

"Salvage Excavations" in the West Bank for Settlers Only

An analysis of the scope and objectives of archaeological excavations in Area C of the West Bank 2007-2014

Introduction

Most archaeological excavations in the world are carried out in advance of and for the purposes of construction work or other forms of development. In Israel too, it is mandatory to execute "salvage excavations" for the final documentation of ancient sites before they are destroyed in the process of construction works. There are 6,000 declared ancient sites in the West Bank. Therefore, almost all development or construction works in the area require salvage excavations.

In this document we will analyze the archaeological excavations carried out by the Staff Officer for Archaeology in the West Bank between 2007 and 2014. This report points to the strong links between archaeological excavations and the settlement project, and to the way archaeology is used to realize ideological goals. Most importantly, this document provides clear data regarding the construction and development map in the West Bank and demonstrates how unevenly the Civil Administration distributes the resources under its control between the Palestinians, on the one hand, and the settlements on the other.

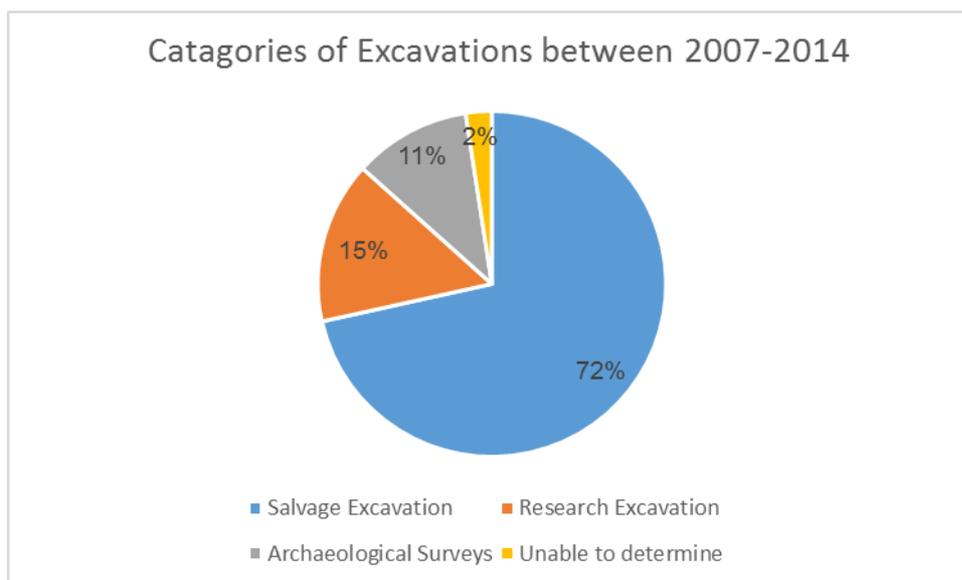
Table 1: The objectives of the excavations in the West Bank between 2007-2014

	Cannot be determined	Survey	Tourism	Research	Construction outside the settlements and villages	Construction in Palestinian Villages	Construction in Settlements	Separation Barrier	Total
2007	0	0	1	0	1	2	2	1	7
2008	0	2	3	6	2	1	3	3	20
2009	0	3	9	6	1	1	4	1	25
2010	0	5	4	3	3	0	2	0	17
2011	0	3	4	2	0	4	7	2	22
2012	2	3	3	3	1	2	8	1	23
2013	0	1	9	4	4	1	14	0	33
2014	2	1	3	1	0	1	10	0	18
Total	4	18	36	25	12	12	50	8	165

The Data¹

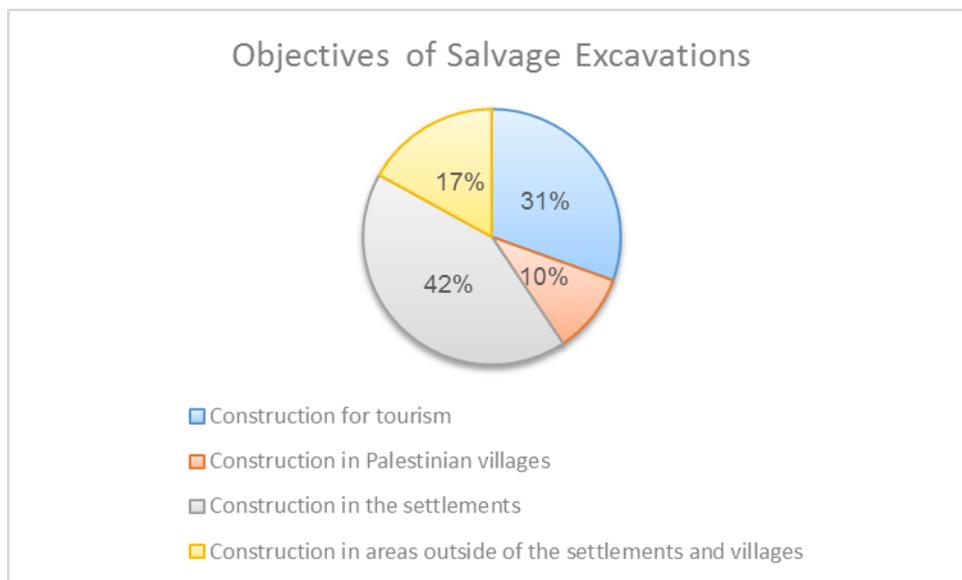
Between 2007 and 2014, 165 requests for **permits for archaeological excavations** were approved (Table 1). Of these, 118 requests (constituting 72% of all requests) were submitted for the purpose of a **salvage excavation**. 25 requests (15% of all requests) were submitted for **research excavations**. 18 requests (11% of the requests) were submitted for **archaeological surveys** used to determine which archaeological remains can be found in a certain area, without conducting an excavation. Of the data that was received by "Emek Shaveh", there were 4 cases (2% of requests) for which we were unable to determine the objective of the request (Table 2).

¹"Emek Shaveh" obtained this information from the Staff Officer for Archaeology following a freedom of information request. The categories of the different objectives were determined by the location of the sites, based on information from the Staff Officer for Archaeology, as well as information on the various excavations gathered from the media.



Salvage Excavations: Presentation of the Data

Of the 118 requests for a **permit to conduct salvage excavations**, 50 requests (constituting 42% of all the salvage excavations) were submitted in advance of **construction or other development works in the settlements**. 36 requests (31% of all requests) were submitted for the purpose of **developing archaeological sites as tourist attractions**. 20 requests (17% of all requests) were submitted for **works outside of Jewish settlements or Palestinian villages**, such as the construction of the separation barrier or improving infrastructure, most of which were intended for the benefit of the settlements. 12 requests (10% of all requests) were submitted for **works that were conducted within Palestinian villages** (Table 3).



This data points to a considerable gap between construction and development works for the benefit of the settlements and development works in Palestinian villages in the West Bank. Out of 118 excavations, 106 were for the benefit of the settlements, while only 12 benefitted Palestinian villages. Due to the proximity of many ancient sites to Palestinian villages, a salvage excavation is required for any development work - be it paving a road, adding to an existing structure or expanding a village or a settlement. The fact that only 12 salvage excavations were conducted over a period of seven years in Palestinian villages means that on average **less than two excavations** were conducted each year for the purpose of expanding Palestinian villages or improving their infrastructure.

Even if this data does not provide information about all the construction works carried out in Palestinian villages or the settlements, it undoubtedly demonstrates how the Civil Administration chooses to manage its resources - whether financial or land reserves - and for the benefit of which populations.

This data paints an even clearer picture when one remembers that the permits submitted for touristic development and academic research at archaeological sites were not initiated by the Palestinian population and did not serve its interests, but rather those of Israeli or international

entities, who are frequently vested in archaeology as a means to prove the historical veracity of the biblical stories².

Conclusion

The fact that 90% of all the requests to conduct an archaeological excavation (106 out of 118) between the years 2007-2014 served the interests of the settlers and the State of Israel gives rise to the following conclusions:

1. While the public assumes that excavations are carried out mainly for the purpose of research, the fact is that the vast majority of excavations are carried out for the purposes of construction and other forms of development. Therefore, most excavations should be viewed as an aspect of infrastructure or construction work. The data shows that most of the infrastructure work preceded by salvage excavations is carried out for the benefit of the settlements.
2. The Civil Administration rarely improves the infrastructure in Palestinian villages in the West Bank or allows construction in these locations, despite the fact that it was established especially to serve as a substitute governing body in the West Bank and to care for the needs of the Palestinian population.
3. The analysis of the data on archaeological excavations that took place in the West Bank between 2007-2014 serves not only as a means to understand the priorities driving the settler movement, but also demonstrates how unequally the State allocates the resources it controls.

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²As we can learn from the website of [Associates for Biblical Research \(ABR\)](http://www.abr.org), the only international organization that excavated in the West Bank during these years.