The background of the entire page is a photograph of ancient ruins in a desert landscape. In the foreground, several tall, cylindrical stone columns stand on a sandy ground. The columns are made of light-colored stone and have a fluted design. In the background, there are more ruins, including walls and smaller columns, and a large, rounded hill under a clear blue sky.

**The role of ancient sites in the political struggle
in the Bethlehem area (“Gush Etzion”)
and their economic and educational potential**

emek shaveh

למק שורה עמושביה

2015

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February 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.

This publication was produced by Emek Shaveh (CIC) with the support of the HEKS foundation. Emek Shaveh is the sole responsible party for the information contained in this publication. It does not represent the opinion of the abovementioned donor.

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Introduction

“Gush Etzion,” as many Israelis refer to it, is located in the West Bank bordering on Jerusalem to its north. It includes the area to the west and east of the Palestinian city of Bethlehem. To its south it borders on Palestinian towns and villages in the Hebron area (the villages of Halhul, Sa'ir and others).

Over the past two years, politicians have become more vocal in their demands to apply Israeli sovereignty to this area, and many Israelis assume that most of it will remain in Israeli hands in any future political agreement. The antiquities sites located in the area play a central role in the political drive to annex Gush Etzion. To support this plan, the government of Israel is investing millions of shekels in the development of antiquities sites such as Herodium and the Biyar Aqueduct, while highlighting their importance to the history of the Jewish people. At the same time, they ignore or devote very little attention to the history of the site through other periods.

Hundreds of thousands of visitors regard this stretch of land as a site rich in antiquities, detached from a political context, and the presence of foreign tourists and Israeli visitors at these sites strengthens Israel's claim to the area. Contrary to the increased presence of Israeli visitors, there is almost no Palestinian presence in the open areas outside the cities and villages in the Bethlehem region.. In the context of the ongoing political struggle, the large numbers of Israeli visitors reinforce the Israeli-Jewish connection to the place and to its history.

This publication is divided into two sections. In the first section we will examine how Israel and the settlers utilize antiquities sites for political, educational and economic ends. The second section will discuss the potential educational and economic benefits for developing a tourism industry around these antiquities sites by and for local Palestinians. It is our opinion that the struggle over the local heritage is inseparable from the political struggle. Because ancient sites are the principal testimony to this land's rich history, these sites could become a significant resource for studying the region's past and serve Palestinian tourism development by increasing the numbers of visitors to the area. While Israel makes effective use of antiquities sites for political, educational and economic ends, it appears that Palestinian society does not yet regard antiquities as a central component of its identity and has yet to become aware of their importance to its political struggle. We will propose three possible tour routes to antiquity sites that are either located close to Palestinian villages or are accessible to Palestinians. The information is predominantly archaeological and is based on existing research.

Part 1: Archaeological sites in the service of the settlements

1. Israel's definition of the area

Between 1943 and 1947, four Israeli settlements were founded in the area called Gush Etzion¹. The Jordanian army destroyed the settlements in the war of 1948, and they were rebuilt following the 1967 War when Israel occupied the West Bank. In 1980 Gush Etzion was declared a municipal entity².



- 1) Peace Now, [Gush Etzion](#)
- 2) [Yeshu Council Website](#) (Hebrew)

In the narrow sense of the word, the term “Gush Etzion” refers to the area between Bethlehem and Hebron, between the Elah valley in the west and route 60 in the east. Approximately one hundred thousand residents live in this area (not including the city of Bethlehem). Most of them are either national-religious or ultraorthodox Jews (about 70,000 residents) and the rest are Palestinians, most of whom are Muslim. The cities of Efrat and Beitar Illit, among the largest in the West Bank, are located outside the historic area of Gush Etzion.³ A much broader definition, the one which is utilized by the Gush Etzion Regional Council (see map), also includes large areas to the east of route 60 extending to the municipal boundary of Ma’ale Adumim in the north – an area which is seven times larger than the historic area of Gush Etzion.⁴

Great efforts are being made to link up “eastern Gush Etzion” to the Gush Etzion settlements west of route 60 and to the road to Beit Shemesh, west of Jerusalem. In 2005 a road linking Herodium to the southeast of Jerusalem towards the Har Homa settlement in East Jerusalem was built and shortened the drive from Herodium to Jerusalem to ten minutes. Until then, the only road to Herodium passed to the south of Bethlehem; this is a relatively long route, winding through Palestinian villages, and the traffic on it is minimal.⁵

Another attempt at buttressing the link between Israel and Gush Etzion is the planned road between Gush Ezsion and the Dead Sea that is predicted to cost about 35 million shekels. In September 2013 several ministers and the head of the Gush Etzion council held a tour along the route of the road in order to promote it.⁶ The planned route would connect the settlements of Tekoa and Nokdim and Herodium National Park with the west of Gush Etzion, and then link up the Judean foothills (the Beit Shemesh area) to Gush Etzion and the Dead Sea. One of the people most active in advancing this plan is the Foreign Minister in the previous government, Avigdor Lieberman, who lives in the settlement of Nokdim.

When Israeli politicians state that they wish to annex Gush Etzion to the State of Israel,⁷ it is unclear what is the exact area to which they are referring. Is it Gush Etzion as it was defined until 1948? Or the “Gush” as it was redrawn by the settlements that have been built since 1967, and as it appears in the maps of the Yesha Council?

3) Idan Landau (blog), [Not to die stupid](#), (Hebrew), 10 August, 2009.

4) See Route Map at the [Gush Etzion Tourism Site](#)

5) H. Fendel, [Herod's Grave Uncovered](#), *Arutz Sheva*, 8 May 2007

6) A. Atali “[The coalition is advancing a new road in Gush Etzion](#)” *nrg*, 17 September, 2013.

7) O. Hadad, “[MK Ayelet Shaked: Annex Gush Etzion](#)” (Hebrew), *Mako*, 16 June 2014.

2. The Tourism Industry

The tourism industry has contributed 4% to the gross national product of the State of Israel in 2013. Almost half of its contribution (\$5 billion of a total of \$11.5 billion) is from foreign tourism.⁸ In the Palestinian Authority, tourism accounts for less than 3% of the gross national product.⁹ By comparison, in Jordan tourism contributes approximately 21% of the gross national product, with an annual income (2013) of \$7 billion.¹⁰

Christian pilgrims constitute a significant portion of foreign tourism in Israel and Palestine. Their itineraries are comprised of sacred sites and sites associated with the history of the Holy Land.

Area C, which includes 60% of the area of the West Bank and is under full Israeli control, contains 6000 archaeological sites.¹¹ Some of them have an as yet untapped tourism potential. Many of these sites constitute, for example, a single ancient agricultural facility such as a wine press, olive press or an ancient quarry.

The central sites in the West Bank are managed by Israel’s Nature and Parks Authority. Hundreds of thousands of visitors frequent these sites annually, including Qumran, Herodium, the Tomb of Samuel, and Mount Gerizim. Two sites that have been subject to accelerated development and are managed by settler foundations are Susya and Tel Shiloh.

2.1 The development of tourism in the Bethlehem area by the Palestinian Authority

In 2005 the Palestinian Authority in collaboration with UNESCO presented a list of 20 unique nature and heritage sites situated within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.¹² Of those, the ones located in the area Israel calls Gush Etzion are:

“**El Bariyah: Wilderness with Monasteries**” – the Judean Desert and the Byzantine monasteries within it (Mar Saba, the Hariton Cave and more), including Herodium.¹³

8) Z. Reinstein, “[Record year for incoming tourism](#),” *Ynetnews*, 10 January 2014.

9) “[West Bank and Gaza: Area C and the Future of the Palestinian Economy](#),” World Bank website.

10) Knoema World Data Atlas, [Jordan Travel & Tourism total contribution to GDP](#).

11) R. Greenberg and A. Keinan, “[Israeli Archaeological Activity in the West Bank 1967-2007: A Sourcebook](#),” 2009.

12) [Inventory of Cultural and Natural Heritage Sites of potential outstanding universal value in PALESTINE](#) “Yes... Bethlehem is a World Heritage site”

13) [El Bariyah: Wilderness with Monasteries](#), UNESCO World Heritage Convention, Tentative Lists.

“**Qanat el-Sabil**” – The aqueducts leading to Jerusalem including the “Biyar Aqueduct” in the east of the southern West Bank. The aqueducts, some of which were built in the late Roman period, carry spring water from the Hebron area through Solomon’s Pools to the south of the village of el-Khader and then to Jerusalem.

“**Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines**” – In the western area of the village of Battir. Ancient traditional agricultural practices characteristic of communities from the mountain area have been preserved in Battir. These are characterized by terraces and irrigation systems based on reservoirs where the water accumulates and from where it is then distributed to cultivated fields.

Once Palestine was accepted as a member of UNESCO in 2011, the site ‘El Bariyah: Wilderness with Monasteries’ was included in Palestine’s tentative list of world heritage sites.¹⁴ In 2014 the site ‘Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines’ in the village of Battir was awarded the status of a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.¹⁵ Parallel to the inclusion of these sites in the UNESCO list, resources have been invested in developing tourism in Battir, and recently an ecological museum was built in the village.¹⁶

The most important site in Palestine is the city of Bethlehem. While Bethlehem is already an established destination for tourists, especially for Christian pilgrims, the archaeological wealth in the surrounding villages—Battir, Hussan, Nahalin, and Wadi Fukin to the east and Herodium to the west—offer a great potential for package tours that combine visits to Christian holy sites in Bethlehem with day trips to antiquities and natural sites around the city, providing a rich learning experience of the history of this area.

2.2 The development of tourism in Gush Etzion by Israel

In recent years, significant efforts are undertaken to develop tourism in Gush Etzion as part of the branding campaign titled “an Israeli Home.” In 2008, its sites registered 400,000 visits and 30,000 overnight stays were recorded. This marked a 10% increase compared to 2007.¹⁷ According to the Gush Etzion Regional Council, the number

of visitors in 2009 reached 450,000.¹⁸ Many of the tourists visited the area on the intermediate days of the Passover and Succoth (Feast of the Tabernacles) festivals. In April 2014, 10,000 visitors were recorded in one day.¹⁹

Tourist sites and activities in Gush Etzion include a museum in Kfar Etzion, heritage sites, wineries, family fun activities, tours, and visits to archaeological sites.²⁰ Tourism is an important means for cultivating solidarity with the settlement project and with the settlers. The Mayor of the Gush Etzion Regional Council said, “It is amazing to note how the number of visitors steadily increases from one festival to another (...) the people of Israel vote with their feet and are saying that Gush Etzion is an Israeli home.”²¹

The two most popular archaeological sites in the area for Israeli visitors are Herodium and the Biyar Aqueduct. The Ministry of Tourism had begun investing in the development of these sites in 2002,²² and investments continued to be forthcoming during the periods when rightwing parties controlled the ministry between 2001-2004 and 2009-2013.²³

14) UNESCO World Heritage Center, Tentative Lists, Palestine. The term “tentative list” refers to a list that a given country wishes to have recognized as a “World Heritage Site.” As of January 2015, there are 14 sites in Palestine’s tentative list, and one recognized site (Battir).

15) Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir, UNESCO World Heritage Convention, News.

16) Battir Landscape Ecomuseum

17) “A 10% increase in tourism in Gush Etzion” (Hebrew), *Ynet*, 9 February 2009.

18) I. Rosenblum, “Tourism Ministry pledges money for West Bank settlement hotels,” *Haaretz*, 27 June 2010.

19) Y. Kirov, “Thousands in Gush Etzion”, the people of Israel vote with their feet” (Hebrew), *Arutz 7*, 16 April 2013.

20) *Ibid.*

21) *Ibid.*

22) C. Hawley, “Israel pushes tourism on occupied land,” *BBC News*, 6 February 2002

23) All ministers in the Ministry of Tourism, Knesset website.

3. Sites

3.1 Herodium (Jabel el -Fureidis)

Herodium is one of the central archaeological sites in the West Bank and was declared a national park in 1985. The site is identified as a palace and fortress built by Herod in the 1st century BCE. Like many of the building projects attributed to Herod, Herodium too was built according to a unique plan and inspired by Roman architecture. Mount Herodium is in fact an artificial hill that was cast on top of a natural hill. At the center of Herodium is a magnificent fortified palace. Tunnels from the palace lead halfway down into the mountain. At the foot of the mountain, in an area referred to as “lower Herodium,” a large pool was discovered (46x70 meters) surrounded by colonnades and a garden. This whole extravagant complex demonstrates the unique technological capabilities characteristic of monumental buildings from the Roman period.

In the years 66-70 CE, during the Great Revolt of the Jews against the Romans, groups of Jewish rebels took refuge in the fortress. During the 2nd century CE, the site was used by the troops fighting in the Bar Kochva revolt (132-135 CE), and was then abandoned until the 5th century CE. Finds from the Byzantine period (5th-7th century CE) attest to the presence of monks at the site, and perhaps also to a settlement. During this period some of the palace’s rooms were used as dwellings and three churches were built on the summit of the hill. Excavations yielded many finds in lower Herodium from that period.²⁴ From the seventh century CE the site was abandoned and remained in this state until the 20th century when a Palestinian community, el-Fureidis, was established at the site.

Taking a lead from the writings of the 1st century Jewish historian Josephus Flavius who noted that Herod was buried in Herodium, archaeologists excavated at the site for about thirty years. In 2007, following the discovery of fragments of an ornate sarcophagus (a burial tomb made of stone), a delegation of excavators announced the discovery of Herod’s tomb. The sarcophagus was identified as the coffin in which Herod’s body was laid to rest.²⁵ The discovery and the suggested identification (which is subject to debate) have increased the importance of Herodium as a principal site that attracts many visitors.

With the discovery of the site suggested as Herod’s tomb, the former head of Gush Etzion Regional Council, Shaul Goldstein (now the director-general of the Nature

24) E. Netzer, “Herodium”, from A. Stern (editor), *The New Encyclopedia for Archaeological Excavations in the Land of Israel*, 1992, Vol.2, pp.450-460 (Hebrew).

25) E. Netzer et al, “Herod’s grave and a Royal Theatre on the Slopes of Mount Herodium”, *Kadmoniot*, 2009, Jerusalem, p. 138 (Hebrew).

and Parks Authority), said: “the discovery of Herod’s tomb in Herodium, one of the most intriguing structures of the ancient world, is yet further proof of the strong links between Gush Etzion and the history of the Jewish people and Jerusalem...”²⁶

This statement reflects the shift in the Israeli attitude towards Herod in the past few decades. For generations Herod was regarded within the Jewish tradition as a king who was antagonistic toward the Jews. In the Christian tradition Herod is noted for his decision to kill the children of Bethlehem with the birth of Jesus (“the Massacre of the Innocents”).²⁷ His Edomite background was emphasized (it was written that his grandfather had converted from Judaism) and his Jewishness was cast in doubt. The Halachic literature from the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE sharply criticized Herod and his cruelty,²⁸ and in certain periods he was considered a pariah due to his character and conduct.

Herodium is a unique site from the early Roman period from which we can learn a great deal about the architectural style prevalent in the Roman world and in this region in particular during the 1st century CE. It offers a window onto the relationship between Roman culture prevalent throughout the Mediterranean area, and the unique local culture.

Herodium should be presented to the public as a site that can teach us about the impact of Roman culture on our region. Yet today, all the activity at the site focuses on the history of King Herod and the Jewish revolt against the Romans.²⁹ Presenting Herodium as a site which belongs almost exclusively to the history of the Jewish people undermines its importance for understanding the complex cultural life in this part of the world during the 1st century CE. Designing the experience at Herodium to feel as though the site is associated exclusively with Jewish national heritage is clearly motivated by the attempt to establish Gush Etzion as a central site in Jewish history in the public perception. This attitude coincides with the settlers’ political agenda and the notion prevalent among the general public that almost every archaeological remains dated to the early Roman period – the Second Temple period – is associated with the history of the Jewish people.

In February 2013, an exhibition about King Herod opened at the Israel Museum. The museum’s decision to focus on the archaeological finds discovered at Herodium to the point of reconstructing Herod’s ornate tomb, and displaying tons of rocks from the site,

26) L. Shoval, “The mystery has been solved: Herod's grave has been discovered”, *Ynet*, 8 May 2007, (Hebrew).

27) The Gospel According to Matthew, 2, 15-18.

28) M.Stern, “Herod’s Reign,” The Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 1992, pp.10-20 (Hebrew)

29) Herodium National Park [on the website of the Nature and Parks Authority](#)

invited visitors to associate the exhibition with Herodium and the settlements of Gush Etzion. In our estimation, ever since the exhibition at the Israel Museum first opened, the number of visitors at Herodium has increased and identification of the site with the heritage of the Jewish people has grown stronger.

In addition to the archaeological excavations and conservation at Herodium, money has been invested in a parking lot, improving access routes, building a visitors center, and producing a film about Herod's funeral procession. Between 2010 and 2014, nine million shekels were invested in developing the Herodium National Park³⁰ as part of a more general investment in tourism in Area C. In 2010 the state of Israel launched the "National Heritage Sites" initiative, which includes archaeological and tourist destinations in Israel and the West Bank. In the first stage, 400 million shekels were invested in this initiative.³¹ The Ministry of Tourism allocated 16 million shekels to this initiative (a multi-year allocation which has been only partly utilized).³²

Various tourist sites are emerging in the area surrounding Herodium, for example the Tekoa artists village and the Sde-Bar farm, an agricultural farm located in the "eastern part of Gush Etzion, at the foothills of Herodium, the Palace of King Herod."³³ The artists' village and the farm both note their proximity to Herodium in their brochure – a central tourist attraction in the area. After visiting the antiquities site, tourists are directed to restaurants and other businesses in the neighboring settlements. Clearly, Herodium has become a central asset for the neighboring Jewish settlements, which are the direct beneficiaries from the development of tourism at the site. Yet, these development plans do not include the Palestinians who live in the nearby villages of Palestinian Teqoa, el-Fureidis, Za'tara, Khirbet a-Deir and others.

Apart from Qumran, Herodium is the national park that attracts the greatest number of visitors in the West Bank. According to the data from the Nature and Parks Authority³⁴ and the World Bank, 86,000 people visited Herodium in 2012 contributing to an estimated income of almost half a million dollars.³⁵ This figure does not include

30) Peace Now, Instead of tax hikes - stop indulging the settlements, 30 July 2013. See also Y. Karni, Ministry to invest millions in settlement tourism, *Ynetnews*, 20 September 2010.

31) Y. Mizrachi, "Israel's "National Heritage Sites" Project in the West Bank: Archeological importance and political significance", *Emek Shaveh*, 2011.

32) T. Avital, "Exclusive to "Kalkalist": 400 million shekels to 150 national heritage sites", *Kalkalist*, 19 February, 2010 (Hebrew)

33) Gush Etzion tourism website

34) Data received orally from the site's management.

35) World Bank Report "West Bank and Gaza: Area C and the future of the Palestinian Economy" (2013), p. 24.

income from other activities in the area, such as the selling of food and souvenirs, and the economic profits to small businesses in the area: transportation, restaurants, accommodation and more.

3.2 The Biyar Aqueduct

The Biyar Aqueduct is situated on agricultural land at the foothills of the settlement Efrat to its west on the western side of the Gush Etzion block and west of Bethlehem. It is not included in the list of Palestinian national heritage sites, but was mentioned in a preliminary list of sites. The site appears on the route of "the historic trail of the Land of Israel," which is a sort of addendum to the National Heritage Sites initiative. The trail is recommended as way to strengthen the connection between the Israeli public with the route that traverses the length and breadth of the country, and includes sites that are associated with Jewish history and identity in the Land of Israel.

The Biyar Aqueduct originates at the Biyar Spring and is 4.7 km long. The aqueduct is a water supply system most of which consists of narrow tunnels carved in the rock. The aqueduct has not yet been excavated so the assumption that it was first built in the 1st century BCE is based on historic sources and archaeological surveys. It had been in use until the British Mandate period.³⁶ It is not possible to walk the full length of the aqueduct, but the Gush Etzion Regional Council and the Gush Etzion Field School have rendered the spring and a 100-meter-long subterranean section suitable for walking in the summer and fall. The aqueduct is presented as a water system that carried water to Jerusalem and to the Temple from the early Roman period, also referred to as the Second Temple period, despite the fact that scholars are uncertain about when the aqueduct was first built. It is used to highlight the importance of the area in serving Jewish Jerusalem's life during its glory days.

36) A. Mazar, "The Aqueduct of Jerusalem", *Jerusalem Revealed*, 1975, pp. 79-84.

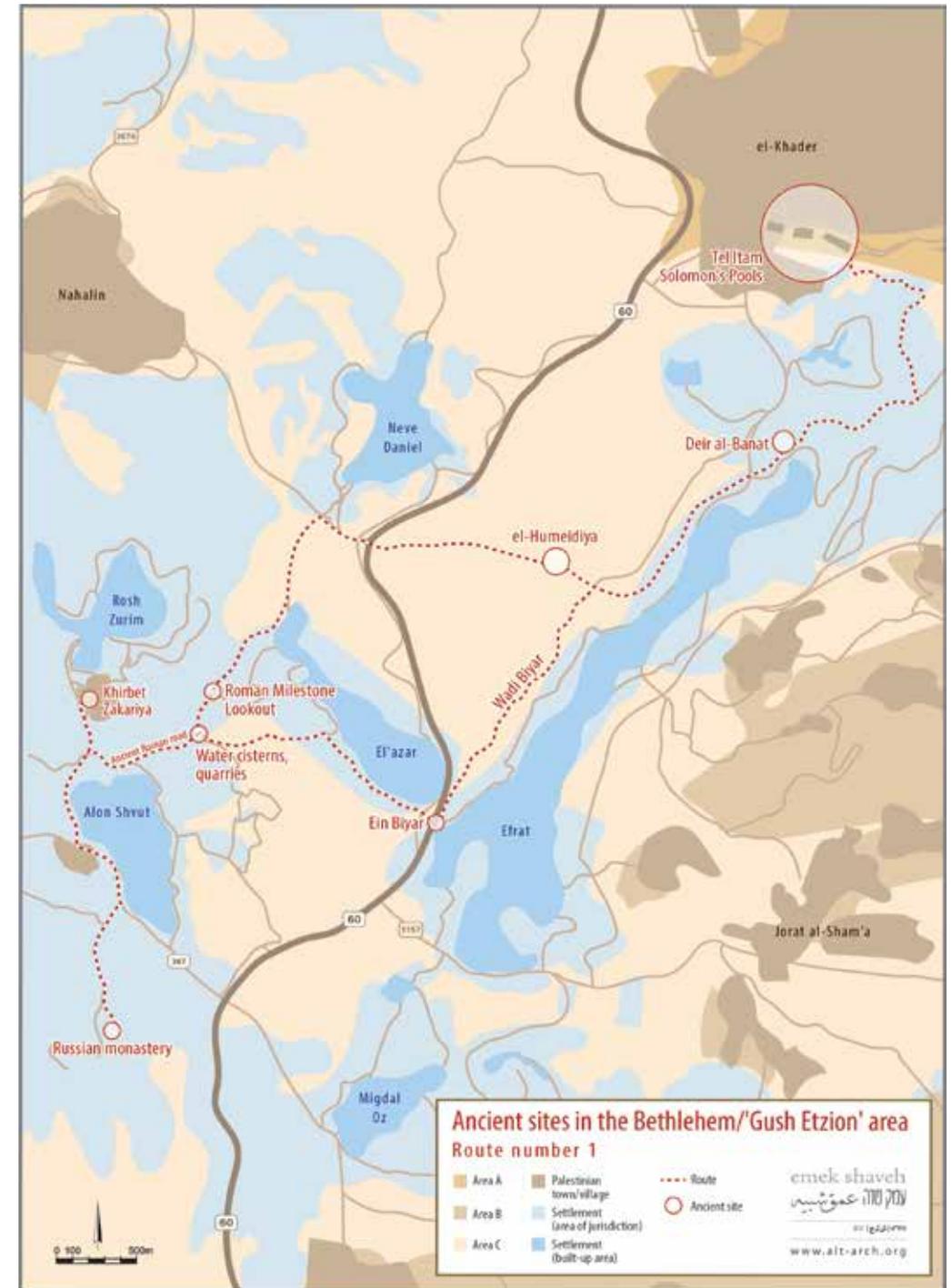
Part II: A tourist trail through archaeological sites accessible to Palestinians

Introduction

The areas south of Jerusalem and around Bethlehem are endowed with hundreds of antiquities sites from different periods. Alongside multi-layered mounds or remains of ancient settlements, there are smaller sites such as agricultural farms, springs, roads, tombs, and water systems such as aqueducts, cisterns, ancient agricultural systems and more. The antiquities sites around Bethlehem offer an opportunity to learn about the area through time. In addition to the research and educational opportunities, there is also an as of yet untapped potential for developing these sites for tourism. Today the antiquities located in the area “belong” primarily to Israeli bodies such as the Kfar Etzion Field School, the Nature and Parks Authority or to settler non-governmental organizations.

Those who control the the antiquities sites can shape their historic narrative. Archaeology has become a tool used to shore up public legitimacy for the settlements. The archaeological sites also create economic opportunities near the settlements and support infrastructure and tourism ventures in the area. Thus it is clear that the the antiquities sites have become a tool in the political struggle and that control of these sites is a significant component in strengthening the local community. In our opinion, in the present-day reality there is a need not only to strengthen the local Palestinian residents’ connection with their villages but also to their wider living space and heritage.

In what follows we will focus on antiquities sites located in Palestinian villages or that are outside the villages but still accessible to Palestinians. We propose three trails that represent opportunities to learn about the area and its rich and varied history. The proposed routes were designed around a series of antiquities sites. We will not tell historic or folkloric stories about the different sites—stories which are often told to visitors—both because we wish to place the antiquities sites at the center of this discussion and because the folkloric and historic information is the provenance of the guides from the nearby villages. These routes should be perceived only as preliminary recommendations that could serve as the foundation for strengthening the economic and social conditions of each Palestinian community and the residents of the wider area as a whole.



Route 1: From the Valley of Pools to Solomon's Pools

Location: The tour begins in Deir Sha'ar, the hill of the "Russian Monastery" situated across from the entrance to the settlement of Alon Shvut and next to the military camp that houses a Civil Administration facility. The site sits on top of a mountain at a height of 954 meters, and overlooks the Jerusalem-Hebron road.

Travel instructions: Drive from the Gush Etzion junction on route 60 and turning westward to road 367. Turn into the military camp; just before the entrance turn Left onto a dirt road driving south.

Site description: An observation spot at the top of the mountain overlooks the Valley of Pools (Khirbet Breikhot), the villages of Beit Omar and Ein Arub. At the site one can see remains of buildings from the Roman period (the 2nd century CE and onwards), the 13th milestone, which marks the Roman route from Jerusalem to Hebron, burial sites carved in the rock, and agricultural facilities, all of them from the Roman period or later. The site includes a subterranean cave carved in the rock containing burial crypts. Excavations at the site revealed remains from a Byzantine period church (the 6th century) with a mosaic floor featuring a dedication inscription in Greek. In the place where the military camp now stands one can find chambers cut in the rock adorned with crosses that served as solitary cells for the monks.

In 1892 a monastery called Deir Sha'ar was built which served as a travel inn for Christian pilgrims. In the war of 1948 heavy fighting for control over the site took place and after the war, the monastery was destroyed. Now the site is under Israeli control. Next to it is the military camp, the offices of the Civil Administration and the police. Orchards were planted at the site that belong to the settlement of Kfar Etzion. Signs at the site refer to the Israeli history of the place and highlight the Jewish settlement before 1948, the 1948 War and a return to the site after 1967.



The Russian Monastery – burial cave and a tunnel cut in the rock

Khirbet Zakariya

Location: Khirbet Zakariya is an extension of the Palestinian village Artas. It is a small Palestinian village situated between the settlements of Alon Shvut and Rosh Tsurim. The core of the village is built on the ancient site. Access to the village is from road 367, which links Gush Etzion junction to the Elah valley area. On road 367 turn north to the settlement of Rosh Tsurim. The small Palestinian village is surrounded by settlements to the point where the houses of the settlement Rosh Tsurim come up right next to the village homes. Apart from a cluster of houses and a mosque there is also a school and a grocery store in the village.

Site description: Some of the village homes are built on top of ancient caves, including a columbarium cave (a cave used for raising pigeons in ancient times). Ancient stones are incorporated into the houses. The mosque in the village is called "A-Nabi Zakariya" and is built on top of a Byzantine church. Fragments of capitals, grates and other ancient archaeological details are incorporated into the structure of the mosque. Evidence was found of human settlement at the site from the Hellenistic period (the 2nd century BCE) through to the present today. The settlement was at its largest, it appears, during the Byzantine period. There are those who identify the site of the village with the Hellenist

settlement Beit Zakariya, next to which one of the most important battles between the Hasmoneans and the Seleucids had taken place. The site is considered sacred which is probably one of the main reasons that the distinct natural Mediterranean vegetation has been preserved in the area.



Nebi Zakariya – the structure of the mosque – fragments of ancient columns incorporated into the walls of the structure

The ancient Roman route from Jerusalem to Hebron

Location: South of the village A-Nebi Zakariya is a dirt road that was signposted by the settlers as the “Road of the Patriarchs.” The dirt road links the settlements of Alon Shvut and Neve Daniel and is paved for private vehicles. Although the archaeological finds in the area demonstrate that the road was paved during the Roman period – probably in the 2nd century CE - it is presented to the public as the Road of the Patriarchs, referring to the biblical period.

Site Description: Along the road is a cluster of antiquities including wineries, quarries and two cisterns cut in the rock that are accessed through stairs leading down into them. The cisterns have been identified as ritual baths. Nearby is a milestone from the Roman period. During Roman times, milestones helped travelers passing by foot, on saddle or cart to orient themselves and learn the distance to the closest city. One of the milestones bears two inscriptions. One mentions Caesar Arcadius, who ruled the Byzantine Empire in the years 395-408 CE, and the second mentions Caesar Marcus Aurelius, from 170 CE.

Then the road splits. One option is to take a dirt road towards route 60, to Ein Biyar. The other option is to continue driving to the settlement of Neve Daniel towards an observation post which looks out at a beautiful view to the west and to the foothills of the mountain all the way to the plains. The road ends when it links up with route 60, and at the entrance to the settlement Neve Daniel.



A cistern/ritual bath and the steps leading down to the two entrance points



A Roman milestone – view to the settlement of Beitar Illit and the village Nahalin

Khirbet el Humeidiya

Location: Khirbet el Humeidiya is located across the junction at the entrance to the settlement Neve Daniel from route 60. A dirt road leads up to it. It is situated east of the road at a height of 900 meters. At the site are the remains of a Palestinian village, Khirbet Pa'ur, which was abandoned it seems in the 18th century following tribal feuds. A short walk leads to the hilltop and the central structure in the area.

Description: The site includes remains of several structures located along two extensions. On the western extension is a large structure featuring a long dome like space, likely a khan from the early Islamic period which was in use up until Ottoman times. Earthenware found at the site attest to the presence of humans as early as the Byzantine period. The structure incorporates fragments of ancient walls and stones with architectural ornaments, indicating repeated presence at the site over a period of hundreds of years. On the next hill over to the east is a cluster of structures one of which serves to this day as a mosque. Also at the site is an ancient Muslim tomb called Humeidiya, which lent its name to the ruin as a whole. Ancient hewn stones are set in the mosque which also features an inscription from 1737 CE. The eastern slopes contain burial caves carved in the rock and a large water hole. The grounds where the ruin stands is currently used for agriculture. A dirt path leads down from the ruin to Wadi Biyar in the east.

The village is mentioned in historic writings as early as the Byzantine period. Father Hieronymus (4-5th centuries CE) mentions a village by the name of Peura on the road from Bethlehem to Hebron. During the Byzantine period an agricultural estate existed at the site that had belonged to the district of Hebron. In Ottoman times a small village by the name of Peur stood at the site. In 1860 the lands were bought by the missionary James Finn for the purpose of establishing an agricultural farm where Jews could be trained to work the land. The project failed and the farm was abandoned.

The site is considered holy by the residents of Bethlehem and el-Khader who visit it and light oil candles. The mosque has been renovated and is used for prayer.



Khirbet el Humeidiya



The renovated mosque

Ein Biyar – Wadi Biyar

Location: An underground water canal that stretches from the top of the valley, at Ein Biyar, east of route 60 and alongside it and west of the edge of the settlement Efrat.

Site Description: Ein Biyar is part of the infrastructure that carried water from the Bethlehem area to Jerusalem. The system was in use until the British Mandate period. We do not know for certain when it was built but it appears it was first constructed in Roman or Byzantine times. The system includes a subterranean tunnel and a series of shafts which were used to clean the aqueduct from soil and sediment. Today the shafts are closed and are used by the farmers for irrigation purposes only. The subterranean canal can be accessed today from the first shaft, next to which a visitor center was built by the settlers of Gush Etzion and visitors are charged an entrance fee. From this shaft is a small tunnel leading southward to the source of the spring. To the north lies an approximately 3 km-long subterranean tunnel cut in the rock. This water system is presented as one of Herod's building projects intended to supply water to Jerusalem and the Temple. The tunnel merges with the lower aqueduct which arrives from Ein Arub. The route of the aqueduct passes underneath the northern access road to the settlement of Efrat, the construction of which caused severe damage to the aqueduct.

Another tunnel crosses the hill on top of which sits the settlement of Givat Dagan. The area of the settlement contains three additional shafts. The Biyar Spring can be accessed by foot walking through the valley of Wadi Biyar which extends through agricultural fields belonging to the residents of el-Khader.



Ein Biyar – the entrance point to the shaft and the subterranean canal



The lower aqueduct under the northern access road to Efrat

Deir el-Banat

Site Description and Location: A large ruin on the slope overlooking the path through Wadi Biyar. It is a square-shaped site in which the walls of the structures still stand relatively tall. It apparently was built as a monastery during the Byzantine period and has had many uses since then. Judging by its name, it may have served as women's monastery. The site contains a spring and a pool. There is no official entrance to the site. Overlooking the site are the houses of the settlement Efrat. It appears that the site was part of a network of monasteries built in the area during Byzantine times.

Solomon's Pools

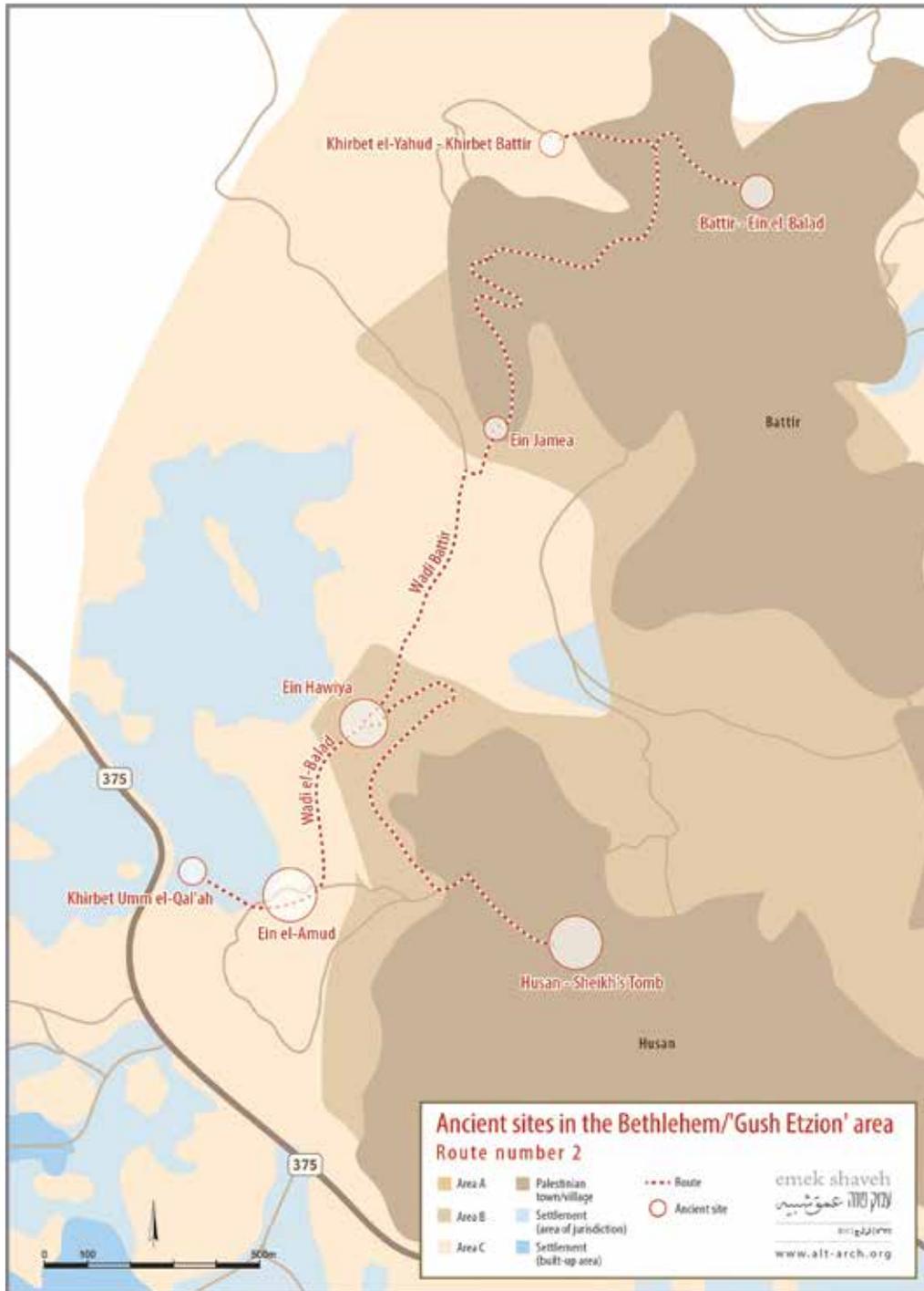
Location: Along the valley towards the springs of Artas. The site features three pools built on the slopes of the el-Khoh valley (a tributary flowing from Wadi Artas).

Site description: These are the main water collection pools for rainwater, spring water and water carried by the aqueducts, en route to Jerusalem. The pools are built on different levels whereby the floor of one pool borders on the edge of the next one. The pools were repaired and renovated over time so that it is difficult to discern the original plan. The large pool is situated on the upper flatter part of the valley, and the bottom pools follow the shape of the valley along the incline. The pools are fed by the aqueduct called the lower aqueduct (the Arub Aqueduct), the Biyar Aqueduct and other springs in the area. Nearby are the remains of a fortress called Qala'at Bureq. An inscription on the gate notes that the aqueduct was built by Sultan Ahmed Khan (1617). According to a tradition held by the residents of the village of Artas, the village was built by Suleiman the Magnificent and its residents received a salary for protecting the pools.



Solomon's Pools

Route no. 2: The area of the villages Battir and Husan



Khirbet Umm el Qal'ah

Location and site description: A fortress at the top of a hill situated at the edge and north of the Husan-Mavo Beitar road. The fortress is located over Wadi Ein Jame'a (which is also called the Wadi of Springs). Khirbet Umm el Qal'ah is a fortress from the Roman period built on an area of 2 dunam (2000 sqm.). The fortress controlled the road and the Wadi. The ruin sustained serious damage when olive trees were recently planted at the site. The walls of the ancient fortress are incorporated into terraces that were constructed in later periods.

Wadi el-Jame'a and Ein el-Balad

Location: The foothill of the western slope of the village of Husan. The Wadi joins up with the Refaim River.

Site Description: Cultivated agricultural plots and a row of springs and irrigation channels extending to Ein Hawiya. A row of springs along rock face, the water collects in the pools and is carried to the field by irrigation canals. Maintenance works on the spring are routinely undertaken by the residents of Husan. The fields are used primarily for growing vegetables.

Ein el-Amud

Location: In Wadi Jame'a west of the village Husan, near Ein el Balad.

Site description: A stone pillar that lends its name to the spring and the pool stands by the whitewashed manmade pool. The water is carried in irrigation canals to cultivated fields owned by the residents of Husan. From Ein el-Amud a walking trail extends along the valley bed towards Ein Hawiya and the villages Battir and Husan.

Ein Hawiya

Location: A spring flowing out of the rock face under the ancient part of the village of Husan. Stairs from the village lead to the pool.

Site description: The spring water is collected in a pool built at the foot of the rock. Irrigation canals leading out from the pool carry water to the various plots. The place is open to the public and access to it is easy. The spring functions as a place of leisure for the residents of Husan and Battir.



Ein Hawiya – the water collection pool and the irrigation canals

The Village of Husan

Location: A Palestinian village west of Bethlehem, the westernmost Palestinian village along the route to Tsur Hadassa, west of the settlement of Beitar-Illit. The village is built above tracts of land extending down to the east to Wadi el-Jame'a and is situated along the ancient trail from Elah Valley to Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Description of the village:

Husan is home to approximately 4000 residents all of whom are Muslim. At the center of the village is the tomb of a Sheikh, surrounded by the ancient core of the village, which for the most part is in a state of ruin. The ultra-orthodox settlement of Beitar Illit has been built on lands belonging to the village. Within the area of the settlement lies a valley with fields that are cultivated by residents of Husan. The village also features an area of garages and car repair services which serve the local residents and residents of Beitar Illit.



The Sheikh's tomb in the center of the village Husan

The Village Battir and its sites

From the center of Husan we return to the valley walking along a trail leading to Ein el Jame'a inside the village of Battir. Next to the spring is a pool from which a network of irrigation canals carry water to agricultural plots. Nearby is a leisure center which includes a pool, a park and a playground.

Location: the village is built on the slope of a mountain which overlooks the Refaim river, adjacent to the village of Husan to the east. The ancient center of the village surrounds the spring Ein el-Balad.

In the valley under the spring one can find large cultivated vegetable gardens; Battir is famous for its eggplants. In the rock-cut chamber which houses the spring is an ancient inscription by the tenth Roman legion from the second century CE. The center of the ancient village has been renovated and restored with the support of European funding and is slated to be part of a tourism initiative including bed & breakfasts, and social and cultural activities in the village.

The agricultural terraces are part of a UNESCO world heritage site. The UNESCO site includes an area extending from the village al-Walajeh to Wadi Jame'a and Husan.

Khirbet el Yahud/Khirbet Battir

Location: The central archaeological site sits at the top of the southwestern stretch of the village and is called Khirbet el-Yahud or Khirbet Battir. A section of the site has been excavated by Israelis in the past and the remains are exposed but neglected to the point that they could collapse. The section that has not yet been excavated lies underneath an olive grove.

Site description: Khirbet Battir/Khirbet el Yahud is a multi-layered archaeological mound which includes remains from the early Bronze Age I (around 3000 BCE). The settlement evolved and expanded during the Middle Bronze Age II (around 1700 BCE). A large central structure from this period has been discovered which possibly functioned as part of a center of government. The next layer of settlement is dated to the end of the Iron Age III (seventh to the sixth century BCE). A thick wall was discovered from this period. Nearby a settlement from the Roman period (first-second century CE) was discovered but its parameters remain unknown. Roman army camps were discovered next to the site to the east. It appears they were built during the Bar Kokhva revolt – the revolt of the Jews against the Romans. Khirbet al-Yahud is identified as the historic site of Beitar, the last stronghold of the rebels.



The Center of Battir and the agricultural terraces



Ein el-Jame'a



Khirbet el Yahud – remains of a structure from the Middle Bronze Age

Route 3: Wadi Haras

Gardens, tombs, ancient agricultural facilities and springs

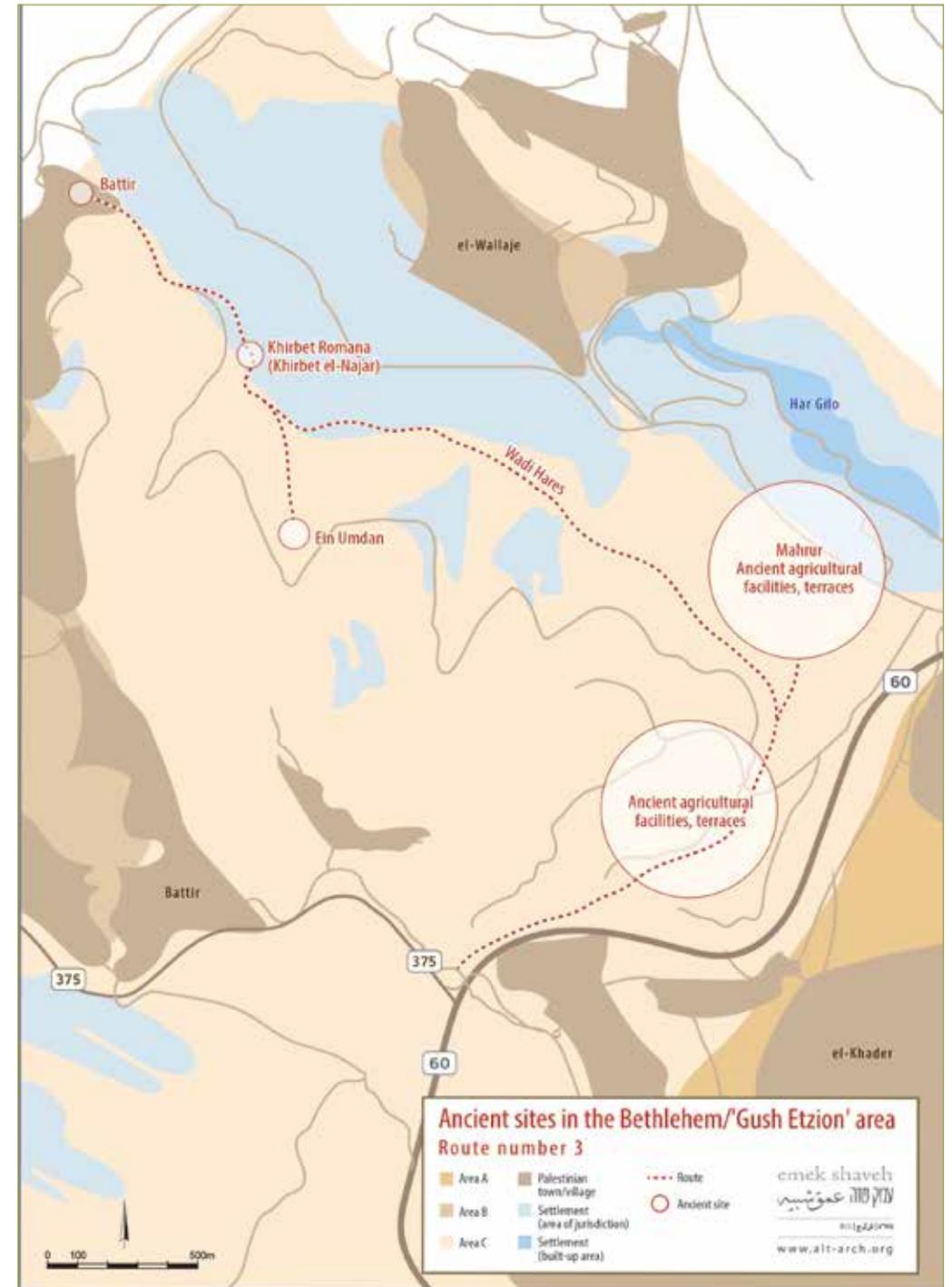
Location: A 6-kilometer-long valley extending from the town of el-Khader near the roundabout that leads to the village of Battir. The land at the upper section of the Wadi is owned by residents of el-Khader; some of the land in its northern section towards the valley is owned by residents of Beit Jalla. This section is called Wadi Mahrur. At its northwestern edge the Wadi meets Emek Refaim.

The valley can be accessed from the center of Battir. Signs along the walking trail show the way to Ein Umdan and Khirbet a-Najar. The path is paved for several hundreds of meters. The path and the signs were put in place by the council of the village Battir in cooperation with international organizations.

Site description: The slopes above the valley are cultivated through a system of agricultural terraces with stone steps and paths leading to the terraces. Ancient watchtowers of differing heights were built between the plots, some of them one-story high, others two stories. The trail crosses fields which are cultivated according to traditional methods, precipices, springs and Mediterranean vegetation.



Wadi Haras on the way to the village of Battir



Khirbet Romana/Khirbet a-Najar

Location: The site is located at the meeting point between Wadi Haras and Ein Abu Haras, located southwest of the valley.

Site description: Khirbet a-Najar is nicknamed by the locals 'Khirbet Romana.' Fragments of the ruins have been incorporated into the agricultural terraces. One can identify large building stones, burial caves, and water holes carved in the rock. It appears a settlement existed at the site beginning with the end of the Iron Age II (eight to seventh centuries BCE). Near the site one can find burial caves cut into the rock, which based on their features can be dated to the Iron Age II. The settlement continued to exist into the Roman and Byzantine period.

The path continues until it splits. One offshoot leads to a spring located where the valley begins, the other continues the path through the Wadi towards a spring called Ein el-Umdan. The spring includes two carved tunnels which drain into one well maintained pool. A roofed canal extends from the pool passing underneath the terraces to the cultivated fields.



Fragments of ruins in Khirbet a-Najar built into the foundations of the terraces



Entry to a carved burial chamber



Wadi Haras



Ein el-Umdan

El Mahroun

Location: Return to the valley and continue walking. The top section of the valley is called Wadi Mahroun and it contains a large concentration of ancient watchtowers of different kinds. This is the top section of Wadi Haras which is located underneath the Tunnels Road and the Tunnels roadblock.

Site description: A cluster of ancient watchtowers of different shapes and sizes - round, square, two stories and more. Some of the watchtowers have been renovated and are used as residential dwellings. The watchtowers are built between the terraces and the agricultural sections of the valley. Their large number of watchtowers and close proximity to one another demonstrate mutual relations and planning.

There are also many watchtowers to be found in the valleys close to the area of the Cremisan Monastery near Bethlehem and the Har Homa settlement. The watchtowers were used as residences for the villagers during the planting and harvest periods and helped the farmers guard their crops and save time walking from the village to the field.

The structures are built using stones from the field. Only dry materials were used, no cement. Chiseled rocks were placed in the entrance and the foundations of the structure. The villagers dug water holes next to the structures and built facilities for keeping

domestic animals. The thick walls of the structures helped maintain a comfortable temperature during the summer months and chilled the agricultural produce after it was collected. Once traditional methods of cultivation were abandoned some of the watchtowers were abandoned. Some still serve as a sort of summer home. Some of the renovations and use of the structures as residences are attempts to demonstrate ownership over the land vis-à-vis the Israeli authorities.



El Mahroun



Watchtowers amidst the terraces

Economic and educational potential

This report focuses on the expanse of villages between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, two central cities on the tourist map of Israel-Palestine. From an archaeological point of view, the area surrounding the two cities is integral to their history. It is clear that the sites and trails described in the previous section hold a potential for a tourism industry that has yet to be realized and which could become a source of livelihood for the local residents. Tourism in the area does not need to be based only on foreign visitors. In our opinion cultivating interest among the local communities in the area and its antiquities is of great importance from a political, educational and economic point of view. Moreover, local tourism can be a source of income even in times of heightened political tensions. It could increase the appeal of these sites for overseas tourists and bolster the local residents' relationship to the larger environment in which they live.

In this report we described the ways in which Israel uses antiquity sites to strengthen the economy of the West Bank settlements and the ideology which perceives the area south of Jerusalem as inseparable from Israel. These sites must be managed by the Palestinians and could be a central means of strengthening the Palestinian economy in the area. So long as the question of who manages the sites has not been resolved, it becomes even more important to develop those sites that are located in and around Palestinian villages and that can be easily accessed by Palestinians.

We have recommended three tourist trails which should be considered as preliminary recommendations only. The central consideration in choosing these sites was their archaeological importance and their potential to teach us about the area through many different periods of history. Some of the places do offer tours guided by Palestinian organizations, but for the most part the sites are not properly signposted, nor is there much information regarding the larger historic context. The routes we have outlined are intended to demonstrate the connection between the different sites and the added value of visiting the sites in the framework of a longer trail, rather than visiting only one site at a time.

It is our opinion that developing the village area while preserving antiquity sites is important for the political, economic and educational future of this area. When a decision is made to develop an antiquity site in this area, it is important to consider its important role as a resource for learning about the local heritage and as an economic basis for strengthening the economy of the local communities. From a political perspective, it is very important to present the varied cultural heritage of the area in order to tell a complex history of the people of this land. This way of presenting history is not only more accurate from a scientific perspective, but will also strengthen the political status of the local residents in the long run.

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