

25.8.2022

Biannual Summary of Developments:

Introduction:

In the first eight months of 2022, new historic sites in East Jerusalem and the West Bank emerged as conflict zones as settlers and government bodies seized land or assumed control under the pretext of archaeological research or the development of historic sites for the public benefit. The methods are familiar, but the increase in the number of new focal points is staggering. In Jerusalem, projects which are either led by the settlers of the [Elad Foundation](#) or which clearly serve the organization's interests are now expanding beyond the City of David Archaeological Park into the Hinnom Valley and the Peace Forest, and new plans detail a future route along the Kidron, the eastern valley outlying the Old City.

The multiplication of settler-led tourism ventures would not have been possible without the full cooperation of the relevant government bodies such as the Nature and Parks Authority (INPA), the Jerusalem Municipality, and the Jerusalem Development Authority (JDA). Together, their actions exploit values of nature and heritage conservation to alter the multicultural identity of Jerusalem's historic core.

In the West Bank, an organized campaign by settler lobbying groups claiming widespread damage to antiquity sites by Palestinians has been yielding dividends in the form of new allocations to the Civil Administration and regional councils earmarked for combating antiquity theft. Multiple private or semi-private organized activities by settlers who are monitoring, documenting, and complaining about damages to archaeological sites have been encouraged and consolidated by a group dedicated to "safeguarding lands for the Jewish people" called "Guardians of Eternity" (In Hebrew "Shomrim al Hanetsach"). Last year we [wrote](#) that this was part of a widespread effort to crack down on Palestinian construction, agricultural activity and the development of heritage sites. This year, efforts intensified when claims were also made over a site in Area B (under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority), and steps were taken to extend the jurisdiction of the Israel Antiquities Authority into the occupied West Bank.

These developments join the increased [preoccupation](#) with ancient sites in the areas that are associated with biblical-era or later events in the history of the Jewish people and attempts by settler councils and organizations to expand or deepen Israeli control at those sites.

Jerusalem

Shalem Plan (the sequel)

On Jerusalem Day (29th May), the Israeli government announced a decision to finance the second stage of the "Shalem Plan" to the sum of 16 million NIS over the next year-and-a-half. This is the second phase of the [Plan](#) initially announced in 2017 and budgeted in 2018 for the development of ancient Jerusalem to "thereby enhance Jerusalem's status as an international city of faith, heritage, culture and tourism." In essence this is a political decision to continue to finance the Elad Foundation's archaeological-touristic settlement while subserving the Israel Antiquities Authority to its private ideological needs. The series of projects in both phases of the plan are designed to change the demographic and historic character of East Jerusalem in general, and the Historic Basin in particular.

The first stage of the Shalem Plan enabled the IAA's extremely problematic horizontal excavation of the Stepped Street (dubbed the "[Pilgrim's Road](#)") which entailed excavating under the homes of Palestinian residents of Silwan. One of the objectives of the tunnel is to link the City of David with tourist sites inside the Old City that are associated with Jewish history, thus reshaping the prism through which tourists understand the past of the city.



The Stepped Street, dubbed the "Pilgrim's Road", a horizontal excavation under the homes of Palestinians in Silwan. Photo from April, 2022.

The second phase of the Shalem Plan will fund the development of new sites in the Historic Basin and a network of paths between sites run by the Elad Foundation, linking the City of David with the Hinnom Valley, the Kidron, and the Haas-Goldman Promenade in the Armon Hanatziv neighborhood. Together with the cable car [greenlighted in May](#) by the High Court, these developments will completely change the landscape and story of Jerusalem. Instead of a diverse multicultural historic city, Jerusalem will now be rebranded as a city with a predominantly Judaic and Jewish past.

The Hinnom Valley

The Elad Foundation is best known for its flagship City of David venture in Silwan, but over the past few years it has been expanding its operations into multiple locations in Jerusalem's Historic core.

Most recently, Elad has launched several new projects in an area called the Hinnom Valley (see map #1), an ancient valley which for millennia had served as the city's necropolis. From

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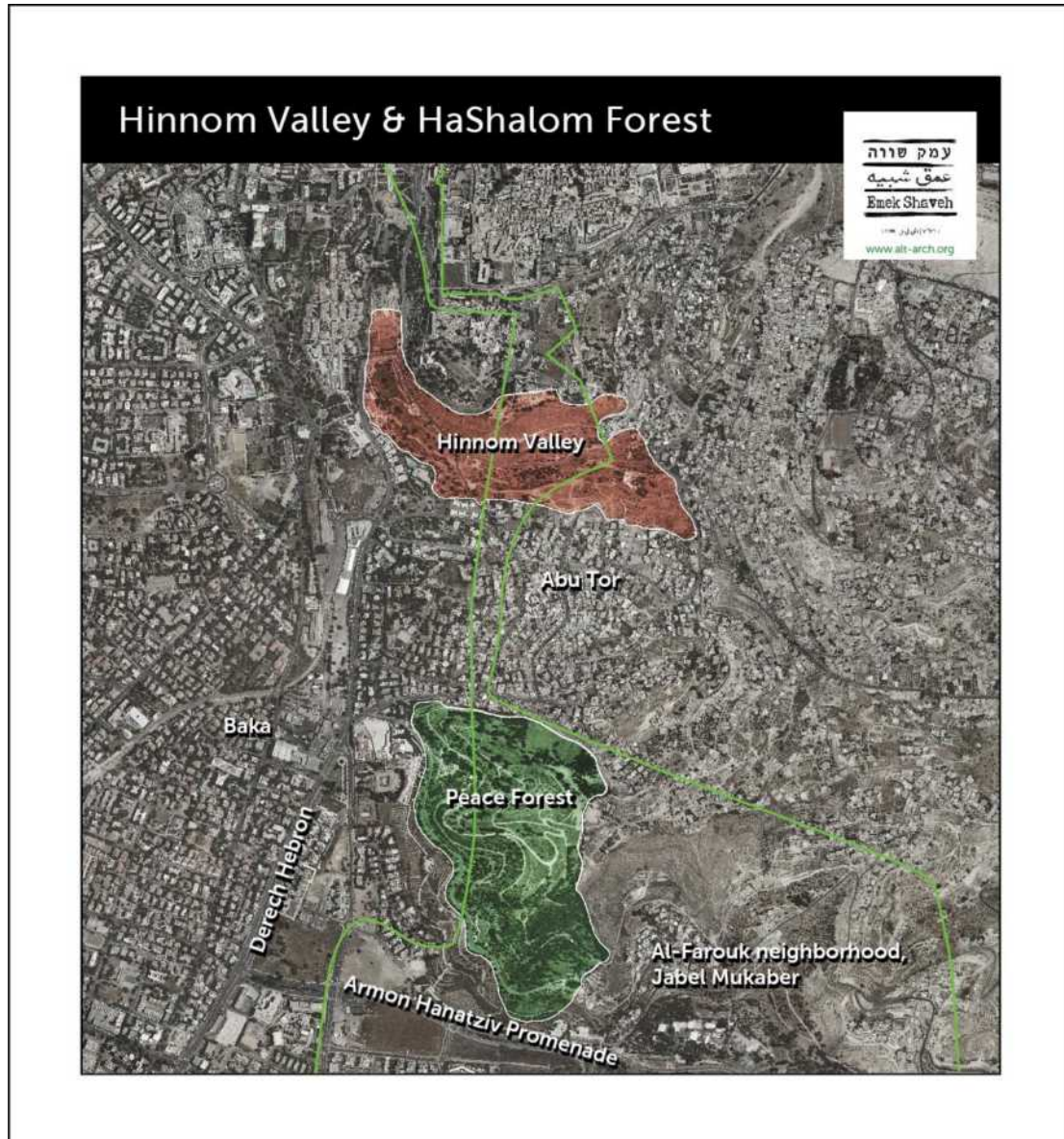
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a geopolitical perspective, the valley comprises areas of diverse status. The section west of the Old City is inside sovereign Israel, a portion of the valley is known as no-man's land, while the area to the south-east is in the Occupied Territories. On the Palestinian side to the south, it borders the neighborhood of Abu Tor, to the east it abuts the neighborhoods of Wadi Hilweh and Wadi Rababa in Silwan, and meets Al-Bustan, another neighborhood in Silwan.



Hinnom Valley in July with Silwan in the background.

Up until two years ago, the valley was a green zone that served as a recreational space for both Palestinians and Israelis for picnics, rock-climbing and horseback riding. The valley is included within the Jerusalem Walls National Park (declared in 1974) which has helped to preserve its ancient landscape and protect it from modern development, but also imposed severe restrictions on the Palestinians of Silwan who live within its boundaries. The government body responsible for the overall management of the national park is the Nature and Parks Authority (INPA).



Map #1 showing the Hinnom Valley and the Peace Forest

In recent years, the settlers together with governmental authorities have been advancing plans for the development of the section of the valley which abuts the Wadi Rababa neighborhood of Silwan. The land in this stretch of the valley consists of areas defined as “absentee property”, and private plots owned by residents of Silwan which in 2018 were

appropriated through [gardening orders](#), a legal mechanism used by local authorities to develop uncultivated private land for the public benefit.

The projects advanced in the area over the past few years include the Jerusalem [cable car](#) (recently given the green light by the High Court of Justice) a [suspension bridge](#) and a "[House in the Valley](#)", a café and events facility built by the Elad Foundation. Last summer, the Elad Foundation together with the Nature and Parks Authority launched yet another tourism site called "[The Center for Ancient Agriculture](#)", an educational farm aimed at teaching biblical farming methods at the center of the valley. Parts of the farm are built on land which Palestinian families claim is privately owned but which is claimed by the Custodian for Absentee Properties based on the highly [discriminatory Absentee Property Law](#).

The landowners who have worked their land for decades (although have not been able to develop it since it was declared part of the National Park) have petitioned against the gardening orders that have enabled the Nature and Parks Authority and Elad to carry out landscaping work in the valley and on the slopes of Mt. Zion including the construction of terraces, planting and the creation of footpaths while prohibiting the Palestinian landowners from any kind of intervention on their land apart from olive picking. Last week the district court dismissed their petition.

In recent weeks, Elad and the INPA have begun works at the Samburgki Cemetery, an Ottoman-era cemetery for Jerusalem's Jewish poor on the slopes of Mount Zion. During the works Elad announced to the Palestinian residents of the Wadi Rababa neighborhood in Silwan that they will be [sealing off an access road](#) that serves over 1000 residents and parking spaces near the homes. The residents have no other vehicular access to their homes. While initially it seemed that the municipality and INPA would intervene on behalf of the residents, despite repeated appeals by the residents and Emek Shaveh, the authorities have allowed the works to continue.

Teaching "Social Involvement" on Private Palestinian Land

Over the past few months, the Elad Foundation has been hosting groups of high school children, pre-military groups and groups of volunteers to work on land, some of which is privately owned.

Some of the groups who have participated in activity at the farm are high school students who worked on site as part of a curricular program of "social involvement" which counts

towards their matriculation. Earlier this year we discovered that the Greater Baka Community Council in West Jerusalem invited students to participate in a "social involvement" program at the farm without explaining to parents or teachers that this is a political project run by the Elad Foundation. In response, Jewish residents from the neighborhood initiated a petition calling on the Baka Community Council to cease cooperation with the farm. The Baka Community Center stopped publicizing the activity as a result. This is one example of many of the involvement of organizations and youth who often work on the farm completely unaware of the political and ethical implications of their actions.



Israeli school children working on land in the Hinnom Valley which Palestinians claim is privately owned.

Tensions between the Palestinian Landowners and the workers of Elad and the INPA

These activities have introduced significant tensions into the area which have, in turn, led to altercations between the Palestinian landowners and employees of the Elad Foundation and the Nature and Park Authority, including a violent incident at the end of May where a member of the Sumrin family, one of the families who own land in the Hinnom Valley, was [seriously injured](#) by a rock to his face. As of writing, despite the fact that there is a video recording of the event there have been no arrests made of the Jewish-Israeli workers involved in the violence.

Elad and the Nature and Parks Authority: The two who walk together

The Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) was mandated in 1998 to oversee all the historic parks and nature reserves in Israel and in East Jerusalem. Twenty years ago, the Nature and Parks Authority subcontracted the Elad Foundation to develop and operate the City of David archaeological park. Since then, the relationship between the authority and Elad has only grown stronger. In the Hinnom Valley, workers wearing t-shirts with both organization's logos attest to seamless cooperation on the ground.



Worker wearing a shirt with both logos (Elad and Nature and Parks Authority). Photo from Silwanic.

The contract between the Elad Foundation and the INPA for the Hinnom Valley, signed in 2020 for five years and extended for another five years in October 2021 in an irregular procedure, is just the latest in a series of partnerships between the two bodies. This particular contract was processed without a tender. According to the contract, the INPA will invest up to 100,000 NIS whereas the Elad Foundation will invest up to 5 million NIS. Moreover, the Jerusalem Development Authority and Elad are each investing 4 million shekels in the development of the burial caves in the valley. But the source of Elad's "matching" contribution is in fact the Ministry of Tourism.

The contract between Elad and the INPA includes a map which delineates the area where works are permitted (map #2). Interestingly, according to the map, the INPA agreed to subcontract Elad to manage sections of the valley which are not even currently under the jurisdiction of the INPA. How was this possible? The "mystery" was resolved last February when a plan for expanding the boundaries of the national park by 25% was submitted for discussion to the District Planning Committee (map #3). The areas slated for expansion

included the Mount of Olives and areas within the Hinnom Valley and Abu Tor. A simple comparison between the map of the expansion plan and the map of the agreement between Elad and the INPA shows clearly that the areas promised to Elad which are not currently under the auspices of the INPA, will come under its auspices if the national park expansion plan is approved (map #4). In other words, *the INPA promised Elad land that was not under its jurisdiction* when the contract was signed. A [letter](#) of condemnation by the churches who would be impacted by the expansion plan on the Mount of Olives resulted in the plan being *temporarily* taken off the agenda, but it is once again on the planning committee's agenda for December 2022.

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Map (# 2) that appeared in the contract between Elad and the INPA delineating the area (in red) which the INPA subcontracted to Elad.

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Map #3 showing the Jerusalem Walls National Park in its present-day boundaries (in light green) and the expansion plan (marked in dark green).

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Map # 4 is the same as Map #2 (from the contract between Elad and the INPA) but with the expansion area marked in blue (blue=our marking). The INPA had subcontracted Elad to develop this area even though the area was (and is currently) **not** under auspices of the INPA when the agreement was signed.

The events in the Hinnom Valley/Wadi Rababa should be understood in the context of an overall strategy promoted by the settlers and all the relevant authorities to change the identity and demographic composition of the area surrounding the Historic Basin. The farm in the valley/Center for Ancient Agriculture has become a strategic site for the Elad Foundation in their efforts to reach the Israeli secular mainstream public. Due to its proximity to West Jerusalem and mainstream cultural institutions such as the Jerusalem Cinematheque, Elad is well positioned to attract relatively non-political crowds that would perceive the farm as yet another cultural venue in the area. This month, the Elad Foundation announced a series of performances by Israeli musicians at the farm in collaboration with the "Zappa" club. A series of [campaigns](#) by Jewish-Israeli Jerusalemites to persuade the artists to not to cooperate with Palestinian land theft is currently underway.

In July, during the International Film Festival in Jerusalem, we launched a series of tours together with [Peace Now](#) and [Ir Amim](#) that brought more than 150 Israelis to the valley to learn about the developments and meet with the Palestinian landowners.



Joint tour with Ir Amim and Peace of Now of the Hinnom Valley during the Jerusalem Film Festival in July.

Next in line: The Kidron Valley

The Kidron Valley runs alongside the Old City walls between the Old City and the slopes of the Mount of Olives and linking the neighborhoods of Silwan and Wadi el-Joz (Wadi el-Joz is a continuation of the Kidron). The slopes of Silwan overlooking the valley feature rock cut tombs from the Judean period topped by residential Palestinian homes. Slightly to the north it runs below the Mount of Olives Jewish Cemetery. Along the valley itself are monumental tombs from the Second Temple Period including Absalom's Tomb and the Tombs of Zecharia and Bnei Hezir (a priestly family from the Hellenistic/Second Temple period).

The Kidron valley is also of the utmost religious importance for Muslims and Christians. According to Islamic tradition, at the end of times, Muslims who are buried in the Bab a-Rahmeh and Yousefiya cemeteries, situated on the western slopes of the Kidron valley, will be the first to be resurrected. According to Christian tradition, Jesus and the apostles came

through the Kidron Valley after the Last Supper on their way to the Mount of Olives. The Kidron valley is also believed by Eastern Christians to be the location of the Virgin Mary's ascent to heaven.



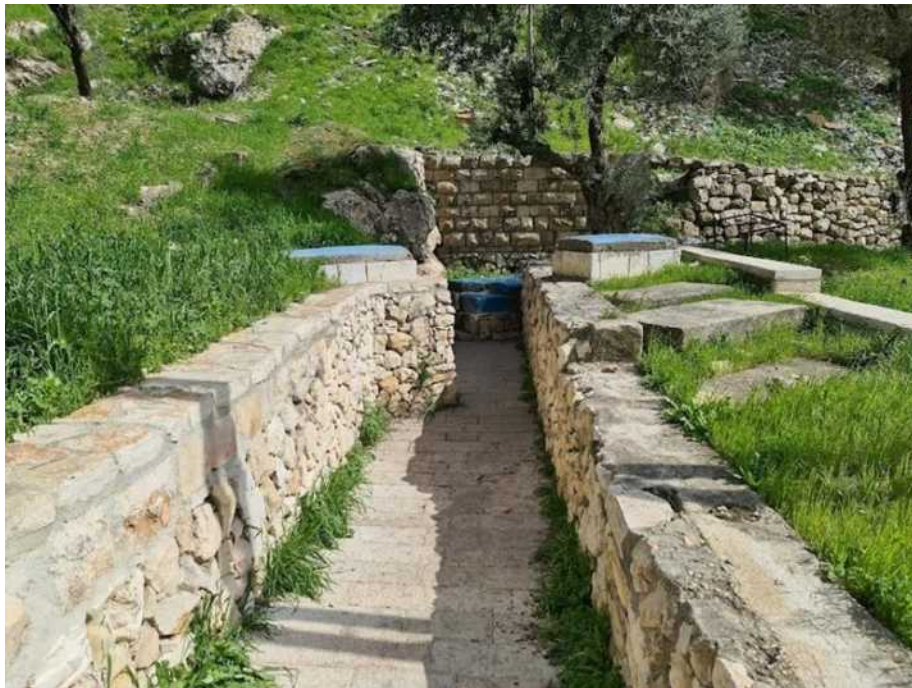
The Kidron Valley and the southeast corner of the Old City with Absalom's Tomb.

For several years now the Elad Foundation has been cultivating the slopes overlooking the valley in the area leading to the Pool of Siloam in the City of David Site. On festivals and school holidays Elad has led tours through the valley to the Tombs.

In recent months a plan has emerged to develop the Kidron all the way to the north-eastern corner of the Old City walls, an area known as the "Sheep Market". According to the Jerusalem Development Authority's budget for 2022, one million shekels will be invested in creating a promenade. The budget provides for rest stations, shaded areas, and the route itself will be linked to the Elad-run Stepped Street (which Elad refers to as the "Pilgrim's Road"). The route as a whole is referred to in the budget as "the Second Temple route", a name that suggests the narrative likely to dominate this area.

Taken together with the plan to expand the national park into the section of the Mount of Olives which is home to several of the city's most important churches, the plans will extend the route of settler run Judeo-centric tourist trails through the whole eastern section of the Historic Basin while placing increasing restrictions on the Palestinian residents and the Mount of Olives Churches.

A detailed guide of the Kidron Valley and its importance in Judaism, Christianity and Islam will be published within the next few weeks.



The Rabbi Ovadia MiBartenura Tomb, one of the sites along the Kidron near Silwan which according to the JDA budget is slated for development.

West Bank

In recent years we have witnessed a [growing](#) campaign by settler NGOs to extend Israeli control over sites in the West Bank claiming large-scale antiquity destruction and theft by the Palestinians. While we acknowledge that antiquity theft is a major problem in the West Bank, we strongly object to its use as a justification for settlement expansion and promoting actions which advance de facto annexation (more below). There are approximately 6000 antiquity sites in the West Bank. The significance is that in almost every

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village or town there are archaeological remains of varying scale from a watering hole to a multilayered mound. It follows that there is always a tension between the need for development and the safeguarding of heritage sites.

Another worrying trend we have been monitoring is the increased engagement by Israeli archaeological institutions, universities and the Israel Antiquities Authority with projects in the West Bank. These are causes for concern, particularly when it comes to the latter which signifies steps taken towards [de facto annexation](#) in the realm of archaeology.

Tel Tibnah

In late July, an archaeological excavation sponsored by Bar-Ilan University commenced at Tel Tibnah, an archaeological mound near the villages of Nabi Saleh and Deir Nisham. Tel Tibnah (recognized by this project as Timnath-Heres) is an archaeological site covering more than 100 dunams which according to one tradition features the burial place of Joshua. The site was surveyed several times by Israeli archaeologists who identified remains of a significant multilayered site.

The villagers of Dir-Nisam, Beit Rima and Nebi Saleh claim the land is privately owned. In any case, the lands are used by the villagers for agriculture and herding. In addition, within the site there is a spring that serves for drinking and irrigation. The consent of the villagers was not requested prior to the excavation. Initiating archaeological projects on privately owned land, even if these are declared as archaeological sites, requires [notifying the landowners and seeking their approval in advance](#). After discovering the excavations on their land, the local residents submitted their objection to the proposed excavations which will have a dramatic effect on their lives, impact their freedom of movement and violate their property rights.

We also discovered that in 2019 a report was written by the settler organization Israel's Heritage Preservation Center (IHPC) concerning a budget that would be required for the development of the site into a tourist site which would demonstrate its importance in the region's Jewish heritage. The assessment examines how the nearby Jewish settlements may be involved in the site's development while ignoring the presence of the Palestinian villages.

Emek Shaveh, together with [Hagel](#), approached all relevant actors to highlight the problematic nature of the project. So far, only Bar Ilan University issued a response saying that the Civil Administration's Staff Officer for Archaeology issued a permission to excavate and that the land in question was not privately owned.

Last week, Emek Shaveh visited the site with MKs Mossi Raz and Gabi Laski (Meretz) who met with the head archaeologist at the site and the head of the department for The Land of Israel Studies at Bar Ilan University and debated the legality and ethics of the excavation. [Here](#) is a segment of this discussion.

Mount Ebal

In March a Texan Evangelical archaeologist gave a [press conference](#) claiming to have found a "curse tablet" with Proto-Hebrew writing on Mount Ebal, constituting, in his opinion, the oldest Hebrew text found in the country and containing a mention of the name of God. Dr. Scott Stripling, Director of Excavations for Associated Biblical Research (ABR), a Christian ministry dedicated to demonstrating the historical reliability of the bible through archaeology, and his team which includes Israeli researchers, claim the epigraphic analysis and special scanning procedures date the find to the Late Bronze – Iron I periods when Mount Ebal was a regional Israelite ritual site. Stripling and colleagues claim the artifact was found through the wet sifting of debris left over at the site from an excavation undertaken in the 1980s.

Today, Mount Ebal is situated within Area B, which according to the Oslo Accords falls under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority had not issued an excavation license. We have evidence which clearly suggests that the artifact was removed from the site in December 2019 without license, in contravention of international law and in complete disregard for acceptable archaeological standards. To read about the find and Emek Shaveh's response see Haaretz article [here](#). For an article (in Hebrew) by Emek Shaveh's Board of Directors Chairperson, Professor Rafi Greenberg, in Makor Rishon see [here](#).



Dr. Scott Stripling with Yossi Dagan, Head of the Shomron Regional Council. Photo by the Shomron Regional Council.

In recent years, Christian evangelicals keen to prove the veracity of the biblical account through archaeology have been excavating key sites in the West Bank. For several years until 2016, the ABR team excavated a site called Khirbet Maqatir on private land belonging to the Palestinians of the village of Deir Dibwan. It was only after the village council approached the excavators to inquire why permission was not sought that the excavations were stopped. Since 2017, Stripling has been leading delegations to excavate at [Tel Shiloh](#) associated with the site of the ancient biblical Tabernacle.

At the same time, right-wing organizations such as "Guardians of Eternity" (an offshoot of Regavim) and the Shiloh Forum have spearheaded a campaign aimed at bringing [greater Israeli control](#) to ancient sites throughout the West Bank, including sites in areas B and A. The "discovery" of the tablet dovetails a two-year campaign by settlers to bring [Mount Ebal under Israeli control](#), citing the threat of destruction by Palestinians as the reason.

Israel Antiquities Authority take steps to expand their activities into West Bank

In 2021 we [wrote about](#) the steep increase in citation of archaeology as a reason for strengthening official Israeli control over Area C, as then-Minister of Heritage, Rafi Peretz, had allocated 24 million NIS to increase the number of inspectors with the Civil Administration's Staff Office for Archaeology. In January this year, Minister of Heritage and Jerusalem Affairs, Ze'ev Elkin, announced he would allocate a further 10 million NIS towards safeguarding heritage sites in Area C. A Knesset Education Committee session that month discussed a report by Guardians of Eternity, a report we [reviewed](#) and found highly questionable. Emek Shaveh's Executive Director Alon Arad participated in that session where he said "The destruction of antiquities should not constitute a pretext for political action and I think we should also refrain from camouflaging the political nature of this discussion as an archaeological act. Blurring the lines between archaeology and heritage on the one hand, and settlement and annexation, on the other, endangers the future of archaeology." For Alon's full remarks at that session see [here](#).

During that session the committee also recommended extending the Israel Antiquities Authority oversight into Area C, a move that would constitute **de facto annexation** in the realm of antiquities. And indeed in June, it was decided that following right-wing pressure, IAA anti-theft inspectors would [begin to operate](#) in the West Bank. At the end of July, the IAA advertised a job for an enforcement position in the "Judea District" of "Judea and Samarea" which they removed after we sent a letter inquiring about the legality of the procedure.

Antiquities Trade Law

Antiquity theft is rife both in the West Bank but also inside Israel. One of the main reasons is that Israel is one of the only countries in the region which does not prohibit the trade in antiquities. As a result, there is a very lively legally sanctioned antiquities market giving impetus to antiquity theft. Over the past few years, we have been lobbying for a law to prohibit the trade in antiquities. We are convinced that such a law would go a long way to reducing incentives for plundering ancient sites. Prior to the dissolution of the present government, we were advancing legislation together with MK Mossi Raz from the Meretz party. We believe that this should be a bi-partisan issue and plan to continue our efforts after the elections.