

Archaeology and Politics in Jerusalem's Historic Basin

Annual Report - 2018



עמק שווה
عمق شبیه
Emek Shaveh

(חל"צ | ש. ל. ח. | CPB)

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2018 has seen record levels of government investment in archaeological tourism ventures in Jerusalem's Historic Basin. New projects, such as the cable car from West Jerusalem to the neighborhood of Silwan/City of David, join ongoing development works to create a network of tourist sites which are transforming Jerusalem's Historic Basin from a multicultural historic city to a series of tourist attractions shaped by a Judeo-centric narrative. Driven by a religious nationalist agenda, the excavation, conservation and development works in the city's historic sites have become a central feature of the settlement project, with far-reaching implications for future negotiations over sovereignty. This process is facilitated by tightening cooperation between the right-wing settler movement and the Government of Israel and record levels of investment in projects that prioritize a Jewish identity for the historic city.

These archaeological tourism ventures have evolved as a strategy intended to compliment familiar patterns of the settlement enterprise in the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, such as the seizure of houses and the settling of ideological settlers in residential areas in Silwan and the Old City. In this regard, 2018 has also been marked by significant achievements for the settlers. In the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood of Silwan, several homes have been taken over by the right-wing Elad Foundation¹, and across the valley, in Batan al-Hawa², 700 Palestinians risk losing their homes following a decision by Israel's Supreme Court to hand over a five dunam area to the Ateret Cohanim settlers group. Perhaps the most significant achievement from the settlers' point of view this year has been the amendment to the National Parks law passed in November³ which will allow the Elad Foundation to multiply the number of housing units for settlers in Silwan.

Emek Shaveh has addressed the role of cultural heritage and archaeological sites in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and monitored developments in this arena over the last decade. We are concerned that the changes to the management of

1) The Elad Foundation is a right-wing NGO devoted to settling Jews in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan. The foundation manages the City of David Archaeological park, outside the Old City walls in the neighborhood of Silwan, which features remains from the earliest periods of Jerusalem's history. It is presented as the city of King David, the first capital of the Jewish people, and as one of the most important sites of national significance in the country. The Elad Foundation has curated the City of David site in a narrow and tangential manner, emphasizing the story of King David, distorting the significance of the archaeological finds, and ignoring multiple periods embodied at the site.

2) Sue Surkes and TOI Staff, [High Court Rejects Petition Against Evacuation of 700 East Jerusalem Residents](#), *Times of Israel*, 22 November 2018.

3) Emek Shaveh Update: [National Parks Bill that Benefits Settlers Passed into Law](#), 26 November 2018.

archaeological sites and heritage policy together with the weakening of Palestinian presence in the Historic Basin are detrimental to the preservation of Jerusalem's multicultural heritage and undermines the cultural infrastructure underlying the feasibility of dividing sovereignty over the city.

Archaeological-tourism ventures in the Historic Basin in 2018 can be roughly grouped into three categories:

1. Extensive excavations - both traditional stratigraphic excavations and excavations in underground tunnels
2. The development of these sites into tourist attractions and linking the various sites through a network of passages and routes above and underground.
3. New forms of transport and the creation of new routes, chief amongst them is the cable car.

Archaeological Tourism as Facts on the Ground

In May 2017, the government announced the 'Shalem Plan' (the 'comprehensive plan')⁴, an overall vision to create a continuum of archaeological tourist sites above and below ground from Silwan (where the archaeological site the City of David is situated) into the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. The plan envisions a network of tourist routes which would reshape the character of the Historic Basin from a city with a multilayered, multicultural identity to a space dominated by a single narrative of Jewish belonging. The politicians do not try to hide the political intentions behind their advancement of archaeological-tourism projects. At the meeting in May 2017, Minister of Culture Miri Regev was quoted as saying: "these excavations revive the Old Testament and strengthen our greatest "Kushan" (possession title)"⁵.

Although the project was officially announced in 2017, it has been ongoing since 2005 with substantial support by the government, which, in our assessment, has so far allocated more than 1 billion NIS (around 250 million Euros). The plan includes massive excavations under the Western Wall plaza, development of sites for tourism and linking the newly excavated spaces to underground tunnels in Silwan/City of

4) Emek Shaveh: [Press Release – The Israel Antiquities Authority's plan to excavate beneath Silwan, all the way to the Western Wall Plaza](#), May 29 2017.

5) Ibid.

David. Earlier this year, the government announced a special allocation of 47 million NIS over a period of two years for excavations in and around the City of David⁶. The amount comprises approximately 20% of the Israel Antiquities Authority's (IAA) excavation budget and will fund excavations in tunnels beneath the homes of the residents of Silwan, underground links between the various excavation sites and between Silwan/City of David and the Old City, and excavations on the slopes of Mount Zion. All of the excavations are led by the Israel Antiquities Authority or Tel Aviv University.

The main current archaeological/tourism projects include:

Tunnels and underground excavations in Silwan and the Old City

Horizontal excavations in tunnels characterized archaeological practice in Jerusalem in the nineteenth century. But archaeological practice in the 20th century largely dismissed lateral excavations as unscientific and destructive and discarded it in favor of chronological stratigraphic practices. Israel has occasionally engaged in horizontal digging in the area west of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, since 1969, but only since 2004 has the Israel Antiquities Authority become the professional body in charge of these excavations. In the past decade and a half, the IAA has focused the bulk of its efforts in the Historic Basin on creating a system of channels, tunnels, and underground spaces.

A central tunneling project for the IAA is the excavation of an ancient Roman street under the homes of residents of the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan (No. 10 on the map of archaeological sites in Jerusalem's Historic Basin, below). Funded by the Elad Foundation, the settlers' organization devoted to settling Jews in Silwan/City of David, it runs several hundred meters from one edge of Silwan, near the ancient Pool of Siloam, to the foot of the southern and western walls of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. First documented by the archaeologists Bliss and Dickey in the 19th century, the Roman street is now dubbed the "Pilgrims' Trail"⁷ the path taken by Jewish worshippers who ascended to the Temple built

by Herod. Archaeologists think the street was built no earlier than 30-31 CE, the end of the Second Temple Period. Other parts of the street are dated to the late Roman and Byzantine periods. It was also in use during the early Islamic period.⁸ The narrative framing this excavation site, which has yet to be open to the public, is one which foregrounds the story of Jewish pilgrimage, while completely omitting later periods, or the present-day Palestinian village above it.

The excavation of the ancient Roman street joins works in the Western Wall tunnels⁹ and underneath the Western Wall Plaza (nos. 9 and 10 on the map of archaeological sites in Jerusalem's Historic Basin, below) which are carried out by the Western Wall Heritage Foundation¹⁰. Since 2004, the latter excavations have expanded the area running under Hagai/al Wad street and under residential houses in the Muslim Quarter (No. 12 on abovementioned map). In 2009-2010 the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Western Wall Heritage Foundation discussed a plan to excavate the entire area beneath the Western Wall. As far as we know, the project is supported directly by the Prime Minister's Office and is currently being implemented on a small scale, particularly in the area under Wilson's Arch located at the northern edge of the Western Wall. The Shalem plan envisions a link between the Western Wall Tunnels and the underground tunnels in Silwan via an ancient drainage tunnel running under the Old City walls. The tunnel was excavated with funding provided by the Elad Foundation and was opened to the public in 2011.¹¹

Once excavations are completed, the tunnels will create an unbroken underground tourist route between the City of David site in Silwan, the Western Wall Plaza and the Western Wall Tunnels. The route is intended to evoke the experience of visiting an ancient city dominated by two periods: the Judean monarchy and the time of the Second Temple, both of which are central in the shaping of a contemporary Israeli-Jewish national identity.

6) Emek Shaveh, [The Israeli government approved a record amount for archaeological excavations in Silwan](#), May 13, 2018

7) N.Hasson, [In a Tunnel Beneath Jerusalem, Israeli Culture Minister Give Obama a Lesson in History](#), *Haaretz*, 31 December, 2016.

8) M. Hagbi and J.Uziel, Jerusalem, [City of David, the Byzantine Street](#), *Hadashot Arkheologiyot*, 127, 2017

9) For more information about the Western Wall Tunnel excavations see "[Underground Jerusalem: The excavation of tunnels, channels, and underground spaces in the Historic Basin](#)", Emek Shaveh, 2015.

10) The Western Wall Heritage Foundation is a government foundation responsible for the Western Wall Plaza and the Western Wall Tunnels

11) For more information see "[Underground Jerusalem: The excavation of tunnels, channels, and underground spaces in the Historic Basin](#)", Emek Shaveh, 2015.



The wide tunnel running under homes in Silwan (named "The Pilgrims Trail")



The wide tunnel under two arches

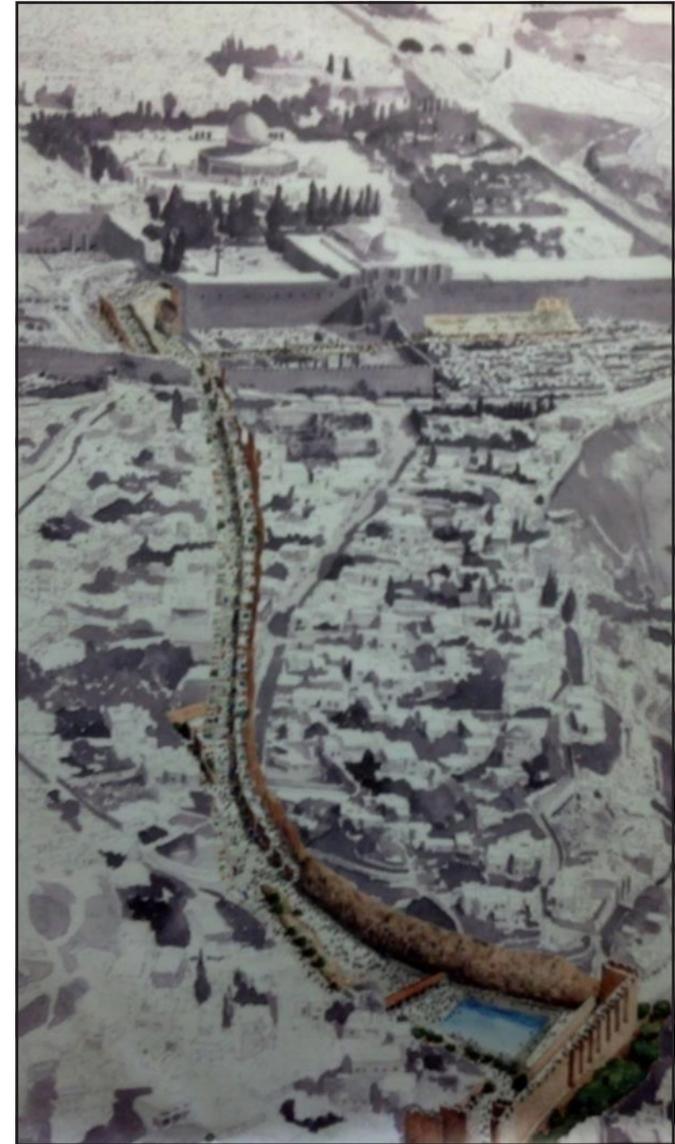


Image on display at the entrance to the tunnel dubbed the "Pilgrim's Trail". The image is an imagined reconstruction of the ancient Roman street during the Second Temple Period.

Givati Parking Lot Excavations and the Kedem Center

The excavation of the ancient Roman street joins the works in an area called ‘the Givati Parking Lot’ (No. 2 on map), at the entrance to Silwan/City of David across from the Old City walls. Excavated in 2003, and 2005, and uninterrupted from 2007, it is the largest excavation area in the Historic Basin. Previously the area served as a parking lot and was one of the last public spaces in the neighborhood of Silwan. It was used as an ad hoc marketplace or for wedding celebrations. The excavations at Givati are categorized as salvage excavations (excavations prior to construction) conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority together with Tel Aviv University. They are sponsored by the Elad Foundation in order to prepare the area for the construction of a 16,000 sqm visitors’ center called the “Kedem Center”.

Over the years, the media has reported about extraordinary findings in the excavations, from the greatest cache of gold coins from the Byzantine era, to a Hellenistic structure, which some scholars suggested could be identified with the Acra, a fortress built by Antiochus Epiphanes in his attempt to maintain his hold on Jerusalem. Archaeologists also exposed: a large structure from the 1st century CE, remains of residential structures from the Abbasid period (8th–9th centuries C.E.), impressive foundations of Byzantine or Roman structures and a large residential structure from the late Roman period (2nd–3rd centuries C.E).

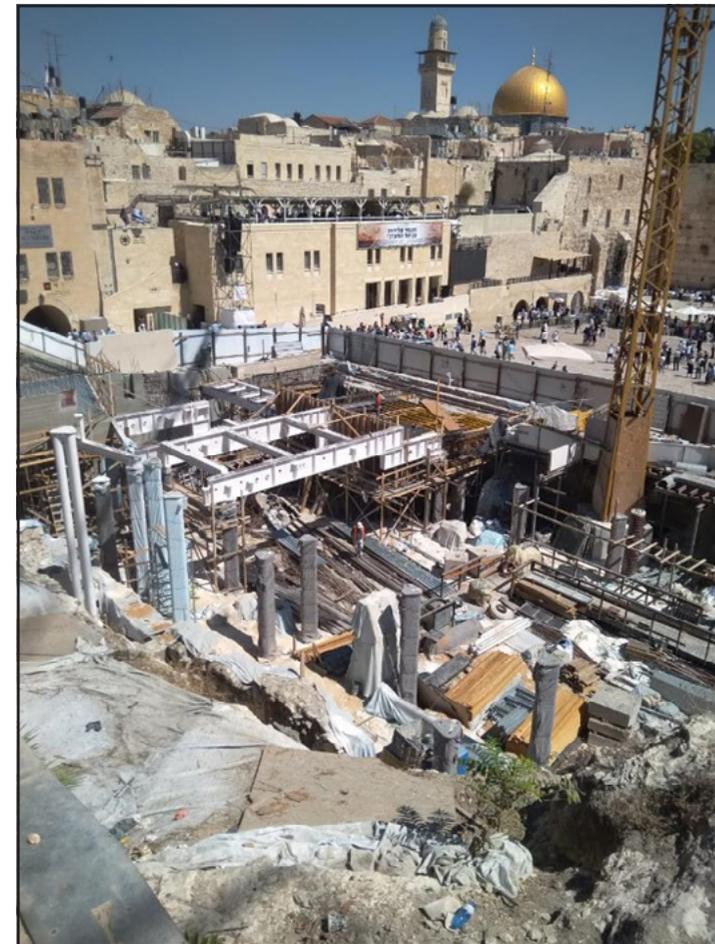
The Kedem Center¹², which will be built atop of the excavation area and will, no doubt, entail damage to antiquities, is a highly controversial project and was approved for construction in July 2017, after political intervention and a long battle¹³ in the planning committees. The Kedem Center will house tourist facilities as well as the ‘Shrine of the Bible’ a government sponsored venture to educate Jewish-Israelis about their biblical heritage. If the plan to build the cable car is realized, the center will also house the third cable car station (see section on the cable car p. 6).

12) Emek Shaveh Press Release: [Elad’s Kedem Center in Silwan was Approved by all the Planning Committees](#). 19 July 2017.

13) Emek Shaveh Press Release: [Decision to Approve Elad’s Kedem Compound Plan in Silwan Awakens Fears of Extreme Politicization of Planning and Building Institutions](#), 30 March, 2016.

Beit Haliba

In the past few months, the Western Wall Heritage Foundation have begun building a three-story building called “Beit Haliba” in the Western Wall Plaza (No. 8 on the map of main archaeological sites in Jerusalem’s Historic Basin). Beit Haliba, will serve as a large office building for the Western Wall Heritage Foundation. Construction began this year (2018) following an eight-year process in the building and planning committees. Situated on top of what was once the Mughrabi Neighborhood, it is the first building that the planning committees have approved at the Western Wall Plaza since Israel created it in 1967. The process of approving the construction plan has taken years and was subject to many objections by residents, archaeologists, planners, as well as Emek Shaveh. The area slated for construction is atop unique archaeological remains.



Beit Haliba construction works

The Cable Car

The plan for a cable car from West Jerusalem to the City of David/Silwan was announced during a government meeting on Jerusalem Day, 28th of May 2017.¹⁴ The project is part of the strategy to reorient transport to the Historic Basin and multiply the number of visitors to settler controlled archaeological sites. The cable car is due to transport thousands of people a day from the Baka neighborhood in West Jerusalem to Silwan/City of David in East Jerusalem, with a station on the rooftop of the aforementioned 'Kedem Center' promoted by the Elad Foundation. The project is being advanced by Minister of Tourism, Yariv Levin, and the Jerusalem Development Authority (JDA), which belongs in part to the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage headed by Minister Ze'ev Elkin and in part to the Jerusalem Municipality.

The cable car will be suspended on a line that crosses the ancient Ben Hinnom Valley, south of the Old City, and the residential neighborhood of Silwan with a station at Mount Zion before ending at the Kedem Center (see cable car map below). At the Kedem Center the visitors will be funneled to the Old City through the City of David and the Davidson Center, an archaeological park at the foot of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. According to the cable car plan, a second phase will entail the construction of a station at the Mount of Olives and another station at the southern tip of Wadi Hilweh in Silwan, adjacent to the archaeological site of the Pool of Siloam. In May, the government allocated 200 million NIS for the first phase of the project. The allocation was made even though the plan had yet to be approved.

The cable car plan is being advanced in an unusual process, through the National Infrastructure Committee (NIC) rather than through the local planning committees, as is the norm with most local construction and tourism projects. The advancement of the plan through the NIC expedites the approval process, leaving very little time and scope for public objections by the relevant stakeholders and circumventing the need to consult the conservation committee. On October 29th 2018, the NIC approved submitting the plan. Once the plan will be submitted, the public will have 60 days to submit 'reservations'. The hearing at the NIC was preceded by a 10-month public campaign against the cable car plan that culminated

in a public letter signed by seventy intellectuals and academics¹⁵, including five Israel Prize laureates, and a protest by the Association of Architects and Town Planners¹⁶ and by the Council for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in Israel. Leading architects and planners blasted the cable car project as a Disneyesque plan that will destroy the historic landscape.¹⁷

Gaining New Ground: The settlers expand to new areas in the Historic Basin

Elad venture into the Old City

2018 marked a turning point in the consolidation of strategic areas in the Historic Basin in the hands of the settler-run Elad Foundation. In February, the government agreed to hand to the Elad Foundation operational responsibilities¹⁸ for the archaeological site outside the southern and western walls of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. This is the first time since taking control of the City of David Site in 2002 that the Elad Foundation will be given the rights to manage an archaeological site inside the Old City, at the foot of the Holy Esplanade. The site is linked to the City of David Archaeological Park by an ancient underground drainage tunnel, also managed by the Elad Foundation. A legal petition¹⁹ by Emek Shaveh objecting to Elad's management of the sewage tunnel is currently one of the obstacles to the implementation of the agreement.

The Davidson Center is an important archaeological park situated alongside the southern section of the Western Wall and along the southern wall of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif within the Old City walls. The Davidson Center displays artefacts discovered during the excavations, highlighting those from the Second

14) Government Secretary [announcement](#) following government meeting on May 28, 2017. (Heb)

15) S.Surkes, [Israel Prize Winners Call on Government to Cancel Jerusalem Old City Cable Car](#), *Times of Israel*, 12 October, 2018.

16) S.Surkes, [Architects Association Questions Legality of Jerusalem Cable Car Project](#), *Time of Israel*, 11 October, 2018.

17) See [short video](#) explaining the Cable Car Project.

18) Emek Shaveh Press Release: [Israeli government approved the transfer of operational responsibilities for the Davidson Center to the Elad Foundation](#), February 14, 2018.

19) Eisenbud, Daniel, [Elad Management of City of David Tunnel Challenged in Court](#), *Jerusalem Post*, April 12, 2015.

Temple Period, particularly the 1st century CE—a street, shops, and traces of the destruction of the city by the Romans. The site also contains late Roman structures, a line of buildings from the Byzantine period, and four administration buildings, identified as palaces from the Umayyad period.

Davidson Center is a strategic location next to the Western Wall which links the Old City to the City of David/Silwan. The site is still under the auspices of the Company for the Reconstruction and Development of the Jewish Quarter, a government owned company. As Elad is a private body, it is not allowed to assume management responsibilities over holy sites such as the Western Wall, and it seems that this is one of the reasons why management of the site has yet to be officially transferred to the Elad Foundation. As far as we know, the agreement with Elad does not include the egalitarian prayer area south of the Mughrabi bridge.

Elad has an interest in gaining a foothold at this site. Having a management role at the Davidson Center is likely to help Elad increase tourism traffic to the City of David itself, by linking the sites physically, bureaucratically and narratively. It will enable Elad to consolidate the aforementioned route currently under excavation and heavily promoted as the ancient “Pilgrims' Trail” to the Temple, with a newly inaugurated site called the “Ritual Baths Trail”²⁰ at the Davidson Center, along the southern wall of the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif. Together the two routes are used to advance the narrative of Jewish pilgrimage to the Temple in ancient times.

Elad in the Ben Hinnom Valley

Over the past year, Elad have ventured into the “new territory” in the Ben Hinnom Valley. The valley is also known as ‘Wadi Rababa’, in Arabic and ‘Gehenna’, in the Christian tradition. On its slopes are the neighborhoods of Yemin Moshe, and Abu Tor on one side, and the Old City walls, Mount Zion and Silwan on the other, linking to the Kidron Valley. The valley is situated within the Jerusalem Walls National Park. The southern section of the valley is scattered with burial sites from the Iron age (8th-6th century BCE), the Second Temple (1st century BCE – 1st century CE), Roman, Byzantine, and Crusader periods and features cemeteries of various minority communities such as the Karaite cemetery. In biblical tradition

the valley is considered a place where ritual sacrifice (and child sacrifice) took place during the reigns of the Kings of Judah.

In 1974, the valley was declared part of the Jerusalem Walls National Park, a decision which was intended to preserve a green belt around the Old City. Residents of Abu Tor and Silwan who owned land within the valley were no longer allowed to build in it. The section of the valley close to West Jerusalem’s city center has experienced development over the decades with a concert venue and fair grounds, and recently a public park frequented by Israeli and Palestinian families.

A few months ago, the Elad Foundation inaugurated a café (No. 6 on the Hinnom Valley map) on the slopes of the Arab side of the Abu Tor neighborhood. This came a few months after the local planning committee issued a building permit for a 189-meter-long pedestrian rope bridge (No. 5 on abovementioned map) to link the café area with Mount Zion. Emek Shaveh and Peace Now have appealed to the district planning committee²¹ against the procedure used to issue a permit - a process which precludes public discussion - for a bridge in such a sensitive historic area. The appellants demand that the process reverts to the usual protocol of bringing a detailed plan before the district planning committee, thus exposing it to public scrutiny.

The bridge, café, and cable car ventures have been recently complemented by “gardening orders”²² issued by the municipality for plots within the Ben Hinnom valley. The orders essentially allow the local authority to temporarily use unutilized private land for public purposes, in this case for landscaping. As mentioned, the plots belonging to residents of Abu Tor and Silwan have not been built on since the area was declared a national park in 1974.

20) Emek Shaveh press Release: [How Many Ritual Baths does the Old City need? And why are there so Many Routes to the Temple Mount?](#), 8 February, 2017.

21) Emek Shaveh: [Peace Now and Emek Shaveh have filed an appeal regarding the construction of a bridge in the Hinnom Valley](#), 2 May 2018.

22) Emek Shaveh Press Release: [Update: Jerusalem Municipality Announces Taking possession of 60 dunams of Private Land in Silwan and Abu Tor for Gardening Purposes](#), 23 August, 2018.



The Hinnom Valley – looking east toward the neighborhood of Silwan



The Elad Foundation's new cafe in the Hinnom Valley

New law facilitates large-scale construction for settlers in Silwan/City of David

National Park Bill that Benefits Settlers Passed into Law

Perhaps one of the most significant but underestimated developments this year is the amendment to the National Parks law passed by the Knesset in November which will enable the Elad Foundation to multiply the number of residential units for settlers in Silwan. The Elad Foundation is known today amongst the Israeli public primarily as the organization which manages the archaeological park at the City of David and is therefore considered as one of the key patrons of archaeological development in the Historic Basin. But the bill reminds us that Elad is fundamentally a settlers' organization devoted to Judaizing the Palestinian village of Silwan.

The bill passed in the Knesset on a second and third reading in November²³ is an amendment to the National Parks bill and is designed specifically to enable the construction of residential homes in national parks. One of the only neighborhoods whose residents live within the boundaries of a national park is Silwan/City of David. According to the bill, a building plan for the neighborhood may be submitted by the municipality or by the existing home owners. In practice, because Silwan is characterized by fraught relations between the local Palestinians and the Jewish settlers, the residents would not agree on a plan. Therefore, it is likely that the Jerusalem Municipality, which has very close ties with the Elad Foundation, will tender a plan which will benefit the settlers of the Elad Foundation.

The bill, unsurprisingly, was heavily promoted by Elad which has, over the past 25 years settled approximately 500 Jews within Silwan/City of David. It is clear that the Palestinians will not be beneficiaries of this law given the fact that Palestinians of East Jerusalem very rarely receive construction permits, not to mention the paucity of master plans for Palestinians in the city.

23) Emek Shaveh: [Update: National Park Bill that Benefits Settlers Passed into Law](#), 26 November 2018.

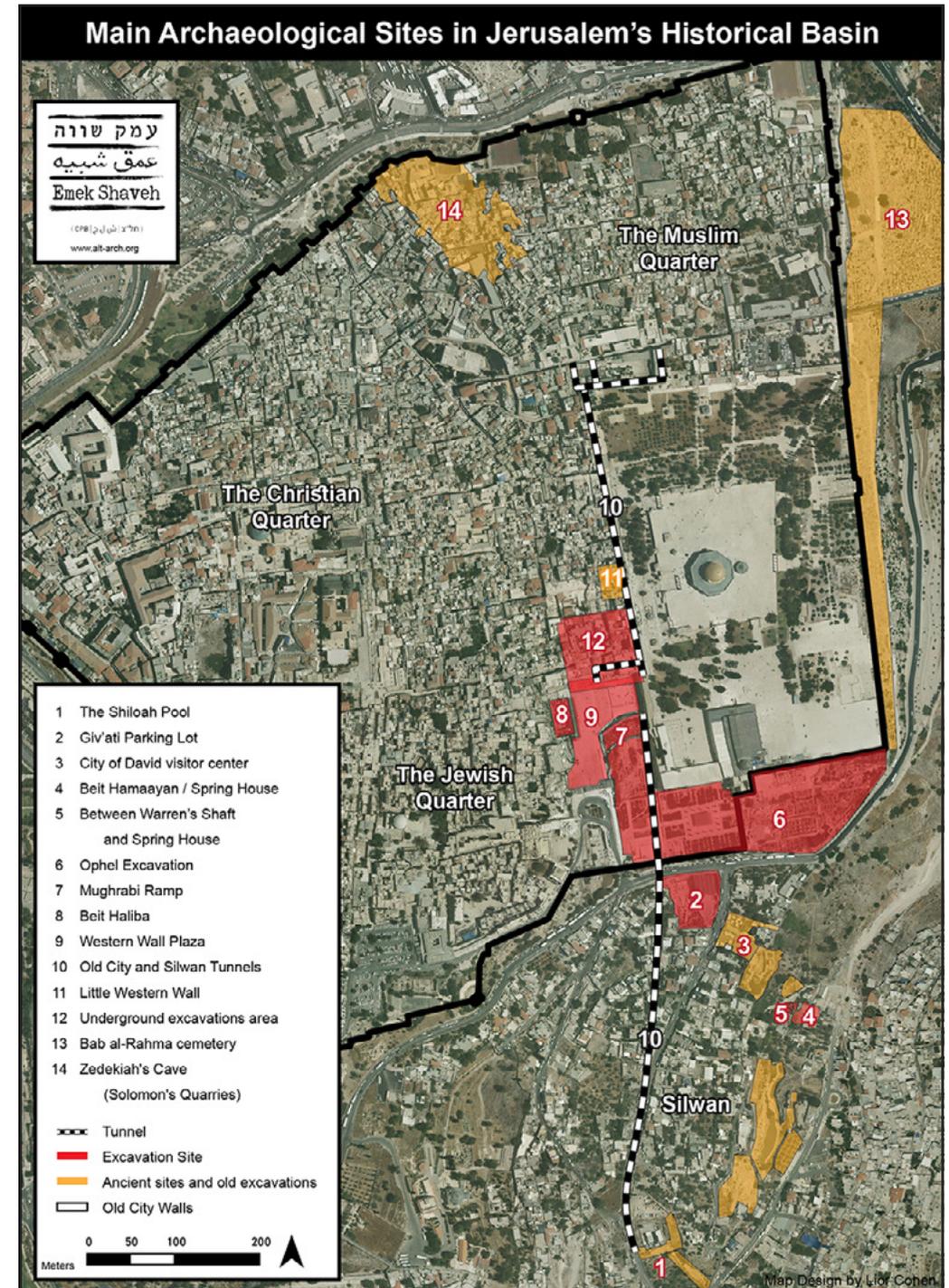
Conclusion

While most of the developments described in this report are an outcome of long-term processes geared to change the character and layout of Jerusalem's Historic Basin, new developments represent unprecedented level of government investment in advancing the settler agenda.

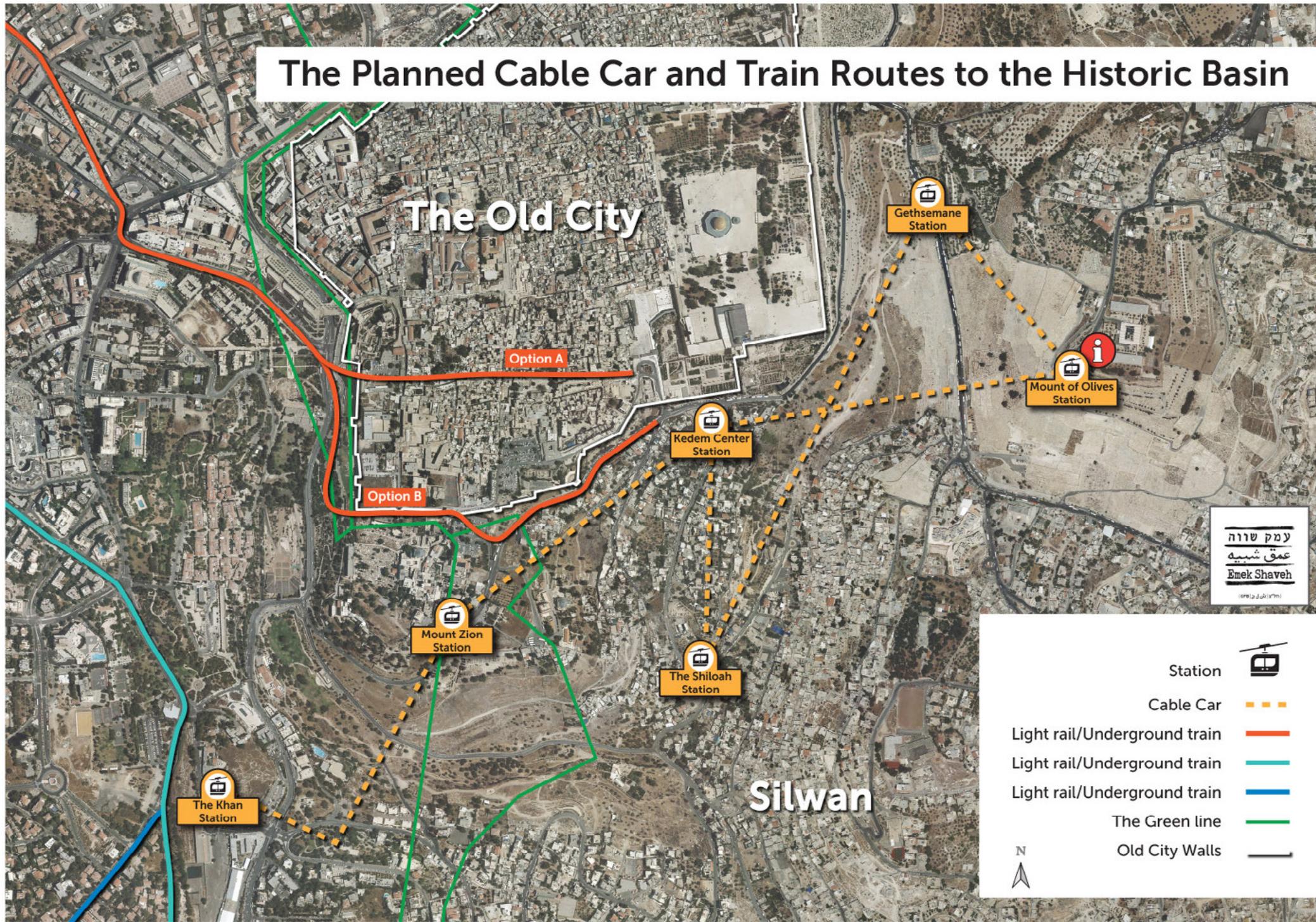
The fact that the development of the Historic Basin has become a central priority for this government is evidenced not only by the proliferation of new projects and record levels of budgetary allocations but also by the aggressive promotion of these projects by lawmakers often entailing the adoption irregular processes, as in the case of the cable car, or aggressive lobbying on behalf of the settlers, as witnessed in the passage of the National Parks bill. In 2018 the settler vision for Jerusalem has begun to take shape. It includes a network of old and new tourist sites featuring underground routes, a cable car and micro settlements in new areas of the Historic Basin. It involves handing over a major existing site inside the Old City to the control of the settlers for the first time. It involves an unprecedented legislative measure to free the settlers of the City of David/Silwan from obstacles hitherto hindering their efforts to change the demographics in the City of David/Silwan.

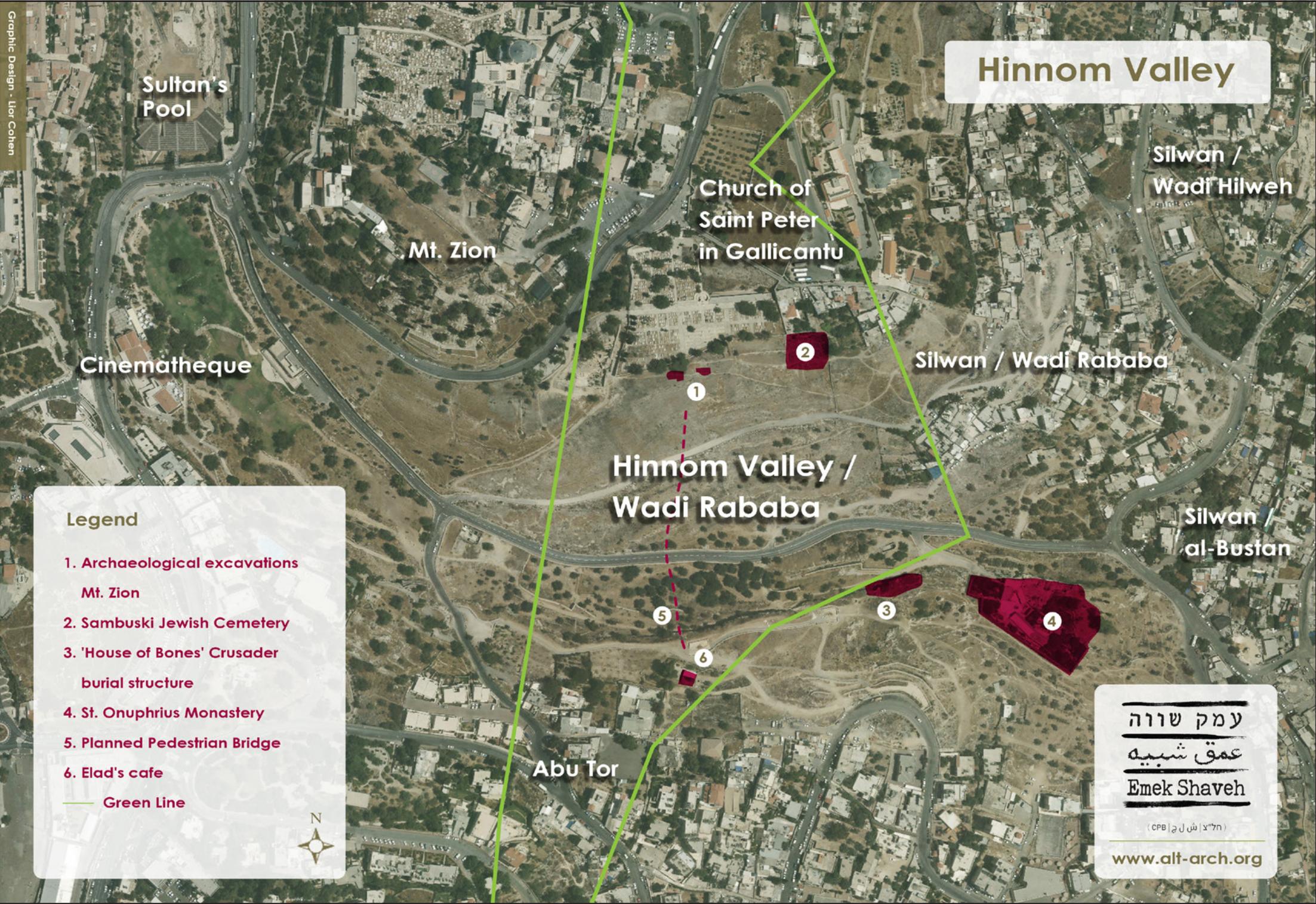
Archaeological tourism development in Jerusalem's Historic Basin has become inseparable from the settlement enterprise. The archaeological parks, tunnels and new transport projects are turning ancient sites into national monuments intended to redraw geopolitical boundaries and secure exclusive Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem's Historic Basin. The cost of this trend is enormous, both because it is eroding the physical evidence of Jerusalem's diverse past and because it is detrimental to any future political compromise.

Maps



The Planned Cable Car and Train Routes to the Historic Basin





Hinnom Valley

Legend

- 1. Archaeological excavations
- Mt. Zion
- 2. Samsuki Jewish Cemetery
- 3. 'House of Bones' Crusader burial structure
- 4. St. Onuphrius Monastery
- 5. Planned Pedestrian Bridge
- 6. Elad's cafe
- Green Line

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