

Shalem Plan Overview

The Plan to Reveal Ancient Jerusalem

Introduction

Each year, the Israeli government marks Jerusalem Day through a festive meeting at a select site in the city. On May 28 2017, to mark 50 years of Israeli rule over East Jerusalem, a celebratory meeting was held in the Western Wall Tunnels beneath the Muslim Quarter in the Old City. At the start of the meeting, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emphasized the importance of the occasion:

On this site King Solomon built the First Temple. Those who returned from the Babylonian exile built the Second Temple on this site, and following its destruction, generations of our people longed for this place. Thousands of years have passed, the people of Israel have returned to their land, established their state, and built a united capital.¹

During the meeting, the plan for revealing ancient Jerusalem was announced. Called the “Shalem Plan”, it involves massive archaeological excavations in the Old City and Silwan, developing archaeological sites in the Historic Basin for tourism, and is generally driving the government’s approach, and that of other bodies acting on its behalf, towards the development of the Old City basin.

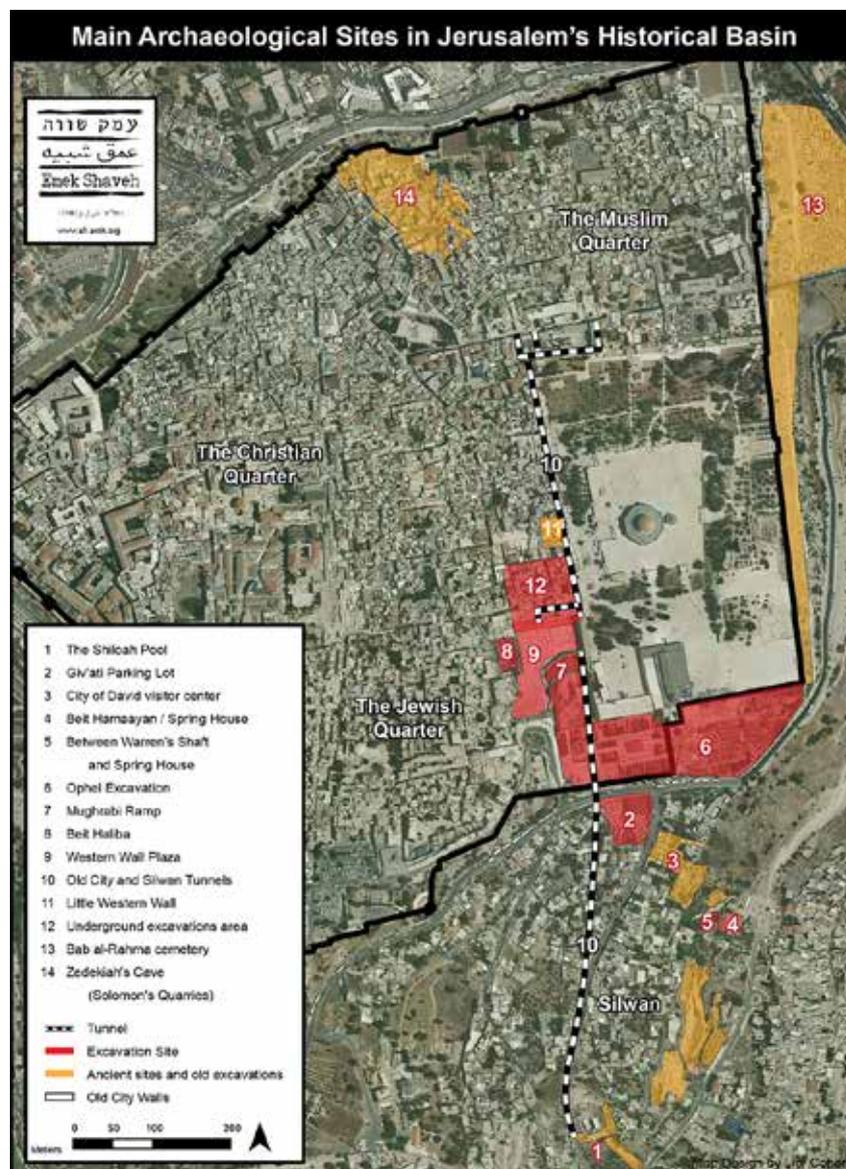
In this document we will examine the significance of the Shalem Plan and the degree to which it continues processes taking place in the Historic Basin over the past 20 years, including the takeover of important heritage sites by right-wing nonprofits as a means of advancing their political and ideological goals. Their actions are harmful to the Palestinian residents and deleterious to non-Jewish heritage in East Jerusalem. The Shalem Plan declaration has now placed the government at the forefront of activity that for years was associated with marginal settler groups.

1. [Cabinet Secretariat announcement following a government meeting on 28.5.2017 \(Hebrew\)](#).

Previous Plans for the Development of Tourist Sites in the Historic Basin of Jerusalem

In 2005, Government Decision 4090 allocated 50 million NIS annually for 2006–2013 to develop and rehabilitate the Historic Basin. The decision also determined that over the course of this period, the Ministry of Tourism would allocate 10 million NIS for tourism in the Old City.² Following on that decision, in 2012, Government Decision 4651 allocated 50 million NIS annually throughout 2013–2019 for the development of public tourism sites in Jerusalem.³ In total, over the past 14 years, the state has invested over one billion NIS in tourism development in Jerusalem’s Historic Basin. The rationale driving the investments, as it is stated in the decisions, is the need to reinforce the status of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel.⁴

Over the years, cooperation between government offices and state and municipal authorities with the settler organizations has tightened, leading to a steep increase in the number of archaeological sites under settler control. These sites are curated to emphasize the Jewish people’s central or exclusive ties to the area.



2. Government Decision 4090 from 9.8.2005, [Priority: Strengthening the City of Jerusalem \(Hebrew\)](#).

3. Government Decision 4651 from 20.5.2012, [Development of the City of Jerusalem \(Hebrew\)](#).

4. Supra note 2.

The process began in 1997 with an agreement between the Elad Foundation, a settlers' organization, and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA), a government body, whereby the Elad Foundation received the rights to manage the City of David archaeological park. Over the years, additional agreements gave Elad management rights over central archaeological sites throughout the Historic Basin, including the Davidson Center, at the foot of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, which it received in 2014.⁵

Over the years, the Israel Antiquities Authority's (IAA) attitude toward Elad's activities vastly shifted. In 1998 the IAA strongly opposed Elad's operations in the area, whereas by the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, the IAA was supporting Elad's initiatives.⁶ As such, it is clear that Elad was the recipient, whether directly or indirectly, of a significant portion of the financial resources allocated by the government to the development of tourism in the Historic Basin.

A blatant example of the manner in which the INPA and the IAA have become involved in ensuring Elad's initiatives are successful is their support for the plan to build the Kedem Compound visitors center at the Givati parking lot. The lot is situated at the heart the ancient Jerusalem archaeological site, mere meters from the Old City walls. The visitors center is planned as a seven-story building spanning 16,000 square meters, to serve as the main entrance to the Jerusalem Walls National Park. There is no question that the planning committees would not have approved the construction of such a large structure at the heart of a national park, and at the center of one of Israel's most important archaeological mounds without the explicit support of the INPA and the IAA.

The Shalem Plan

In accordance with Government Decision 2678 for the development of Jerusalem's Old City basin, enacted on May 28 2017, the Minister of Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage, Ze'ev Elkin, was assigned to prepare and present a comprehensive plan for the development of the Historic Basin.⁷ Following the decision, the Shalem Plan was prepared and presented for government approval on Jerusalem Day of the following year, May 9, 2018.⁸ Alongside the Shalem Plan, Government Resolution 3788 to Strengthen and bolster the Old City basin in Jerusalem, approved on May 13, 2018, notes goals for maintenance, events, and the development of transportation routes in the area. The budget earmarked for the plan stands at 350 million NIS. The area slated for development includes the Old City and the City of David, along with the Mount of Olives, the Peace Forest, and the Armon HaNatziv Promenade.⁹

The plan's goals entail "ongoing exposure of, research into, and development of antiquity sites in ancient Jerusalem as part of a national plan [...] that will highlight and empower the role of Jerusalem as the ancient capital of King David and the modern-day capital of Israel."¹⁰ It further deems that the Shalem Plan aims to brand Jerusalem as a central tourist site of national and international importance; to forge connections between the Old City and the southern section of the Historic Basin (in which the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan is located) via passage through various archaeological layers; to emphasize and preserve the historic and biblical sites in the area; and to demonstrate ancient Jerusalem's multicultural character.¹¹

5. State Comptroller's Report, 2016. [Management and Operation of Tourist Sites in Jerusalem's Old City Basin \(Hebrew\)](#), Report 67, pp. 19–64.

6. Rafi Greenberg, 2014. [A Privatized Heritage: How the Israel Antiquities Authority Relinquished Jerusalem's Past](#), Jerusalem: Emek Shaveh.

7. Government Decision 2678 on 28.5.2017, [Development Plan for Jerusalem's Old City Basin](#). For further information on initiatives within the framework of this plan, see [here](#).

8. [The National Plan to Reveal Ancient Jerusalem: Proposed Decision \(Hebrew\)](#).

9. The Prime Minister's Office, 13.5.2018, [Government Decision: Strengthen and Stabilize Jerusalem's Old City basin](#).

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.



Minister of Culture and Sport Miri Regev with Elad director, David Be'eri, at the stepped street excavations in Silwan: "These excavations bring the bible to life and strengthen our best kushan (an Ottoman-era document attesting to property rights)." Photographer: Miri Shimonovich, Government Press Corps.

Given these declarations, one might mistakenly consider the Shalem Plan a balanced blueprint that primarily seeks to preserve the area's multicultural heritage. However, a closer examination of the texts related to the plan reveals the blatant ideological and political motives that inform it.

For example, in a public statement issued by the Ministry of Culture and Sport following the plan's approval, Minister of Culture and Sport, Miri Regev, noted the following upon strolling through archaeological sites in the Historic Basin of Jerusalem: "Near the (ancient) shops, with all the coins and artifacts of Jews who walked around here 2,000 and 3,000 years ago, and we feel that we have come home. These excavations bring the bible to life and strengthen the best kushan (an Ottoman-era document attesting to property rights) we possess."¹² Another example: the Director General of the IAA, Yisrael Hasson, claimed that the plan aims to "Increase the number of visitors to Jerusalem's ancient sites, establish contiguity between the southernmost parts of the ancient city and those within the Old City walls through the archaeological layers, and to emphasize historic and biblical sites in the area, in order to illustrate the people of Israel's intergenerational connection to Jerusalem."¹³ According to Regev and Hasson, the Old Testament is Jewish property, and unearthing the biblical story reveals the historic connection between the people of Israel and Jerusalem. Moreover the date and location of the meeting where the Shalem plan was first announced, no doubt, intended to highlight an exclusively Jewish historical context. The Shalem Plan was followed by a decision to allocate 50 million NIS toward its implementation.¹⁴

12. [The IAA presented the "Shalem Plan" for the unearthing and development of ancient Jerusalem \(Hebrew\)](#), IAA website.

13. Ibid.

14. Supra note 1.

Another indication for the political bias of the plan's objectives are its sources of funding for the first two years of implementation. The plan's budget derives from two primary sources: 1. The Israeli government, which committed to transferring 47 million NIS for 2018–2019 toward excavation and touristic development at archaeological sites in the Historic Basin. 2. The Elad Foundation, which committed to transferring 43 million NIS over the course of those same two years.¹⁵

Nearly half of the plan's budget, which the government presented as a program of national importance, is funded by a private organization with overt political and ideological goals. This partnership blatantly undermines the government's responsibility to serve all its resident populations. Moreover, it raises questions whether the state and the authorities acting on its behalf have the capacity to counteract Elad's intentions, considering the fact that the organization both owns the land on which the excavations are being executed, and is a primary funder.

Indeed, an assessment of the projects that constitute the Shalem Plan indicate that despite the intentions declared at the outset, this plan will not preserve the multicultural heritage of Jerusalem's Historic Basin. On the contrary, it appears likely to change the character of Jerusalem's Historic Basin such that it will conceal all physical, symbolic, and emotional connections between Palestinian Silwan and the Old City and highlight only sites associated with a Jewish narrative in Jerusalem.



15. Supra note 8.

Main Sites under Development to Date

The Shalem Plan is a series of sites currently under development intended to be linked together to form one historical city, above and underground. These include the following:¹⁶

The Gihon Spring Citadel: Tourism development work has been planned for the Gihon Spring area, including the excavation of rooms carved into the rock and in an area aboveground; completion of the Kidron Valley excavation and its integration into the tourist route, and conservation of the fortified passage and integrating it into the route. the budget for the plan is two million NIS derived from the government, and two million NIS from the Elad Foundation.

The Stepped Street: Since 2013, the IAA has been conducting underground excavations along the route from the Shiloah/Siloam Pool to the Givati parking lot, underneath Palestinian homes on Wadi Hilweh street, the main street in the neighborhood of Silwan. The excavations reveal the route of a Roman era stepped street that led from the Shiloah/Siloam Pool up towards the Temple Mount. The street has been introduced by the Elad Foundation to the public as the “Pilgrims’ Road.” According to this interpretation, it served Jewish pilgrims en route to the Temple. To date no evidence has been provided to prove this claim. Its budget consists of 22 million NIS in government funding, and 28 million NIS funding by the Elad Foundation.



The Stepped Street, known as “Pilgrims’ Road.” Photographer: Koby Harati.

16. Information regarding the funding of the work on sites listed herein is taken from the national program (ibid.), “Shalem Plan: for exposure, preservation, research, and development of sites in ancient Jerusalem,” pp. 4-5. In this document, the IAA presents its work plan within the framework of the Shalem Plan.



Simulation of the Elad Foundation's visitors center called the Kedem Compound, in front of the Old City Walls and the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Underground tunnels will link the City of David with the Davidson Center.

The Drainage Channel: A drainage channel was uncovered underneath the Stepped Street. It is unclear when it was initially excavated. Nevertheless, archaeologists currently excavating the site claim that during the Great Revolt against Rome, the last-standing rebels hid in the channel to evade the terror of the Romans. Within the framework of the Shalem Plan, the entire channel is slated to be opened to the general public. Its budget consists of two million NIS in government funding and two million NIS funding by the Elad Foundation.

The Large Stone Structure: Archaeological excavations were carried out at a site beneath the visitors center at the City of David. According to Eilat Mazar, the archaeologist who excavated the site, the Large Stone Structure is a remnant of King David's palace. Other scholars dispute this conclusion. Future excavations of the structure will be completed within the framework of the Shalem Plan, and additional display areas will be opened to the public. Its budget consists of two million NIS in government funding and three million NIS from the Elad Foundation.

The Kedem Compound: As noted, the Kedem Compound will be built at the entrance to Silwan, approximately 30 meters from the Old City walls, and is intended to serve as the point of arrival into the Jerusalem Walls National Park. The project was granted a budget within the Shalem plan which is earmarked for the completion of the archaeological excavation on site and planning for a children's museum. Four million NIS of the budget was allocated by the government and six million NIS donated by the Elad Foundation.

Foundation of the Western Wall beneath Robinson's Arch: The area is located within the Davidson Center archaeological park, which is managed by the Elad Foundation. Within the Shalem Plan, the project received a budget to complete excavations on site, make it accessible to the general public, and integrate it into the Davidson Center's visitors route. Its budget consists of two million NIS in government funding and two million NIS by the Elad Foundation.

Education, documentation, research, and publication: In addition to the aforementioned projects, the government is investing 13 million NIS in creating educational programs and activities for youth and students who visit the sites in Jerusalem's Historic Basin, and for documenting the excavations on site, publishing the finds, and developing research in the field.

Conclusion

The Shalem Plan is expected to conclude in 2024, yet an analysis of the changes in the character of the Historic Basin over the past several years indicates that the plan is only a step toward the creation of a new Old City in Jerusalem. We are also witnessing a rise in the influence of right-wing organizations, most notably the Elad Foundation, and their increased control over sections of Jerusalem's Historic Basin. Over the past two years, the Elad Foundation has worked toward developing new tourist sites in and around the Ben Hinnom Valley. Some of these initiatives include opening a cafe, building a cable car between the First Station in West Jerusalem and the Kedem Compound in East Jerusalem, expropriating agricultural land from Palestinians in Abu Tor via gardening orders, and other actions.¹⁷ Considering these measures, it appears that the Shalem Plan is important not because it seeks to preserve heritage sites and open them up to tourists but because it seeks to alter the character of the Historic Basin. Archaeology is used as a tool to block dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians over Jerusalem and to serve extremist nationalist bodies in the most politically and religiously charged place in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This exploitative use of archaeology and the growing partnership between right-wing organizations and state authorities is irreversibly changing the multicultural legacy of Jerusalem.

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17. Yonathan Mizrahi, [When Green Zones Meet the Green Line](#), Jerusalem: Emek Shaveh, 2020.

