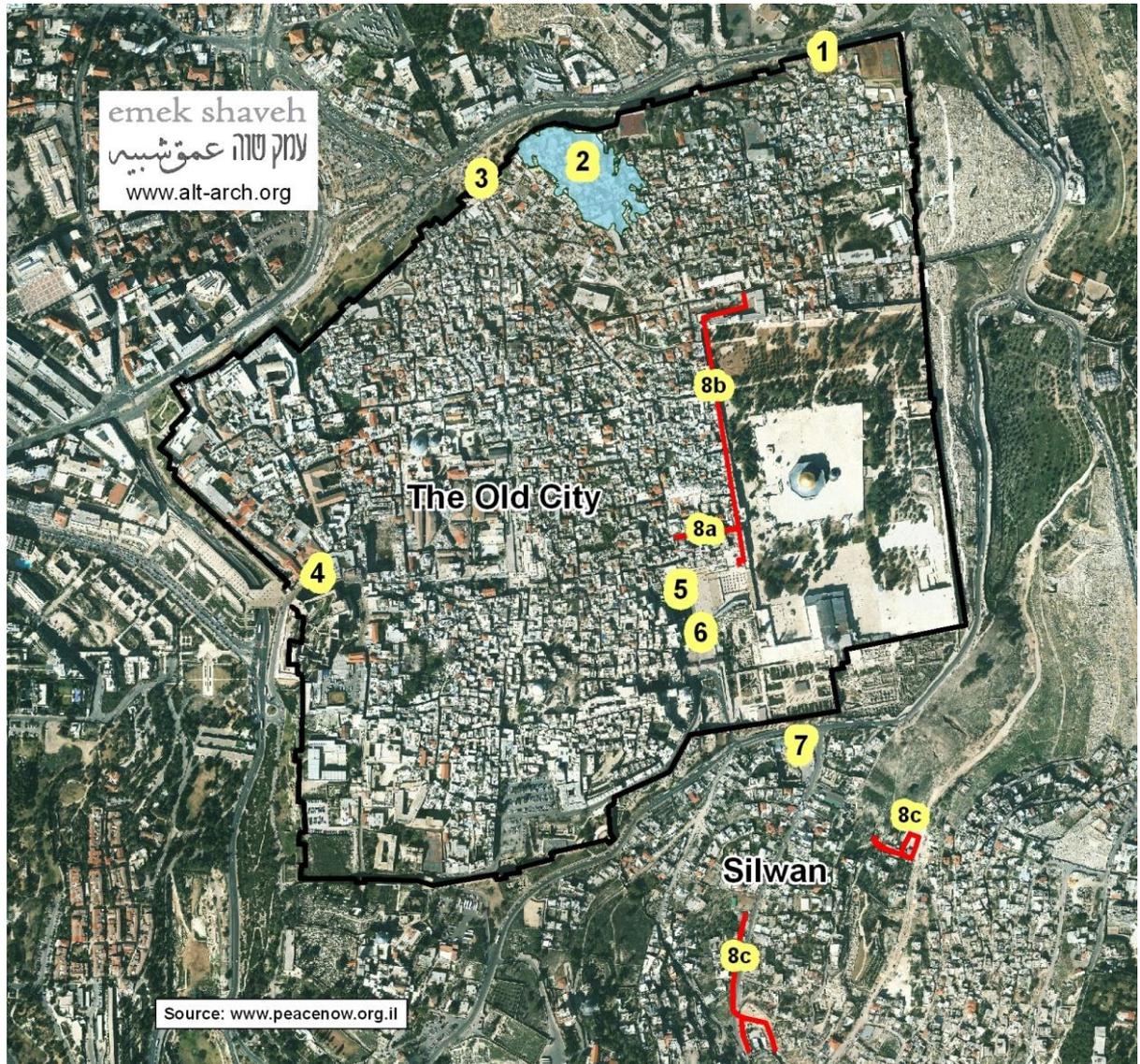


Archaeological Activity in the Old City of Jerusalem and Its Environs

Update 2010



The map of the Historic Basin (aka Holy Basin)

Introduction

The Old City and the historic basin surrounding it (known also as the "Holy Basin") conceal a wealth of archaeological strata from 5,000 years ago up to today. The Old City itself has been built in layers covering almost 3,000 years. The religious and historic importance of Jerusalem has for centuries kindled the curiosity of numerous explorers from all over the world. The first archeological excavations took place in the 19th century; since 1967, archeological research has intensified significantly, especially in the Jewish Quarter and the South Temple Mount area. The Israeli Antiquities Authority was established twenty years ago and has been responsible for most of the excavations in the historic basin during this period.

Conflicting Israeli and Palestinian national sentiments, intensified by Jerusalem's historic and religious sites, make the Holy Basin a highly charged political space. In such a place, every archeological activity not only influences our understanding of the past, but has also political and social implications for the present. Thus, the archaeological excavations and antiquities preservation in the Old City and its environs have become part of the conflict, but also could be part of its solution.

The first part of this report is a preliminary survey of the major excavations and preservation projects in the Old City and the historic basin which have been carried out in the last decade. The second part offers an analysis of their impact on the social and political situation in the Old City and its environs.



Street corner in the Old City, built in layers from different periods

1. Major Recent Excavations and Preservation Projects in the Old City and the Historic Basin

1. The Flowers Gate excavation – preparing ground for settlement construction in the heart of the Muslim Quarter

The excavation took place in the heart of the Muslim Quarter, close to the Flower Gate and the Old City walls. It was carried out by the Israeli Antiquities Authority as a salvage dig in order to prepare ground for the construction of a residential complex, including thirty-two apartments for Israeli settlers. The Ministry of Tourism initiated and financed the excavation, which ended about two years ago, possibly because of budget constraints.



The Flowers Gate

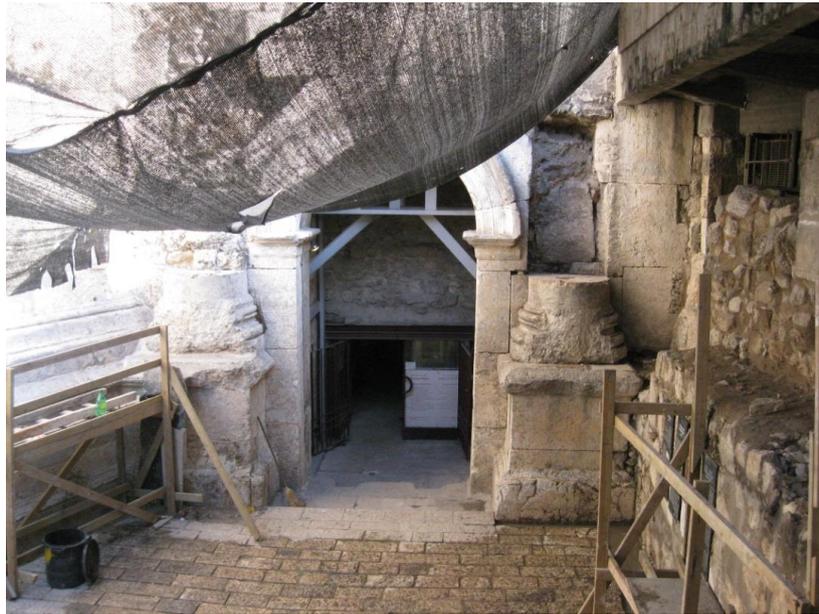
2. Zedekiah's Cave (aka Solomon's Quarries) - excavations in a cave under the Muslim Quarter

Zedekiah's cave is located under a large area of the Muslim Quarter, with the entrance at the Old City wall between the Damascus and Flower Gates. The cave was turned into a tourist site in the 1980s and is run by the East Jerusalem Development Corporation. Presently, the Western Wall Heritage Foundation has been raising funds to develop the site.

According to the archaeological finds, Zedekiah's cave served as a quarry from the 2nd century BCE until the 15th century CE. It is one of the most spectacular caves in Jerusalem and was used during different periods, by different rulers for different purposes. Presenting the cave primarily as a source of construction stones for Herod's Temple (a theory which, in any case, can't be proved), ignores thousands of years of history and dozens of other rulers who also built Jerusalem and influenced its culture and architecture.

3. Damascus Gate – restoration of antiquities

The Damascus Gate is used daily by thousands of Palestinians as their main entrance to the Old City. Under the gate, remains from the Roman period were found (2nd century CE). The Israeli authorities (East Jerusalem Development Corporation, Israeli Antiquities Authority, Ministry of Tourism and Jerusalem Municipality) are currently restoring the ancient Roman gate area and turning it into a tourist site.



Restoration work at f the Roman gate under the Damascus Gate

4. Jaffa Gate – strengthening the connection between West Jerusalem and the Old City

In 2009, the Jerusalem Development Corporation initiated development and infrastructure works at the Jaffa Gate, the main entrance to the Old City from West Jerusalem. The upgraded and more comfortable access from the Mamilla area in West Jerusalem to the Old City has erased the sense of division between them, creating a feeling of a whole, undivided city. The salvage dig exposed part of a Roman wall, and an ancient sewage system leading from Jaffa Gate to Hezekiah's pool located in the Christian Quarter.



Car entrance to the Old City through the Jaffa Gate



Plaza between Mamilla area and Jaffa Gate

5. Western Wall plaza excavations – salvage excavations preparing ground for construction of a museum

Between 2006 and 2009, the Israeli Antiquities Authority carried out salvage excavations in an area of the Western Wall plaza. The Western Wall Heritage Foundation is planning to build a three-story museum there. A group of archaeologists issued a protest against the project, claiming the construction would be harmful to the antiquities found at the site. The planned museum would stand in close proximity to the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Temple Mount.

During the excavations, remains from almost all the important periods in the history of Jerusalem were exposed: Arab remains from the 8th to the 20th century, Jewish remains from the 8th century BCE, as well as Byzantine, Roman and other remains. The finds include parts of public and private buildings, and a street dated to the Roman period of the 2nd century CE.

6. Plan for a two story square at the Western Wall plaza – ambitious project at a most sensitive site

The Western Wall Heritage Foundation is planning to expand the prayer area of the Western Wall plaza. According to the plan, the area under the Western Wall plaza is to be excavated in order to create an additional plaza at a lower level. In order to carry out the plan, the Foundation would have to finance an archeological dig under the existing plaza. The project would enable the visitors coming through the Dung Gate to arrive directly at the Western Wall plaza or to the Western Wall tunnels.

7. Givati parking lot excavations – one of the biggest salvage digs in Israel

One of the Israeli Antiquities Authority's biggest salvage excavations began in 2007 and has not stopped since then. The excavation is financed by the ELAD foundation, which is also financing the Jewish settlement in Silwan. According to the plan, a five story building, housing a museum, shops and parking lot, will be built at the site. An underground axis is planned as well, which would connect the City of David complex with the Western Wall area.



Givati parking lot excavation

8. Underground excavations – the new tunnels in Jerusalem

Since 2004, the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) has been excavating a number of tunnels in the Old City and the Palestinian village of Silwan:

a) Ohel Yitzchak synagogue

In 2004, a salvage dig began underneath a building known as the Ohel Yitzchak synagogue, located at the southern end of Haggai (El Wad) Street in the Old City. The excavations enabled the creation of an additional tunnel, leading from the synagogue to the Western Wall tunnels, under the Palestinian houses in the Muslim Quarter.

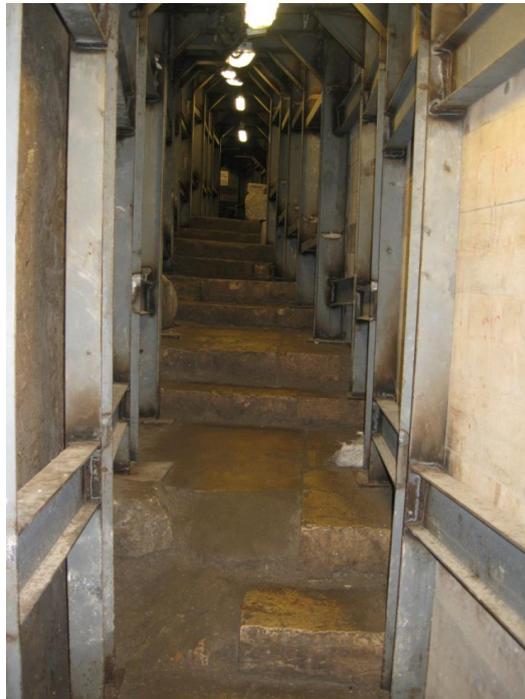
b) Western Wall tunnels

Since 2007, the IAA has been carrying out a salvage dig within the Western Wall tunnels, which had been excavated in the 1980s and 1990s.

c) Tunnels in Silwan

Since 2007, the IAA, funded by the ELAD foundation, has been excavating tunnels leading from the Pool of Shiloah to the northern end of the village. The underground excavations have reached an area close to the Givati parking lot excavations. An additional tunnel is being excavated on

the north-eastern slope of the site, from the Gihon Spring, in the direction of the City of David visitors' center.



Tunnel excavations in Silwan

2. Socio-Political Impact of the Archaeological Research in the Old City and the Historic Basin

Government involvement and the settlers' activities

The archaeological research in the historic basin is carried out in cooperation with a number of governmental, municipal and private bodies. The Prime Minister's office is responsible for the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, which has initiated and financed a number of excavations, for example the Western Wall plaza excavations. Other projects are financed by the Ministry of Tourism, for example, at the Flower Gate. The Israel Nature and Parks Authority (subordinate to the Ministry of Environment) is developing the Jerusalem Walls National Park, and the Israeli Antiquities Authority (subordinate to the Ministry of Culture and Sport) carries out

most of the excavations. The tourist development of the historic basin is carried out by the Jerusalem Municipality, through the Jerusalem Development Corporation and the East Jerusalem Development Corporation.

In 2005, the Israeli government and the Jerusalem Municipality budgeted 620 million shekels (480 million and 144 million shekels respectively) for tourist development and archaeological research in the historic basin. In 2008, 50 million shekels were actually invested and it seems that similar sums have been invested in the following years.

The greater part of the archaeological research in the historic basin is being carried out in areas in which the State of Israel intends to strengthen its hold, in cooperation with the settlers' organizations already active there. Excavations are based on quiet agreements between various governmental authorities and are carried out with no overall planning and no public scrutiny, often serving the interests of a number of private groups with ample financial resources. These groups sponsor many excavations of the Israeli Antiquities Authority, aiming not only at scientific research, but rather at their own religious, ideological, touristic and financial objectives. Two of the most dominant organizations are the ELAD foundation, which runs the City of David archaeological park and is also active on the Mount of Olives, and the Ateret Cohanim foundation, active in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City.

"Archaeological Settlement"

Some of the excavations in the historic basin have been going on for years, without providing enough time for researchers to analyze and understand their findings. For example, the IAA excavations of the water system in the City of David began in 1995 and, until today, after fifteen years of digging, the archeologists haven't published any serious reports about their finds. The Givati parking lot excavations began in 2007 and have not ended yet, and the Western Wall excavations went on for three full years, from 2006 to 2009.

Archaeological excavations necessitate taking over a piece of private or public land, which is supposed to be returned to its owner after the dig is completed. However, the excavations mentioned in this report either never end, or the land is permanently taken over for the needs of settlers or the Israeli authorities. Recently, this kind of excavation was coined "archaeological settlement" by the Israeli media.

In an area so politically sensitive, and with so many archaeological layers, a salvage dig in the wake of a sewage pipe explosion can turn into an extensive excavation with political and social consequences. This was the case of the excavations in the Pool of Shiloah, located in the heart of the Palestinian village of Silwan, which have been going on for years and led to the closure of a large public area between the Al Bustan neighborhood and Wadi Hilwe.



The Pool of Shiloh/El Hamra Pool in Silwan

Excavating in Underground Tunnels: Controversial Archaeological Method and its Socio-Political Impact

The standard method of excavating today, accepted by the archaeological community all over the world, is a vertical method of carefully peeling off archaeological strata. Nevertheless, the Israeli Antiquities Authority has been using horizontal method in its

excavations in the historic basin since 2004. This method of excavating in underground tunnels, approaching the archaeological strata from the side, creates a long and narrow burrow disconnected from its surroundings. It is an outdated and harmful method of excavation that can be justified only by non-scientific constraints, and is usually more harmful than beneficial.

The choice of this particular method of excavating in tunnels underneath Palestinian lands and houses is not based on scientific reasons. It seems to aim at creating an artificial separation between "Jerusalem above the ground" (where the Palestinians live) and "Jerusalem below the ground" (where the Jewish past is rooted).

This kind of excavation has created a series of underground tunnels and spaces connecting unrelated archeological strata and periods in order to tell a continuous story focused on the Jewish past or the past identified as Jewish. The elements, which were not related in the past, are often connected at the expense of repressing or ignoring the remains from periods and cultures seen as not important for the Jewish narrative.

Ignoring the Palestinian residents living in the Old City and its environs is part of the same worldview which regards anything that is not Jewish as a foreign and temporary implant, and thus not a part of the cultural and historic continuity of the place. In addition to that, the excavations in underground tunnels are hidden from the public eye, leading to unsettling rumors about their route as well as their aim.

Current excavations of underground tunnels are a continuation of the Western Wall tunnels excavations carried out in the 1970s and 1980s. Those excavations were concluded with the opening of the northern exit to Via Dolorosa, which led to violent riots between Israelis and Palestinians and resulted in dozens of dead and injured. The settlers' organization Elad, sponsoring the current excavations, aims at creating a long tunnel leading from the Pool of Shiloh (at the western edge of the Palestinian village of Silwan) up to the area of the Western Wall, while other interested parties intend to connect Zedekiah's cave (at the northern end of the Old City) to the Western Wall tunnels.

The Archaeological Research and Local Residents

When excavating in a populated area, it is important to cooperate with the local residents and take their needs into consideration. When archaeological research ignores the residents' needs and is carried out behind closed fences, it can be easily seen by them as a hostile project, as in the case of the excavations at the Flower Gate or in Wadi Hilwe in Silwan. As a result, many Palestinians believe the Israeli government and the settlers are using the archaeological activities to justify their right to sovereignty over the land.

Many areas of the historic basin are populated by Palestinians of low socio-economic status, like the Sadia and Ba'ab Chuta neighborhoods in the Old City and Al Bustan neighborhood in Silwan. In these areas in particular, archeological activity that ignores the residents' needs leads to growing social tension, which could eventually set fire to the whole region.



Damascus Gate

Conclusion

The Old City offers its visitors a great variety of antiquities from different periods and cultures. There is an ancient city wall from the 8th century BCE, and remains from the 2nd Temple period. The street layout of the Old City dates back to the Roman *Aelia Capitolina* of the 2nd century CE, and the impressive public buildings which give the Old City its unique character were built during the Mamluk period. The wall surrounding the Old City was built by the Othman sultan, Suleiman the Great, in the 16th century on the ruins of older walls from the Crusader and Roman periods. Such a rich past is laden with a multitude of meanings - historic, religious, national and political.

Sovereignty over the Old City and the historic basin carries with it responsibility for preserving and presenting all the different past and present cultures that were or still are part of the place. For the sake of the archeological research itself, as well as for political and social reasons, it is important to carry out the excavations in the most professional and careful way. The amount and intensity of the excavations in the Old City and the historic basin should be kept to a minimum, so as not to disrupt the delicate balance between the present and the past, between the living and the dead. Cooperation between the Israeli authorities, local residents and international organizations is essential, as only such cooperation could ensure that archeology will be removed from the political frontline and used instead as a bridge, for bringing closer all the nations and cultures which shaped Jerusalem's past and care about its future.