



*Archaeology in the Political Struggle over  
the Temple Mount/ Haram al-Sharif*

emek shaveh  
לאמק שאוה עמושב

**2015**

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Emek Shaveh is an organization of archaeologists and heritage professionals focusing on the role of tangible cultural heritage in Israeli society and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We view archaeology as a resource for strengthening understanding between different peoples and cultures.

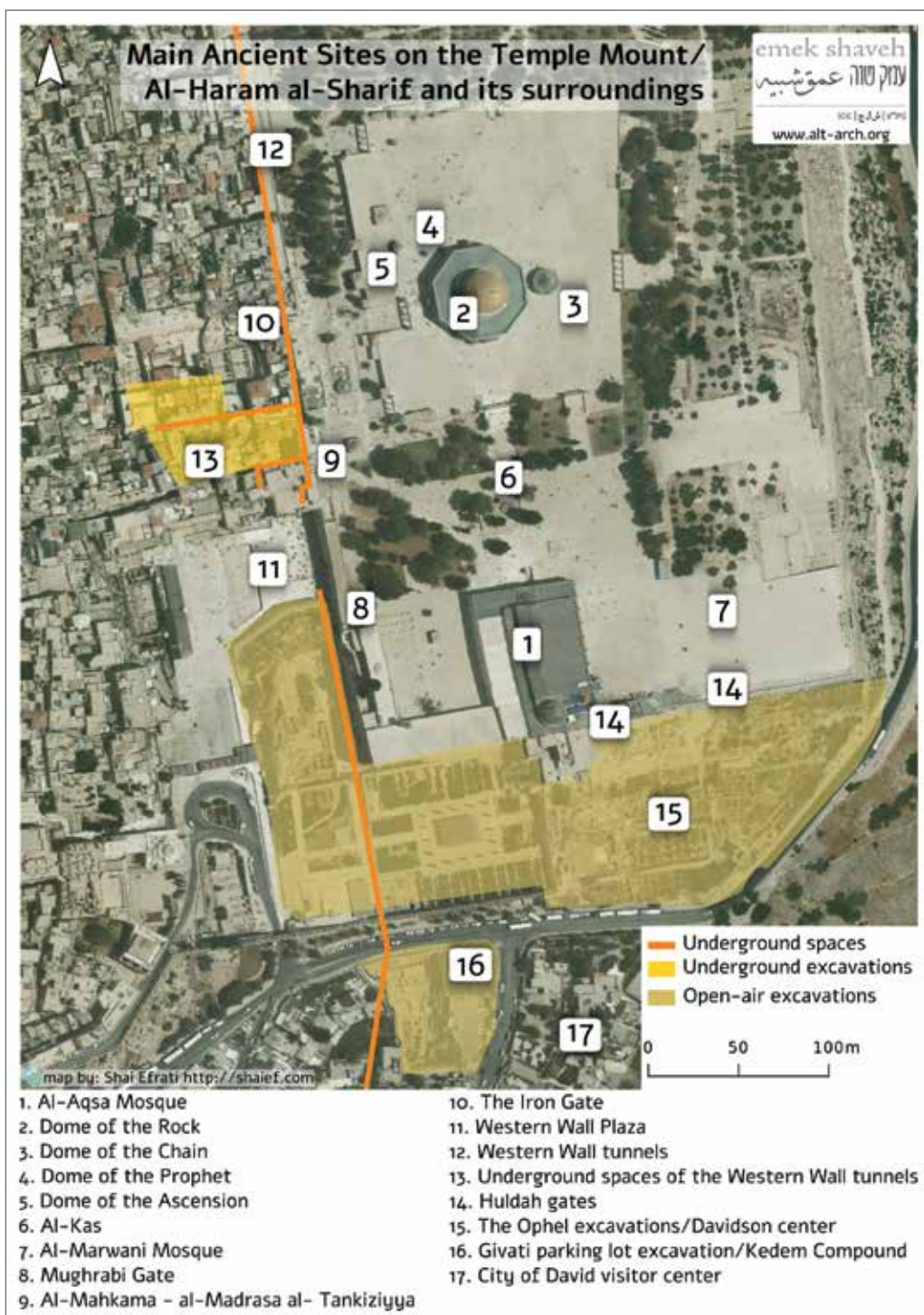
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## Introduction

Immediately after the 1967 War, then Israeli defense minister Moshe Dayan declared that the Islamic Waqf would retain their authority over the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound. This statement coupled by the fact that the Islamic Waqf continued to manage the compound was interpreted as Israel's acquiescence to preserve the Haram al-Sharif's unique historic significance as an Islamic holy site. Yet in practice, even prior to Dayan's declaration, Israel had begun to put facts on the ground which contributed to a shift in the independent status of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif particularly around the issue of access to the site.

Since 1967, the area surrounding the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif has seen continuous development and attempts to modify previous agreements. Activities that have affected the status quo which are most familiar to the public are the tunnel excavations, the renovations of al-Marwani Mosque (also called Solomon's Stables) and the Mughrabi Ramp, but there have been other smaller-scale actions that have contributed to creating a new reality in and around the Temple Mount.

The Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif is not detached from the environment in which it is situated. Events in the Old City and in the village of Silwan are known to have a significant impact on tensions in the area and particularly on the situation on the compound. Emek Shaveh has discussed activities in the area in "From Silwan to the Temple Mount" (2013)<sup>1</sup> and "Jerusalem Underground" (2011).<sup>2</sup>

In the present document we will discuss the use of archaeological excavations, or excavations termed as archaeological, in the political struggle over the Temple Mount and its environs. Considering that any physical activity in the Old City and its surrounding area entails archaeological work (excavations, preservation, oversight etc.), it is only natural that this scientific discipline has been placed at the forefront of the political struggle.

1) Y. Mizrachi, "From Silwan to the Temple Mount - Archaeological Excavations as a Means of Control in the Village of Silwan and in Jerusalem's Old City," Emek Shaveh, 2013.

2) Y. Mizrachi, "Jerusalem Underground: The Excavation of Tunnels, Channels, and Underground Spaces in the Historic Basin," Emek Shaveh, 2011.

## Part 1 – The history of the site: How the Temple Mount became the Haram al- Sharif



The Dome of the Rock and the Dome of the Chain

The Haram al-Sharif site is a collection of magnificent buildings that exemplify the very best of local and Islamic architecture from the last thousand years. The significance of the site as a holy place in the Islamic tradition led to the construction of almost one-hundred buildings on the site, built between the 8th century CE and the 20th century. Apart from its religious significance, the precinct is a heritage site of international importance. This fact virtually goes unmentioned in the political and religious struggle over the precinct and has not been given due consideration.

### Characteristics of the site and the religious traditions

The Temple Mount, or al-Haram al-Sharif in Arabic (meaning ‘the Noble Sanctuary’), is a 140 dunam area (45 acres) located in the south-eastern corner of the Old City. Today it is used as a prayer and study site for Muslims and includes some of the oldest religious structures in the country that are still standing. The Jewish tradition identifies the site as the place of Mount Moriah, where the patriarch Abraham went to sacrifice his son Isaac. The site is identified as the place where the Temple – last destroyed in 70 CE – once stood. The Muslim tradition identifies the site with the “Farthest Mosque” mentioned in the Quran in the beginning of Sura 17: “Glory to (Allah) Who did take His servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque,

whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things).” Such is the description of the legendary journey by the Prophet Mohammed on his horse al-Buraq from Mecca to the “Farthest Mosque” whence the Prophet ascended to the heavens. The Dome of the Rock is associated with the site of the First Temple - ‘Solomon’s Temple,’ as it is referred to in Islam (‘Templum Salomonis’ as the Crusaders called it).

### The holy precinct today

Scholars differ over the dating of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif’s foundations. Most are of the opinion that at least the southern and western sections are ancient (from between the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE). Other sections were added later, up until the Islamic period (7th to 16th century CE). Nine gates lead up to the site. One of them, Sha’ar Harahamim or Baba al-Rahmeh (the Golden Gate), is sealed off. The Mount’s supporting walls feature two smaller gates that are not in use. Its southern wall features two additional sealed gates: the western section contains a double gate and the eastern section a triple arched gate (Hulda Gates). These sealed gates face the excavations of the Southern Wall.

The most well known structures on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif are Al-Aqsa Mosque located in the south-western corner, and the Dome of the Rock located in the center of the premises. In addition, the site contains buildings used as religious educational institutions (madrasas), memorials (the Dome of the Rock is one of them), towers, purification structures (al-Kas) and more. Some of the structures were built in the early Islamic period, the 8th century CE, some were built by the Mamluks during the 14th – 15th century CE, and others during the Ottoman period (16th-20th centuries CE). Several structures feature columns or capitals which, judging by their style, can be dated to the Crusader or to the Roman-Byzantine periods.

The Dome of the Rock is a memorial which in the present-day functions as a mosque. It is one of the oldest standing Islamic structures in the world. Preserved in its original state, not having undergone substantial modifications, it is considered to be an artistic and architectural wonder and a cornerstone in the history of Islamic art and architecture. Surrounding the interior is an inscription describing the construction of the mosque in the year 691, during the reign of the Caliph Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan (685-705) of the Umayyad Dynasty. Historians date Al-Aqsa Mosque in the south of the precinct to the beginning of the 8th century, the time of Abd al-Malik, or to the period of his son’s reign, al-Walid I (705-715). The structure was rebuilt several times and last renovated in 1035 during the Fatimid Caliphate, following the earthquake of 1033.



Of the many domes on the Temple Mount it is worth mentioning the Dome of the Ascension. Located north-west of the Dome of the Rock, it marks the spot associated with Mohammed's ascension to the heavens. The structure is dated to the 12th century, although some scholars say it was built in the 8th century. Another memorial is the Dome of the Prophet, also located north of the Dome of the Rock and built in the 16th century by Mohammed Bey. Like the Dome of the Ascension, some date its initial construction to the 8th century. The Dome of the Chain is yet another and is located to the east of the Dome of the Rock, also apparently built in the 8th century by the Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik.<sup>3</sup>

Other religious buildings adorn the precinct beginning with the Ayyubid period (12th-13th century), such as the minarets at the Gate of Bani Ghanim and minarets from the Mamluk period (the 14th century). Other unique structures from the Mamluk period are the Summer Pulpit (Minbar al-Saif) and the ablution fountain (called al-Kas). One of the most impressive and unique structures on the Temple Mount is the Madrasa al-Ashrafiya. Built in the 15th century, it is an example of Mamluk architecture at its best.<sup>4</sup>

### From the Temple Mount to the Haram al-Sharif

The Temple Mount was never methodically excavated and most of our knowledge about its history comes from historical texts and an analysis of architectural styles.<sup>5</sup> The three monotheistic faiths identify the site as Solomon's Temple from the 10th century BCE. Some scholars also identify the site as a place of ritual from Canaanite Jerusalem (18th-10th centuries BCE).

The most distinct antiquity linking the site with the Second Temple is the Western Wall dating to the end of the 1st century BCE or the beginning of the 1st century CE. It is one of the walls built to support the Temple plaza above it.<sup>6</sup> Archaeological excavations conducted to the south and west of the Temple Mount uncovered remains of capitals, ornaments and inscriptions that attest to the importance of the site during the early Roman period - the time of Second Temple. The archaeological finds from these excavations, including the rock with the inscription "To the Trumpeting Place,"

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3) M. Rosen-Ayalon, "An ancient source on the construction of the Dome of the Chain on the Temple Mount" (Heb), *Katedra* 11, 1979, pp.184-185.

4) M. Hamilton, *Mamluk Jerusalem: An architectural study*, London, 1987.

5) M. Rosen-Ayalon, "The Early Islamic Monuments of al-Haram al-Sharif, Jerusalem: An Iconographic Study", *Qedem - Volume 28*, Jerusalem, 1989.

6) T. Hirshfeld, "Discovery: Sections of the Western Wall were not built by Herod," (Heb) *Ynet*, 23.11.11

reinforce traditions that associate the Temple Mount with the site of the Second Temple.<sup>7</sup> It appears that part of the precinct was built in that period; however scholars are divided over the dating of the gates. Some scholars date the Southern Wall and the Huldah Gates to the Second Temple period, while others date several gates in the Southern Wall to the 8th century CE, the Umayyad period.<sup>8</sup>

Scholars are also divided over the question of what was built atop of the Temple Mount after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. The assumption is that in the 2nd century CE a pagan Roman temple was built under orders by the Emperor Hadrian. This temple was most probably destroyed in the beginning of the Byzantine period (the 4th century), and the precinct remained abandoned until the beginning of the early Islamic period in the 7th century.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the 7th century, as the Umayyad regime grew strong, the Temple Mount was developed as an Islamic prayer site. In addition to the construction of memorial structures and Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Umayyad regime encouraged pilgrimage to Jerusalem – most probably in an effort to prevent or lessen pilgrimage to Mecca – and in so doing enhanced the importance of the Haram al-Sharif in Islam.<sup>10</sup> At the end of the Umayyad period (the middle of the 8th century) Jerusalem's political importance in Islam diminished. Pilgrimage to the Temple Mount did not cease until the Crusader period (end of the 11th century).

Unlike the Byzantine Christians who turned the Temple Mount into a rubbish heap, the Crusaders continued to observe the sanctity of the site and to safeguard it. During the Crusader period, Al-Aqsa mosque was converted into a Church, as was the Dome of the Rock. The Crusaders gave the south-eastern section the name "Solomon's Stables." Following the Crusaders' defeat in the year 1187, the Muslims returned to the Temple Mount. From the Ayyubid period onward, the Muslims highlighted the sanctity of the site in response to Christian dominion over Jerusalem in general and the Temple Mount in particular during the preceding period. During the Mamluk period (13th-

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7) B. Mazar, "Jerusalem during the House of Herod in light of the excavations to the south and south-west of the Temple Mount" (Heb), *Katedra* 8, 1977, pp.29-41; O. Peleg-Barkat, "The Herodian Architectural Decoration in Light of Finds from the Temple Mount Excavations" (Heb), Jerusalem, 2007.

8) R. Shani and D. Chen, "On the Umayyad Dating of the Double Gate in Jerusalem," *Muqarnas* 18, 2001, pp. 1-40.

9) B. Isaac, "Jerusalem from the Great Revolt to the Reign of Constantine," pp.2-13; Y. Tsafir, "The Topography and Archaeology of Jerusalem in the Byzantine period," pp.323-330; Y. Tsafir and S. Safrai (editors) *The History of Jerusalem: The Roman and Byzantine periods (70-638 CE)*, Jerusalem: 1999.

10) A. Elad, "The Temple Mount in the early Muslim period," In Y. Reiter (ed.), *Sovereignty of God and Man – Sanctity and the political centrality on the Temple Mount*, Jerusalem: 2001, pp.57-109 (Heb).

16th centuries), Jerusalem did not serve as a financial or administrative center but its religious significance grew stronger. Most of the structures on the Temple Mount that are still intact were built during this period, and the construction in the area surrounding the Mount is also attributed to the Mamluk rulers. The Ottoman period (16th-20th centuries) saw the construction of religious monuments on the Temple Mount and its environs, and in Jerusalem many Islamic endowments transferred their income to the Haram al-Sharif.<sup>11</sup>



The Dome of the Ascension (right) and the Dome of the Prophet (left)

11) Y. Reiter, "Sanctity and Politics in the history of the Temple Mount," *Sovereignty of God and Man – Sanctity and the political centrality on the Temple Mount*, Jerusalem: 2001, pp.5-13. (Heb)

## Part II –Archaeology and Politics from 1967 to the Present Day

### Changes in Access Policies to the Temple Mount

Between the start of the 1st century CE until the end of the 19th century the Temple Mount had been off-limits to various populations. During Roman and Byzantine times Jews were prohibited from ascending the Mount. From the 7th century onward, with the exception of the Crusader period (12th century), the Temple Mount was closed to non-Muslims. This policy changed in 1885, when only high-ranking Christian visitors were permitted to enter the site. Another shift in policy took place during the British Mandate period, when non-Muslims were granted permission to ascend the Mount for a fee. Following the Six Day War (1967), it was decided to continue the British Mandate policy of maintaining the autonomy of the Islamic Waqf on the Mount. Today non-Muslims are permitted to enter the area only through the Mughrabi Gate. Orthodox Judaism, including the Chief Rabbinate, opposes Jews' ascension to the Temple Mount for religious reasons, out of concern that Jews might step on the site of the Holy of Holies (which no person was allowed to access during the Temple periods apart from the High Priest on the Day of Atonement). Today the exact site of the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount remains unknown. Since the Second Intifada (2001-2005), the Waqf decided to prohibit non-Muslim visitors from entering the mosques (Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock).

### Changes in the precinct: from 1967 to the opening of the Western Wall Tunnels in 1996

Following the Six Day War, the State of Israel began a process of transforming the area west of the Western Wall and south of the Temple Mount. As a first step, the Mughrabi neighborhood that abutted the wall was completely demolished on the evening of the 8th of July 1967, two days after the war ended. The neighborhood, first built in the 13th century, was completely erased apart from several houses on the western edge, and the area was transformed into the Western Wall prayer plaza.<sup>12</sup> UNESCO criticized the destruction of the neighborhood, which had included some of the most ancient and important Islamic structures in Jerusalem (al-Buraq Mosque, the Madrasa al-Afdaliya and others), and had played an important part in the history of the Old City and in defining the connection between the Maghreb and Jerusalem.

Israel's consent to leaving the Waqf with the responsibility for managing the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif came with a few significant modifications. The Madrasa al-

12) Y. Reiter and J. Seligman, "1917 to the Present: Al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and the Western Wall," O. Grabar and B. Z. Kedar (eds.), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade*, 2010, pp. 251.

Tankiziya (the 'Mahkamah') building, which overlooks the Temple Mount and is located near the Chain Gate, was turned over to the Israeli authorities as were the keys to the Mughrabi Gate.<sup>13</sup> Israel's demand to be in control of the Mughrabi Gate was initially rejected by the Islamic Waqf, which claimed that responsibility for the gates cannot be separated from the responsibility for the premises as a whole. Following negotiations and pressure placed by the Israeli authorities, responsibility for the Mughrabi Gate was transferred to the Israeli police. These decisions, coupled with the declaration that the sacred precinct is "an open public space" to which access is free, have been the basis for the physical and administrative changes in the status of the Temple Mount and its surroundings.<sup>14</sup>

Archaeology has also played a major role in changing the status of the area. In 1968, an archaeological excavation was initiated to the south of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Conducted by the Hebrew University, it was one of the first in a series of excavations intended to transform the Jewish Quarter and the Mughrabi neighborhood into Israeli areas. The excavations yielded remains from various periods in the history of Jerusalem including burial sites from the Abbasid period, structures from the Umayyad period, and remains from Byzantine and Roman times. In addition, remains and facilities dated to the Second Temple/ early Roman period were discovered.<sup>15</sup> The excavation area has been preserved as an archaeological park to the present day. Visitors must pay a fee to enter it through the Davidson Center.

In 1969 excavations in tunnels, today termed the "Western Wall Tunnels," had begun, extending from the Western Wall plaza towards the north and along the wall which surrounds the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. The digs carried out by the Ministry of Religion were not conducted as scientific excavations and lacked appropriate archaeological oversight.<sup>16</sup> They created a new underground surface area around the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif; even then they were perceived as a threat to Muslim rights over the Temple Mount.

One of the most heightened moments of tension during these excavations, which to a certain degree confirmed Muslim concerns that the digs extended beneath the Temple Mount, occurred in 1981: Workers on behalf of the Western Wall administration dug

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13) N. Al-Jubeih, "1917 to the Present: Basic Changes, but not Dramatic: Al-Haram Al-Sharif in the Aftermath of 1967," in O. Grabar and B.Z. Kedar (eds.), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet*, p. 275-277.

14) *Ibid*, pp. 277-281.

15) H. Geva, "List of Major Archaeological Activities in Jerusalem, 1967-1992," *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, 1994, pp. 325-330.

16) N. Al-Jubeih, "1917 to the Present: Basic Changes, but not Dramatic: Al-Haram Al-Sharif in the Aftermath of 1967," in Grabar and Kedar *Where Heaven and Earth Meet*, p. 276.

a tunnel in an area called "Warren's Gate" in the direction of the Temple Mount itself. Conflict ensued between representatives of the Islamic Waqf and the administration of the Western Wall. The Israeli authorities ordered the gate sealed with cement. Criticism of the changes Israel had introduced in the area surrounding the Temple Mount was one of the reasons UNESCO decided to declare Jerusalem as a World Heritage Site in Danger in 1982.<sup>17</sup>

Another significant change in the status of the Temple Mount followed the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994, when it was stated that a permanent peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians would take into account Jordanian interests and historical responsibility for the holy sites. In practice, Jordan continues to pay the salaries of the Waqf employees, and is the central authority with whom Israel negotiates all things concerning the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.

Israeli excavations and destruction of built-up areas since 1967 in the area around the precinct have completely transformed the landscape of the Old City. From densely built Palestinian neighborhoods reaching the walls of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, the area has been converted into a non-residential area, part of which (the Western Wall plaza) serves as a place for prayer, part of which is an archaeological park and is known as the "Southern Wall excavations" (the Davidson Center), and large parts of which have been excavated underground creating historical attractions that strengthen the connection between Jews and the Temple. Israeli activity has drawn massive Israeli presence to these places, and tensions at the Temple Mount and its immediate environs have increased. The gates of the Haram al-Sharif were the last line of defense for the Waqf who struggled to maintain its status on the site, a struggle that is still ongoing. Tensions and concerns over Israel's suffocation of the Mount reached new heights in 1996 with the opening the Western Wall Tunnels.

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17) *Ibid*, p. 257



## The events of 1996: renovations of Al-Marwani Mosque and the destruction of antiquities

In 1996, following the inauguration of the Western Wall Tunnels extending towards the Via Dolorosa, riots broke out in which tens of Israelis and Palestinians lost their lives. The riots damaged the cooperation between the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) and the Waqf. Representatives of the IAA confess that since the beginning of 1996 it has been difficult to implement archaeological oversight over the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, works had begun by the Islamic Waqf on Al-Marwani Mosque to build a prayer area underneath the platform in the south-eastern section of the precinct, east of Al-Aqsa Mosque.<sup>19</sup> The renovation works on Al-Marwani Mosque were conducted using heavy machinery that caused significant damage to antiquities. Many tons of earth removed from the site were dumped into the Kidron Valley, the Abu Dis dump, and other areas. No archaeologists were involved in the works which were probably conducted without proper oversight.<sup>20</sup> The State Comptroller's report from 2011 discusses failings in overseeing the works and in the process of obtaining licenses to conduct development works on the Temple Mount in the years 2001-2007: "Significant failings were found in implementing oversight over most of the works during the period to which this report refers (2001-2007). These works were undertaken without any prior coordination with the authorities in charge with law enforcement at the Temple Mount and without receiving the necessary approval or permits as required."<sup>21</sup>

It appears that amongst Israeli and Palestinian professionals no one questions the fact that antiquities were indeed destroyed in the course of renovating Al-Marwani Mosque, but each side interprets the developments differently. Israel views the destruction of antiquities from the point-of-view of Israeli law and a perspective that the Temple Mount is part of an area under Israeli jurisdiction. The Palestinians claim that not only had there been agreements between Israel and the Waqf concerning renovations of Al-Marwani Mosque, but that the Haram al-Sharif should be regarded as a Muslim precinct subject to Jordanian law.<sup>22</sup> According to Jordanian law, the Jordanian Antiquities Authority does not have the right to oversee works by the Islamic Waqf at the Haram

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18) G. Avni and J. Seligman, "The Temple Mount 1917-2001, Documentation, Research and the Preservation of Antiquities, Jerusalem," 2001 (Heb); "Solomon's Stables, the Temple mount, Jerusalem: The Events Concerning the Destruction of Antiquities 1999-2001" *Atiqot* 56, pp. 33-53.

19) The works were conducted in cooperation with the Islamic Movement in Israel.

20) J. Seligman, "Solomon's Stables, The Temple Mount, Jerusalem," *Atiqot* 56, p. 42.

21) State Comptroller's report for 2010, 'The issue of works at the Temple Mount', 2011, pp.1843-1844.

22) J. Seligman, "Solomon's Stables, The Temple Mount, Jerusalem," *Atiqot* 56, p. 41.

al-Sharif, and the same is true for the Israel Antiquities Authority.<sup>23</sup>

Al-Marwani Mosque ("King's Solomon's Stables") is located in a space bordering the Hulda Gates and the Southern Wall excavations conducted by Israel in the years 1968-1982. Following the opening of the Western Wall Tunnels, the Waqf grew concerned that Israel was planning to open the Hulda Gates in order to convert "King Solomon's Stables" into a Jewish prayer site.<sup>24</sup> From the point-of-view of the Waqf, the Jews had objected to the renovations at Al-Marwani Mosque not because antiquities were destroyed but because Jewish groups had designs on the space and saw it as an opportunity to build a synagogue in the sacred precinct.<sup>25</sup>



The entrance to Al-Marwani Mosque

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23) For more information about the lack of involvement by the Jordanian authorities in the administration of the precinct see Y. Reiter & J. Seligman, "1917 to the Present: Al-Haram al-Sharif/ Temple Mount and the Western Wall," Grabar and Kedar. *Where Heaven and Earth Meet* pp. 244-248.

24) Y. Al-Natshe, The Al-Marwani Mosque – "Between Past Goals and Future Threats," Tourism and Antiquities Administration - The Waqf, Jerusalem 2012 (Arabic).

25) N. Al-Jubeh, "1917 to the Present: Basic Changes, but not Dramatic: Al-Haram Al-Sharif in the Aftermath of 1967," in Grabar and Kedar. *Where Heaven and Earth Meet*, p. 281.

It is difficult to assess the extent of the destruction to antiquities at the Temple Mount for several reasons. First, in the absence of an archaeologist during the works, there is no one to offer a professional opinion on the matter. Second, the strong criticism over the destruction at the site is probably motivated by a desire possessed by many to see Israel gain full sovereignty over the Temple Mount. At the same time, the Waqf is working intentionally to strengthen Muslim hold over the Mount and its considerations are primarily political. Protecting antiquities is not one of their most pressing priorities. Yet over the years many reports and articles were published discussing the extent of the destruction and the importance of the finds destroyed. It seems as though most of the remains that have been damaged date to Islamic periods, beginning with the Umayyad Dynasty (7th century) through to the Ottoman period (the 19th century). This is the opinion held by archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority.<sup>26</sup> The assumption is that during the works conducted by the Waqf, some remains dating to the Second Temple period were also damaged, but it appears as though these were few, and their quality remains unknown.<sup>27</sup>

In 2000 a “Public Committee against the Destruction of Antiquities on the Temple Mount” was established.<sup>28</sup> It succeeded to recruit an impressive list of Knesset members, public figures, leading writers and intellectuals, as well as figures identified with the Israeli Left, or people who were not involved in political activism<sup>29</sup> who had come out against the destruction of antiquities on the Temple Mount. Much of the criticism voiced by the committee focused on the destruction of remains from the Second Temple period. Although growing religious extremism and nationalism in Jerusalem has distanced many of the original committee members from the committee or from its activities,<sup>30</sup> the list of supporters can testify to the widespread interest among the Israeli public in the archaeology of the Temple Mount.<sup>31</sup>

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26) J. Seligman, “Solomon’s Stables, The Temple Mount, Jerusalem: The Events Concerning the Destruction of Antiquities 1999–2001,” *Atiqot* 56, pp. 33-53

27) *Ibid*, p. 45.

28) The internet site of the “The Public Committee Against the Destruction of Antiquities on the Temple Mount” (<http://templemountdestruction.com/e/Home/tabid/160/Default.aspx>, accessed 15 Dec, 2014)

29) The Internet site of the “Public Committee Against the Destruction of Antiquities on the Temple Mount,” Committee Members.

30) N. Hasson, “Intellectuals deny association with Temple Mount Pressure Group,” *Haaretz*, 19 February, 2014.

31) See also the signatories of the petition, A call to prevent additional destruction of antiquities on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (Heb.) (<http://www.echad.info/templemount/letter.htm>, accessed 15 Dec, 2014).

The renovations in Al-Marwani Mosque led to growing pressure and criticism of the Israeli authorities and a demand for closer oversight over activities on the Mount. Although Jewish groups working to change the status quo at the Temple Mount had existed prior to the Al-Marwani renovations, since then, complaints about the destruction of antiquities have been used to galvanize support and serve as the main justification for those arguing to defend the Temple Mount and its heritage which, they allege, is being destroyed by the Islamic Waqf.<sup>32</sup>

It ought to be noted that from 2005 to the present day there is an ongoing project called “The Temple Mount Sifting Project” offering experiential activities for students and other visitors in an area outside the Old City, called “Tzurim Valley” at the foot of the Palestinian A-Tur neighborhood. It is conducted with the support of the Elad Foundation (a settlers’ foundation that also manages the visitors’ center at the Mount of Olives and the archaeological site ‘The City of David’). The sifting project is not an archaeological excavation and has no scientific value. Its stated aim is to discover remains from the Temple or other Jewish antiquities, but in practice very little earth has been sifted, and from every possible perspective it cannot provide credible information about the extent of destruction at the Temple Mount. This is an example of a project that combines concern for antiquities with a religious, national and political agenda.<sup>33</sup>

### Changes in the status quo over the past year

During the summer of 2014 we have witnessed unprecedented developments in the activities of the Israeli authorities around the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.<sup>34</sup> In August 2014 Israel began building a new temporary ramp for non-Muslim visitors to ascend the Temple Mount. Several days later, after Jordan had put pressure on the Israeli government, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu gave instructions to dismantle the ramp and stated that the construction was undertaken without the knowledge of the Prime Minister’s Office.<sup>35</sup> The subject of constructing an entryway is a political issue that first emerged when the previous Mughrabi bridge collapsed in 2004. Since then,

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32) Information about the Jewish groups active at the Temple Mount can be found in a report by Ir Amim and the Keshev Foundation: Y. Beer “Dangerous liaison – the dynamics of rise of the Temple movements and their implications,” (Heb) March 2013.

33) R. Greenberg and Y.Mizrachi “Archaeology on a slippery slope: Elad’s sifting project in Emek Tzurim National Park,” *Emek Shaveh* 2012; G. Barkai and Y. Zweig “The Temple Mount Sifting Project,” *New Studies on Jerusalem* E. Baruch, Z.Greenhut, and A. Faust (eds.), 2006.

34) Emek Shaveh, “Construction of a New Temporary Ramp Beside Mughrabi Ramp,” 15 August 2014.

35) B. Ravid and N. Hasson “PM orders removal of wooden ramp at Temple Mount, following pressure from Jordan,” *Haaretz*, September 3, 2014.

Israel has been trying to reach an agreement with the Jordanian government and the Waqf about building a new bridge.<sup>36</sup> The issue of the Mughrabi bridge is linked to the question of control over entrances and passages to the Temple Mount. As mentioned, today the temporary ramp is the only place through which non-Muslims can enter the Temple Mount and it is under the jurisdiction of the Israeli police.

In 2014 a sign was placed in an area called the 'Little Western Wall' requesting the public to respect the sanctity of the site. The Jerusalem Municipality had placed the sign even though the 'Little Western Wall' was never recognized as a holy site. The 'Little Western Wall' is a small section of the western supporting wall of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif adjacent to the Iron Gate (Bab Al-Hadid), through which Muslims can enter the Temple Mount. It is considered the closest place to where the Holiest of Holies once stood where Jews can now pray. The wall measures 10 meters in length and in recent years it has been serving as a prayer area for Jews, particularly on Fridays. Allowing access to Jews creates friction between the Palestinians living near the site and the Jews who come to pray there.<sup>37</sup> The presence of Jews praying near the Iron Gate allows them to have an impact on events at the entrance to the precinct.

The struggle over who controls the gates to the Temple Mount has reached new heights following the decision by the Israeli police to close some of the gates during the morning hours; especially during visiting times for Jews and other non-Muslims (the consequence is to limit access for Muslims to the Mount). This issue is one of the main areas through which Israeli authorities are trying to affect change in the status quo on the Mount. Control over the gates means control over people entering and exiting the Mount, which can be justified by security needs or presented as something that does not undermine the status of the Islamic Waqf; in actual fact, it clearly signifies growing Israeli control over the precinct. In addition to closing some of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif gates to Muslims, one must add the decision to build the Mughrabi Ramp without coordination with the Jordanian government or the Waqf. It seems that even if these activities were undertaken without the knowledge of the Prime Minister's Office, they were carried out as part of efforts to strengthen Israeli control over the entrance to the precinct and are motivated by a conviction that, with respect to the gates leading to the Temple Mount, the time has come to create unilateral facts on the ground.



The Iron Gate leading to the Haram al-Sharif

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36) A discussion of the Mughrabi Ramp by Emek Shaveh in "Why is the Mughrabi Ramp a political issue?" 9 Sept, 2014.

37) A. Eldar, "Jerusalem opens Muslim Quarter Jewish site to prayer, upsetting status quo," *Haaretz*, January 14, 2011.



## Conclusion and Lessons

The Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif precinct has seen many changes over the centuries, but beginning with the 8th century, and particularly after the defeat of the Crusaders in the 12th century, it evolved as a holy site for Muslims. The most significant changes occurred immediately after the 1967 War: on the one hand Israel continued to respect the status of Islamic Waqf on the Temple Mount, but on the other hand it created the conditions for changing this status. The most well-known instance of this is Israel gaining control over the Mughrabi Gate and the establishment of a police department in the 'Mahkamah' building, which overlooks the Mount.

Immediately after the Six Day War Israel created a new area around the Temple Mount: The Mughrabi Quarter was destroyed, archaeological excavations took place all along the southern side of the precinct, and later underground excavations were conducted from the Western Wall plaza extending under the Muslim Quarter, and up against the western wall of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. During the excavations of the tunnels there was at least one incident when excavators penetrated under the area of the Temple Mount itself.

The most significant change took place in 1996 with the opening of the Western Wall Tunnels and the works on Al-Marwani Mosque, in the area called "Solomon's Stables" underneath Al-Aqsa Mosque. Some Jewish groups who seek to convert that space into a Jewish place of prayer were motivated by this event to increase their struggle to expand Jewish presence at the Temple Mount. Alongside criticism of the destruction of antiquities at the Temple Mount there has been an increase in public delegitimization of the Waqf's role in administering the site. These dynamics escalated reaching new heights in the summer of 2014, with the attempt to rebuild the Mughrabi Ramp and modify the opening hours at the gates to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.

When reviewing Israeli involvement in East Jerusalem in general and in the area surrounding the Temple Mount in particular - i.e. the Old City and the village of Silwan - there can be no doubt but that Israel is interested in safeguarding and entrenching its authority in this area. The Israeli authorities and settler NGOs invest their best efforts in transforming Silwan into a tourist site and into the settlement of 'The City of David' (see Emek Shaveh's publication *From Silwan to the Temple Mount*, 2012). At the same time,

the Old City is undergoing unprecedented development of a nature which emphasizes the Jewish connection to Jerusalem and the Jewish people's historic rights in the city. These, along with the years of neglect of the Palestinian population in the city and the solidification of the Israeli perception that the Old City of Jerusalem will remain Israeli for eternity, have prepared the ground for the demand to change of the status quo at the Temple Mount.

If Israel changes the landscape of the Old City and the nature of Israeli presence in the area surrounding the Temple Mount, then it should come as no surprise that the next logical step would be to affect changes in the precinct itself. Even if Israel officially distances itself from Jewish groups who ascend the Temple Mount and who are demanding a change in the status quo, its activities around and even in the precinct itself attest to the fact that the situation at the Temple Mount has been marked by instability since 1967. The change we have witnessed in recent years is a rise in the number of people who are calling for full Israeli control over the compound.

Following decades of archaeological excavations, and with the increase in the political exploitation of the archaeology at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, it is necessary to take some steps to restore trust and cooperation between the sides. Alongside political steps, such as recognizing the special status of the Islamic Waqf and its right to manage the Haram al-Sharif without interference by Israeli parties, the sides must strive to work cooperatively based on UNESCO's and ICOMOS<sup>38</sup> international resolutions. These resolutions, which deal with the preservation and development of heritage sites, could become the basis for dialogue about antiquities and the importance of tradition, a step which could mitigate religious and political tensions.

The only way to preserve the religious and historic status of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif over time is a political agreement that would recognize the precinct as one of Jerusalem's most significant and central heritage sites. In this way, the precinct would be recognized not only as important to Islam but as one of the most important heritage sites in the world. Israeli society must accept that it has been a central sacred place for Muslims for a thousand years or more.

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38) International Council on Monuments and Sites



The Dome of the Prophet



The Dome of the Ascension and the Dome of the Rock

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לאמק שאוה עמושביר

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