

# Death and Redemption in Jerusalem's Historic Basin

## Guide to the Kidron Valley Basin



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عمق شبیه  
Emek Shaveh

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Emek Shaveh is an organization of archaeologists and community activists who challenge the political uses of archaeology and tourism in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. We view heritage sites as a means for building bridges between different national and cultural communities, and work to counter processes where the ruins of the past are used as a means to dispossess disenfranchised communities.

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# Introduction

This guide is an introduction to the important historic sites along the Kidron Valley, the riverbed which runs outside the eastern wall of the Old City of Jerusalem. The guide will focus on the small section of the valley from the northeastern corner of the Old City to the entrance of the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan. This section is mostly included in the Jerusalem Walls National Park, and contains important religious sites to Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

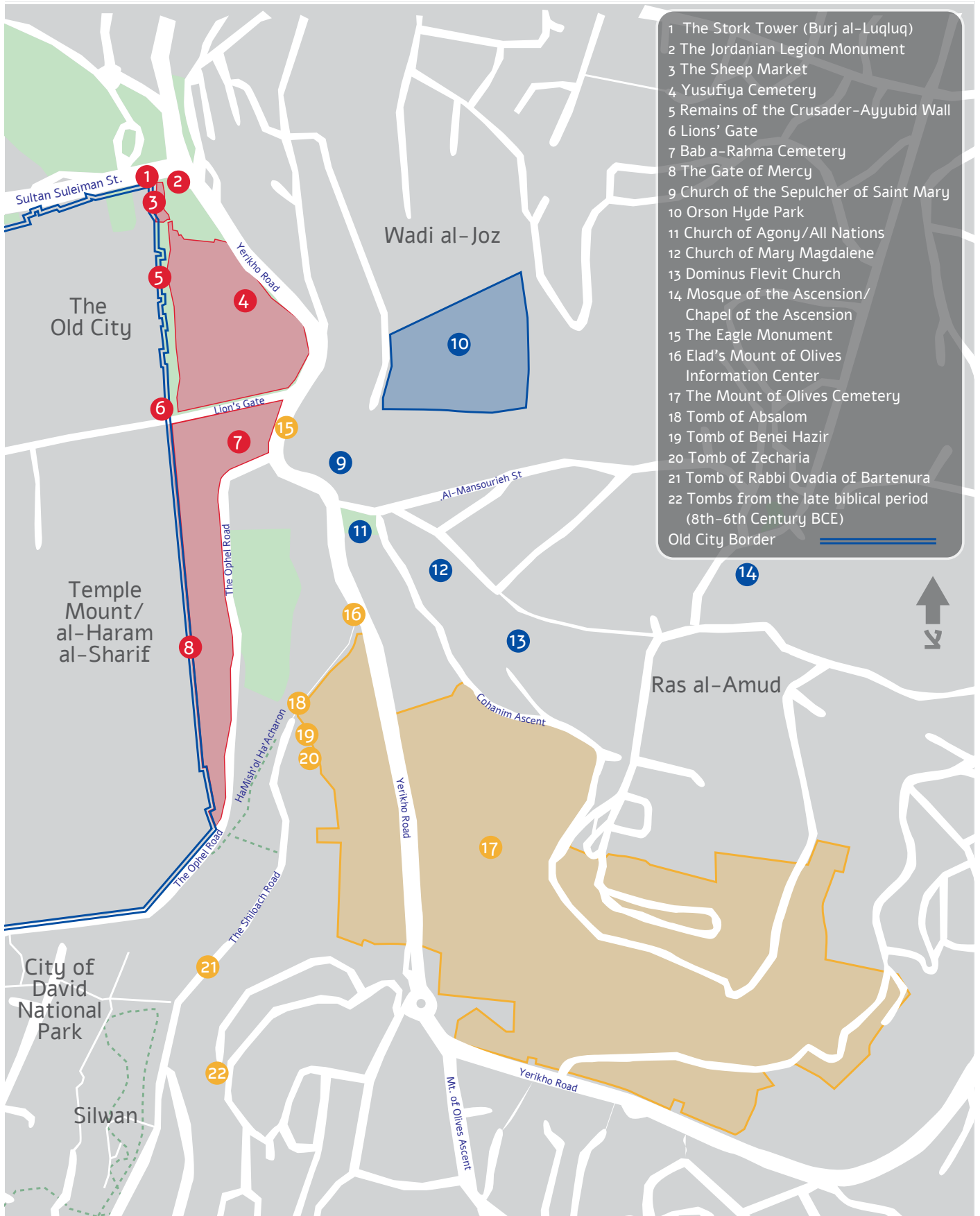
The Kidron in its entirety is one of the longest riverbeds in the Judean desert. It begins in Silwan from where it runs through the entire Judean Desert to the Dead Sea. The section of the Kidron in Jerusalem was important for two reasons: The depth of the ravine served as a natural line of defense from the east, and its location beyond the ancient city walls meant it became home to several of the most important cemeteries in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

This guide features important sites to each of the three faiths. To this end, it is divided into three parts, each devoted to describing the important sites for one of the three respective faiths. Part One, details the sites important in Islam, extending from the northeast corner of the Old City to the “Gate of Mercy”. Part Two describes sites important to Christianity – sites primarily located on the eastern slope of the Kidron Valley in the area south of Lions’ Gate. Part Three describes important sites for Judaism, which are concentrated in the area between the Mount of Olives and the outskirts of Silwan. Each chapter is followed by a list of sources for further reading.

This structure achieves two goals. First, the guide will introduce readers to the history of the sites, exploring the differences and similarities between each of the three faith’s approach to death. We will see how the area of the Kidron Valley near the city walls with its tombs, graves and monuments has been shaped by themes of death and redemption and explore how these ideas have played out in the past, their expressions in the present and consider potential future manifestations.

Second, this guide is concerned with politics. Archaeological practices and heritage development have always been driven by political agendas, especially in Jerusalem’s Historic Basin which is at the epicenter of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Jerusalem has served as a home for diverse faiths, traditions, and ways of life. Yet, particularly in recent years, the Jerusalem Municipality in cooperation with government authorities, such as the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) and the Jerusalem Development Authority (JDA), have been promoting tourism development plans for the area which threaten to disconnect Palestinians from the Old City, erase Jerusalem’s multicultural identity, and destroy the delicate fabric of life in Jerusalem.

# Important sites in Kidron Valley



- 1 The Stork Tower (Burj al-Luquq)
  - 2 The Jordanian Legion Monument
  - 3 The Sheep Market
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  - 22 Tombs from the late biblical period  
(8th-6th Century BCE)
- Old City Border

## Archaeological-historical Background

The steep Kidron Valley, is situated outside the eastern wall of the Old City of Jerusalem. Archaeological excavations along the Old City walls have revealed that the steep slopes fortified the city, protecting it from invading armies for generations. Under Roman Emperor Hadrian's rule in the Second Century CE, Jerusalem was rebuilt with its eastern wall overlooking the Kidron. The connection between the built-up city and the valley runs long and deep. Although the Kidron Valley lies outside the city walls, it has always played an important role in the traditions and beliefs of the city's residents.

The slopes of the Kidron feature a layer of soft limestone conducive to carving burial caves and building cemeteries. Archaeological excavations revealed use of the area for burial since at least the Late Bronze Age (1500–1000 BCE), offering evidence that the Kidron Valley served as Jerusalem's necropolis ("city of the dead") from an early stage in the city's history. Thus, the Mount of Olives, along the eastern slope of the Kidron Valley, was the most important Jewish cemetery in Jerusalem, and the Bab a-Rahma and Yusufiya cemeteries on the western slope of the Kidron along the eastern wall of the Old City, are two of the most important cemeteries for Islam in Jerusalem. The New Testament does not describe the burial site of Mary, mother of Christ, yet according to Christian tradition, her body was laid out in the Kidron Valley prior to her ascension to heaven.

The Kidron Valley served as the city's frontier, linking it to the surrounding areas and other major centers. Most mentions of the valley in historical sources describe an area important because it connects points in physical space. The Book of Samuel, describes Absalom's rebellion against King David, noting that when David fled Jerusalem, he left the city by way of the Kidron Valley: "The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the wilderness" (2 Samuel 15:23).

The Kidron Valley also symbolically came to represent a liminal space. In the Bible, from among the ten mentions of the Kidron Valley, eight of them describe it as an area where purification rituals around pagan altars were performed. In the New Testament, the Kidron Valley is mentioned as the setting for Christ's reckoning with his fate and acceptance of impending crucifixion. Moreover, as noted, this is the space where according to tradition, Mary, mother of Christ, ascended to heaven three days after her death. The cemeteries of Bab a-Rahma and Yusufiya are also recognized in Islam as the first sites where the dead will be resurrected on the Day of Judgement. The hadiths (the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) describe how before the Day of Judgment, the standing of Mecca and Medina, the most important cities in Islam, will decline while the status of Jerusalem will rise, as all the dead congregate in the city for a process of reckoning. In the Jewish tradition, following the destruction of the Second Temple, the Shekinah (a Hebrew word denoting the presence of God) left Jerusalem and moved to the Mount of Olives. According to this tradition, the Messiah will pass through the valley on his way to Jerusalem and enter the city through the Gate of Mercy at the southern section of the Old City's eastern wall.

These traditions reflect the role of the Kidron Valley as Jerusalem's frontier over the centuries. It is not merely a territory beyond the city walls but represents the importance of movement in and out of the city to its development and prosperity. By virtue of its location beyond the city center, the space that is typically ruled by hegemonic societal

forces, enabled unmediated encounters between the various groups that made up the city, thus highlighting its multicultural nature. It is not surprising therefore that forces that have historically sought to establish power and control over the city, built institutions in this area. The Mount of Olives overlooking the Kidron where multiple Christian denominations established churches is a good example.

After Israel occupied East Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War, a new dimension was added to the Kidron Valley, which became part of a seam-zone between Israeli West Jerusalem which was part of sovereign Israel and Palestinian East Jerusalem which the State sought to bring under its control. As part of this rationale, in 1974 Israel declared the Jerusalem Walls National Park around the Old City which included the area of the Kidron Valley closest to the Old City walls.

In recent years, development plans for the Kidron valley emphasize the area's Jewish heritage while overlooking its importance for Muslims and Christians. For example, in 2005, the Jerusalem Municipality led by then Mayor Nir Barkat began promoting a plan to recreate the "King's Garden" – a garden that, according to biblical tradition, King David created after he conquered Jerusalem from Jebusite rule. According to one interpretation, this garden was situated in the area of the Kidron Valley. Among other things, the plan included creating pedestrian paths from Lions' Gate in the north to the neighborhood of Silwan in the south.

More recently, in 2022 the JDA Authorized the touristic development of the Kidron valley. As part of this plan, a promenade dubbed as "The Second Temple route" will be paved all the way from an area known as the "Sheep Market" in the north- eastern corner of the Old City walls, to the entrance to the Stepped Street, an underground tunnel along a First Century Roman road excavated by the Elad (or Ir David) Foundation settlers group which they refer to as the "Pilgrim's Road" in Silwan. If these and other plans will come to fruition, the entire territory is likely to fall under the Elad Foundation's control, resulting in a complete transformation of the Historic Basin's multilayered cultural landscape. In this sense, the current guide will challenge these processes by presenting the multicultural histories and narratives of this area.

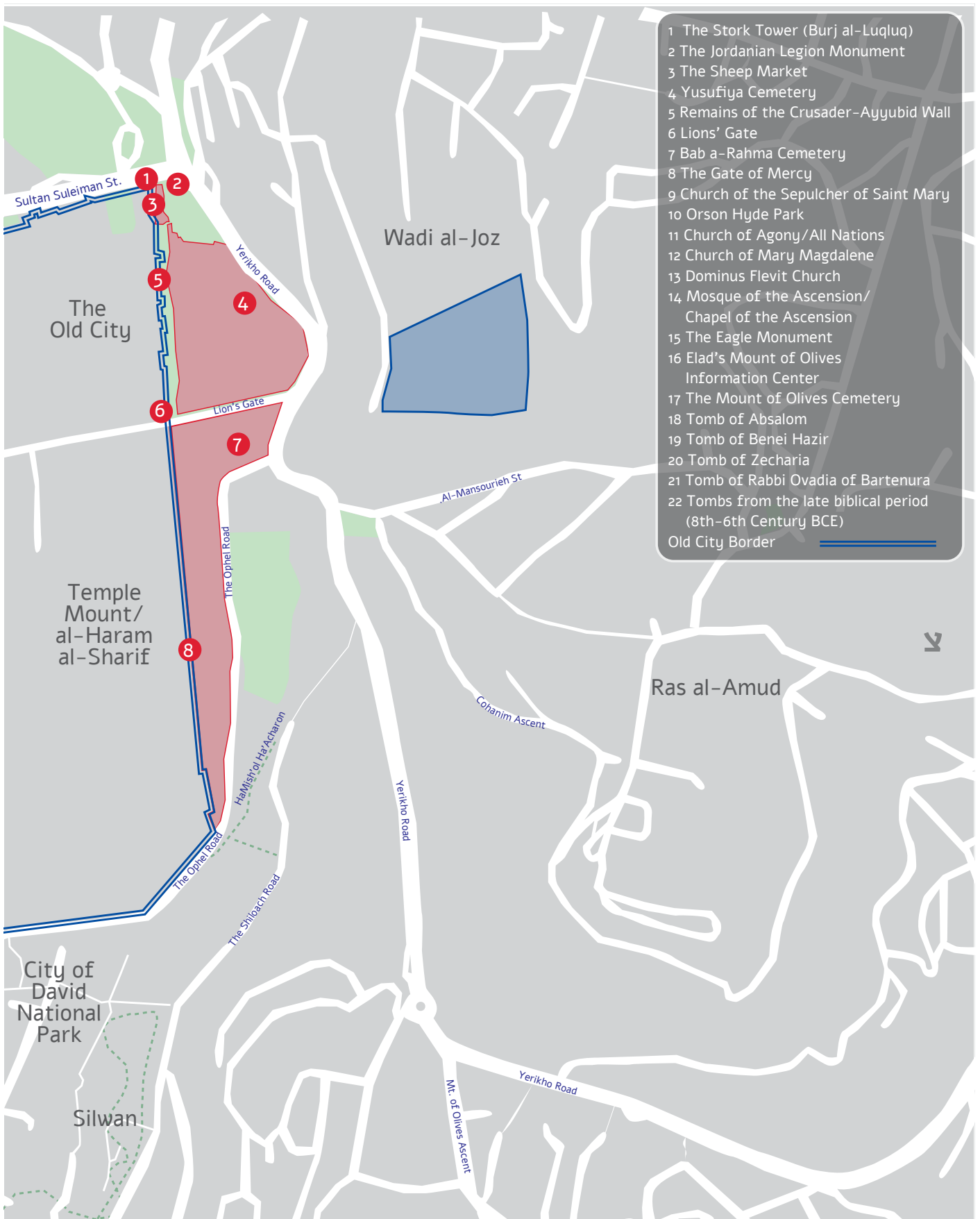


# Part One: Important Sites for Islam





# Important Sites for Islam



## Stork Tower – Burj al-Luqluq

The Stork Tower is among the four towers built at each corner of the Old City Walls in Jerusalem. This tower was constructed at the walls' weakest point – unlike other parts of the city, there are no natural obstacles to deter assaults on this part of the wall. To improve its defensive measures, a moat was dug in the area beyond the wall during the early Islamic period. The moat is mentioned in historical sources, and parts of it were uncovered in an archaeological excavation initiated by German archaeologist Conrad Schick at the end of the 19th century. Despite the moat, both the Crusader and Ayyubid armies breached the Old City walls from this corner.

The existing structure was built in the 16th century under the Ottoman reign of Sultan Suleiman I (known as Suleiman the Magnificent, 1494–1566), who rebuilt the city walls – the same walls which stand today. The foundations of the tower were built within the side of the moat, rising to a height of 12 meters above it. As with many parts along the wall's route, this tower seems to have been built on the ruins of an older tower.

The tower's façade is impressively ornamented: the northern corner features four rows of medallions, and an opaque window in the form of a rosette (rose-shaped decoration) at two thirds the corner's height; a gun embrasure is located in the eastern corner at a similar height. The tower's name was mentioned during the Mamluk period, yet its origin is unknown.

The open area around the tower is unique within a densely built city. In recent years, settler organizations, including Ateret Cohanim, have invested efforts in taking over the area to build homes for settlers, and drive the Palestinians out of the area.



## The Gypsy Community in the Old City

Between the Stork Tower and Lions' Gate is Bab al-Hutta, a neighborhood located in the Muslim Quarter. Among the residents of this neighborhood are approximately 200 Dom families of the gypsy community, one of the poorest and most disenfranchised communities in the country. The gypsy population likely originated in northern India, and over the years it has been divided into two communities: the Rom, or Roma, who settled in Europe, and the Dom, or Domari, who settled in the southern Levant – Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. Scholars think they arrived in Jerusalem with Saladin's army.

The Domari people suffer a double discrimination. Ethnically, they do not belong to the Palestinian population in the city, though the Israeli authorities identify them as Palestinian. As with Palestinians, they are not entitled to citizenship, only to permanent residency. Yet they are a marginalized community even within the Old City. Furthermore, due to the community's low socioeconomic status, it lacks the means to create a separate education system, and the children attend East Jerusalem's general education system. This is one of the reasons that the Domari language is being forgotten, and most of the community's youth speak only Arabic. Community leaders fear this community will disappear from the area in the near future.

## The Jordanian Legion Monument

Following the end of the Six-Day War and the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) occupation of East Jerusalem, many monuments were erected throughout East Jerusalem to commemorate soldiers who died during battles in the city. Some monuments were built under the auspices of the IDF, while others were erected by combatants who survived the battles, in memory of their comrades. The establishment of these monuments had a dual function: they served as points of unity for the families of soldiers and their comrades, while also symbolizing Israel's control over the area.

Alongside the monuments in memory of Israeli soldiers who were killed in war, Palestinians began to erect monuments throughout East Jerusalem in memory of the Jordanian soldiers who were killed in battle. These monuments were inaugurated in 1968, one year after the war, and their construction was not funded by any official body. Monuments were built near the home of Anwar Nusseibeh (a Palestinian leader throughout the 1970s–1980s), near the Rockefeller Museum, and elsewhere. Similar to the Israeli monuments, these were also erected in prominent places, where Palestinian residents of Jerusalem visited and laid flowers.

As early as 1968, the Jerusalem Municipality and Israeli government expressed concern that these monuments would become sites that would rally Palestinians to oppose the new Jewish government. Thus, Deputy Mayor Meron Benvenisti was appointed to negotiate with the Islamic Waqf regarding their presence in the area. Following six months of secret negotiations, the parties reached an agreement on the construction of four monuments around Jerusalem in memory of the Jordanian soldiers who fell in battle: near Givat HaMivtar, at Ammunition Hill, on the path leading up to the Mount of Olives, and near the Stork Tower. The monuments, it was decided, would have a uniform structure: a square

base of two square-meters, a pillar-shaped memorial tombstone with columns to each side, topped by a dome. A sentence inscribed on the tombstone would integrate a quote from verse 169 of Sura Al-Imran from the Quran: “And do not consider those who are slain for the cause of Allah as dead, they are alive with their sovereign and well provided for.” The following text would appear at the base: “Those who fell in the Battle of Al-Quds, June 1967.” In return, the Waqf agreed to remove the unofficial monuments that had been erected prior. The agreement was based on the understanding that if the State of Israel genuinely wanted Palestinians to recognize the Israeli government, it must respect their ways of life, including enabling them to pay tribute to their dead. The monument near the Stork Tower was the first to be erected.

The disclosure of the agreement was followed by substantial public objection and following pressure from Menachem Begin (then a minister without a portfolio), the matter was discussed by the government and Knesset committees. It was decided to cancel the agreement but not to destroy the monument that had already been erected. The Waqf, for its part, did not act to remove the unofficial monuments, and the monument erected near the Stork Tower in memory of the Jordanian soldiers who were killed in the battles for the city has become a Palestinian pilgrimage site during the annual commemoration day for the 1967 war.

Over the years and under the influence of Faisal Hussein, the monument took on a new dimension of commemorating Palestinian martyrs who fell in incidents involving Israeli security forces. Hussein and other Palestinian leaders from East Jerusalem also used to visit the monument during religious Palestinian holidays.



## The Sheep Market

Adjacent to the northeast corner of the Old City is a parking lot primarily used by Palestinians who visit the graves in the nearby Yusufiya Cemetery and pray at the al-Aqsa Mosque. At the end of the 19th century, when Jerusalem expanded beyond the Old City walls, a livestock market was established in the area, mainly for sheep. The sheep market suited the agricultural nature of the area at that period and was among the many establishments north of the Old City walls that served residents' agricultural needs. For example, the municipal slaughterhouse of Jerusalem was located in front of Herod's Gate, where the [Central Post Office Building](#) is currently located.

Ottoman authorities had leased the plot for the sheep market from its Palestinian owners. This arrangement continued in the years that followed, when control of East Jerusalem passed into other hands: from Britain to Jordan, and ultimately to Israel. Yet due to accelerated urbanization processes in the area, the sheep market became inactive and began to serve as an un-authorized garbage dump. This new use became a grave sanitation hazard for local residents and visitors to the Yusufiya Cemetery. For the past ten years, residents of the neighborhood of Wadi Joz have appealed to the municipality to clean up the sheep market and address the sanitation hazard. For years their appeals remained unanswered. In 2017, the Israeli government allocated six million NIS to the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage to clear the waste and draft a plan for tourism development in the area.

In 2018 the Jerusalem Municipality stopped paying rent to the Palestinian families who owned the area. In 2019, the JDA and INPA began to advance procedures toward development of the area. Landowners submitted a request to the Jerusalem Magistrate Court for a restraining order to prohibit authorities from entering their land. The petition was subsequently canceled, and in 2020 the JDA and INPA submitted a plan to build a promenade in the area. Landowners and the Muslim Waqf submitted objections to this plan as well – both due to the use of private land and on the grounds that it encroaches upon the Yusufiya Cemetery that is adjacent to the southern section of the site. The Local Planning and Building Committee also rejected these objections, arguing that the area had already been declared part of the Jerusalem Walls National Park as early as 1974, and that only plans approved by the INPA are permitted therein, as they comply with the area's designation as a national park.

There is growing concern among Palestinians that approval of such a plan will lead to expropriation of their land which would end up in the hands of settler organizations such as the Elad Foundation as has already happened [in other territories](#) within the Jerusalem Walls National Park where the transfer archaeological sites to be managed by settler organizations made it possible for them to displace Palestinians.



## Jerusalem Walls National Park

The Jerusalem Walls National Park surrounds the Old City of Jerusalem along its eastern, southern and western walls. The national park was declared in 1974, but it is based on a planning concept that already formed during the British Mandate, addressing the relationship between the Old City and the surrounding modern neighborhoods to preserve a green corridor around the Old City and its walls. Inside the corridor all new construction would be limited, thus preserving the historic and cultural values of the landscape, while securing its status as a holy city distinct from the modern secular city growing rapidly around it. This concept was reflected in the master plans developed for the city by the British Mandate government – including the McLean (1918), Geddes (1919) and Geddes-Ashby (1922) plans.

This approach was maintained following Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967. Two master plans addressed land management in the area: Town Planning Scheme (TPS)/6 (the National Park) and TPS/9 (the Old City). As noted earlier, the Jerusalem Walls National Park was announced in 1974. The national park includes the Hinnom Valley to the south-west of the Old City, large swaths of the neighborhood of Silwan to the south, the area of the Kidron Valley closest to the Old City walls to the east, and a narrow strip adjacent to the northern and western city walls. The national park is among the last remaining open areas in this part of Jerusalem, and large swaths of it include land claimed by Palestinian residents.

The importance granted to the preservation of open spaces around the walls of the Old City was also reflected in UNESCO's 1981 declaration of the Old City and its walls as a world heritage site. In the declaration, the area surrounding the city walls serves as a buffer zone between the territory declared a heritage site and the rest of the city, which must be left undeveloped to preserve ancient Jerusalem's landscape.

The declaration of the national park became a burden on local Palestinian life. The application of the National Parks, Nature Reserves, National Sites and Memorial Sites Law (1998), which regulates the designation and management of national parks, does not expropriate the land it is applied to but dramatically restricts any development activities. According to section 7 of the law, any development activity carried out in a national park – including construction and infrastructure; renovation and expansion of residential buildings; agricultural activity that alters the landscape and even burial plots – requires approval from the INPA, which is the state body responsible for managing national parks in Israel. In the years since the park was declared, the INPA has refrained from approving the vast majority of requests submitted by Palestinian residents. In such a way the national park mechanism designed to preserve places of historic and natural value has become a political tool in the hands of the State to undermine local Palestinian communities.

## Yusufiya Cemetery

The Yusufiya cemetery extends along the eastern side of the Old City walls from its northeastern corner, near Burj al-Luqluq, to Lions' Gate.

Following work to complete the cemetery's retaining wall, excavations carried out by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) in 2012 at the southwestern section of the cemetery, unearthed an agricultural system dating back to the Hellenistic period (Second to First centuries BCE). This system included a terraced wall and a water channel. The excavators deduced that the water was channeled from the Pool of Bethesda to this area, which was part of the city's agricultural frontier at the time.

Scholars differ regarding the dating of the cemetery. Some estimate that burial began as early as the 12th century CE, when Jerusalem was under Ayyubid control; others think that the cemetery was established at the end of the 15th century, during the final years of Mamluk rule, and prior to Ottoman rule in Jerusalem. Regardless, its construction intended to create an additional burial site, once the Bab a-Rahma Cemetery, south of Lions' Gate, began to fill up.

The cemeteries east of the Old City have a special place in Islam. According to the hadiths, on the Day of Judgment, the dead will gather in Jerusalem for a reckoning. On Judgement Day Jerusalem will rise in importance compared to Mecca and Medina and the dead buried in this cemetery will be first to be resurrected.

[In 2021](#), the cemetery was a focal point for friction between the Palestinian residents who use the cemetery to bury their relatives, and the Jerusalem Municipality and INPA. The latter intended to develop the national park in the northern part of the cemetery and built a fence which they claim is the northern perimeter of the cemetery. The Palestinians, on the other hand, contend that the cemetery's territory extends further beyond the fence. Indeed, in excavations conducted within the framework of development work in the area, human bones were found that seem to confirm their claim. However, a petition submitted to the Magistrate Court against this work was rejected. Residents of East Jerusalem continue to bury their relatives in this area illegally in an act that can also be considered a form of protest against the violation of their basic rights.



## Remains of the Crusader-Ayyubid Wall

Remains of Jerusalem's Old City Wall from the 12th century CE are visible to the north of Lions' Gate. These remains were unearthed in excavations conducted by the IAA between 2017–2018. The excavations revealed the lower layers of the wall, watchtowers, and steps leading to a small gate that likely opened into the city in ancient times. This is one of the only sections of the city wall that have been uncovered from this period. For this reason, it was decided to leave the finds publicly accessible instead of covering them up.

The 11th–13th centuries CE was a period of many upheavals which were particularly pronounced in Jerusalem. The region was an epicenter of religious wars that broke out between the Christian Crusader forces who arrived from Europe during the Crusades in an attempt to stake their claim to the Holy Land, and Muslim forces, primarily Fatimid and Ayyubid who came from Egypt. Control over the city alternated between these forces, and none of them succeeded to maintain a grip over the city for an extended period. As a result, it is hard to discern whether the city's fortifications were built by the Crusaders or Ayyubids.

Excavations in the area attempted to determine when the wall was built. An article with preliminary conclusions claimed that Saladin ordered the wall's construction at the end of the 12th century. According to scholars, after conquering the city in 1187, he began rebuilding many parts of the city wall. According to the excavators, the findings indicate that once control of Jerusalem returned to the Crusaders following the Treaty of Jaffa signed by Frederick II and Sultan al-Malik Al-Kamil in 1229, which included an arrangement for the land's division between Christians and Muslims, the Crusaders restored and repaired the wall. However, researchers warn that this conclusion about the identity of the wall's builders relies more on historical sources and less on the archaeological remains uncovered in the excavation.





## The Old City Walls

The Old City of Jerusalem is not the oldest part of the city. In fact, Jerusalem's historical core is located south of the Old City, along the Ophel (the eastern ridge south of the Old City) in the area where the neighborhood of Silwan stands today. The Old City as we know it was only built in the second century CE, under the reign of the Roman Emperor Hadrian (76-138) who wanted to punish the Jews after they rebelled against the Roman Empire twice within a short period of time – the Great Revolt of 66-73 CE and the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132-136 CE. Hadrian sought to destroy all traces of a Judean entity and rebuild Jerusalem as a Roman city. To this end, he built the city north of its historic core and designed it as a typical Roman city. According to this model, the city was divided into four quarters by two main routes that ran across it: the Cardo Street crossed the city from Damascus Gate in the north to Zion Gate in the south, and the Decumanus street crossed the city from Jaffa Gate in the west to Lions' Gate in the east. Hadrian also moved the religious center of the city from the Temple Mount, where the Temple once stood, to the area where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher stands today, and he changed the city's name to Aelia Capitolina. Excavations along the walls show that the city has been modelled after Aelia Capitolina ever since. Excavations north of the Old City in the area of the East Jerusalem Central Business District (East CBD) and the Russian Compound, unearthed evidence that parts of the wall were constructed before Hadrian's reign.

## Lions' Gate

Lions' Gate is the Old City's eastern gate. It was built in 1538 during the early Ottoman period, in the reign of Sultan Suleiman I. An inscription above the gate features the names of Sultan Suleiman and his father Sultan Selim I.

A relief of two pairs of cheetahs on either side of the gate gave it its name. Cheetahs were the symbol of the Mamluk sultan Baibars (1223-1277). It is also possible, however, that the cheetahs were repurposed during the Ottoman period from a guesthouse for Muslim pilgrims, established by Sultan Baibars following his visit to the city in 1263 and later destroyed. The exact location of the guesthouse remains unknown.

The gate is also called the "Gate of the Tribes," a name predominantly used among Christians, originating from the Arabic name for the gate, al-Asbat (meaning "tribes" in Arabic) Gate – referring to Jacob's 12 sons of the tribes of Israel. Jacob is also considered an important figure and a prophet in the Muslim tradition. Other names include Jehoshaphat Gate, named after the Valley of Jehoshaphat in the Kidron Valley at the foot of the gate, and "Saint Stephen's Gate," named after the saint in the Christian tradition who was taken out of the city through this gate and stoned nearby (according to another tradition Stephen was taken out of the city through Damascus gate). Near the gate, on the Kidron riverbed, is a Greek Orthodox church named "Bab Sitna Mary" (meaning "Our Lady Mary's Gate" in Arabic) after Saint Mary. According to the Catholic tradition, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was born in a house near the gate where the Church of Saint Anne, named after Mary's mother, currently stands.

In addition to the cheetahs and the dedicatory inscription to Sultan Suleiman, the gate

features floral designs and small arches between gun embrasures. The upper section of the gate includes a machicolation (small balcony), from where it was possible to view the area beyond the wall and, if necessary, defend against unwanted invaders. In order to stall forces invading the city, the gate was previously built at an angle that did not enable direct entry. Over the years, the angle was straightened to enable access for vehicles.

The path from Lions' Gate leads to the Muslim Quarter and reaches the last stop along the Via Dolorosa, Christ's "Way of Sorrows." On the Sunday of the Holy Week preceding Easter, Christians typically reenact Jesus' entry from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem following his arrest. The festival is called "Palm Sunday" and believers march in processions from the Mount of Olives to the Old City through the Lions' Gate and along this street.

The gate gained recognition among the Israeli public after June 1967, when IDF soldiers from the Paratroopers Brigade breached the Old City through Lions' Gate, surprising the Jordanians who did not expect a breach from the east. During the maneuver, the doors of the gate were crushed, and were restored in 1969.



## Bab a-Rahma Cemetery

The Bab a-Rahma cemetery is one of four Muslim cemeteries surrounding the Old City: – the Yusuḫiya Cemetery to its north, the [al-Sahira cemetery](#) in the East Central Business District, and [Mamilla Cemetery](#) where Independence Park currently stands. It was granted the name “Bab a-Rahma” due to its location near the Gate of Mercy – which translates to Bab a-Rahma in Arabic. The cemetery extends along the eastern side of the Old City walls south of Lions’ Gate, to the southeastern corner of the Old City (also known as the “Ophel Corner”). It is the oldest Muslim cemetery in Jerusalem, likely established in the Eighth Century CE, shortly after the Gate of Mercy was blocked.

As noted, in the Muslim tradition, on the Day of Judgment, the dead buried in the area of the Kidron Valley (which includes the Bab a-Rahma, Yusuḫiya, and Mount of Olives cemeteries) will be first to undergo resurrection. As a result, Bab a-Rahma is a highly sought after cemetery and despite its small area of a mere 48 dunams, tens of thousands of people are thought to be buried there. The cemetery’s capacity to accommodate such many burials is due to the traditional Muslim method of family burial (called “fostoqiah” in Arabic) of burying members of a family in the same grave.

In Islam, two of Muhammad’s companions (called “a-Sahaba”) who supported him at the start of his journey and serve as role models for proper conduct are buried in this cemetery. One of them is Ubadah bin as-Samat. He was one of the first 12 to pledge allegiance to Muhammad and accept Islam when Muhammad arrived in Mecca for the first time. As-Samat was a great warrior who fought in many of the important battles which established the first Islamic empire. He also served as the first Muslim judge in the region. Shaddad ibn Aws is another important figure among Muhammad’s companions who is said to be buried in the cemetery. Ibn Aws was not known for his military skills, but rather for writing hadiths. Tradition has it that following the conquest of Jerusalem, ibn Aws settled in the city and never left it. According to another version, he was appointed governor of the city of Homs in Syria. It is generally believed that ibn Aws was close to Ali, the founder of the Shia movement in Islam.

Since the start of the 21st century, the Bab a-Rahma Cemetery has been a site of conflict between Israel and Palestinian residents. In 2005, the Committee for the Prevention of Destruction of Antiquities on the Temple Mount, submitted a petition to the High Court of Justice against ongoing Muslim burial in the cemetery. The petition was rejected, but subsequently a decision was made to prohibit any burial in the cemetery that is not sanctioned by a court order. As a result, Palestinians who wish to be buried there encounter many hurdles, and in many instances, residents continue carrying out burials in family graves even without having received permission from the Israeli courts. In 2015, INPA inspectors fenced off the cemetery claiming that the ongoing burials in the cemetery undermine the national park’s historic character.



## The Gate of Mercy

The Gate of Mercy, Bab a-Rahma in Arabic, is another gate within the eastern wall of the Old City. This gate is the oldest of Jerusalem's gates and the only one that leads directly to the Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif. The gate currently stands where it was likely constructed in the early seventh century CE, toward the end of Byzantine rule in the city. Remains from previous phases of the gate during the Roman period were unearthed during excavations conducted alongside it.

The Muslim Bab a-Rahma Cemetery is located just outside the gate. Within the wall, in the Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif compound, is a Muslim prayer and study sanctuary that still remains in use. This structure is accessible only through the Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif.

The name "Gate of Mercy" appears in both Muslim and Jewish traditions – its first appearance is in a letter sent from Jerusalem to Egypt in the 10th century CE. The letter is written in Arabic with Hebrew letters and was discovered in the Cairo Geniza. Another Arabic name for the gate is "The Gate of Eternal Life" (Bab a-Dahariyeh in Arabic), and in the Christian tradition it's called "The Golden Gate." The structure of the gate is rectangular, and a row of columns divides the entrance in two. The northern entry is called the "Gate of Repentance" (Bab a-Taubah) and the southern is called the "Gate of Mercy" (Bab a-Rahma). The gates have a similar structure, and together they resemble the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. The arches feature ornamental plant engravings worn down over the years, and both ceilings are domed. Within the gate are additional two



gates that may be opened. Buttresses added over the years narrowed these openings. The gate is lower than the height of the Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif and stairs lead from the gate to the esplanade.

When the Byzantine emperor Heraclius conquered Jerusalem from the Persians in 629 CE, he passed through the gate at the head of a large procession, and returned the cross which according to tradition was the cross on which Jesus was crucified, to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. It is likely that throughout the Crusader period (1099–1260), the gate was closed throughout most of the year, only to be opened on two occasions: Palm Sunday, which marks the day Christ entered Jerusalem after his arrest on the Mount of Olives, and the day marking Heraclius' entry into Jerusalem.

Different traditions offer explanations as to why the gate was sealed: one claims that it was already blocked in the eighth century CE, when the Bab a-Rahma Cemetery was established. According to another tradition, Saladin ordered it to be blocked after conquering Jerusalem in 1187, in order to prevent Christian processions from passing through the gate. In 1495, the Muslim historian Mujir a-Din wrote that the gate was blocked for fear of Christian attacks on the Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif. He further wrote that since the gate faced open fields, there was no reason to leave it open.

The most important testament indicating when the gate was closed is found in the travelogue of Petachiah of Regensburg, a Jew who visited Jerusalem in 1185 – he described a shut gate across the Mount of Olives called the Gate of Mercy. He also noted a belief in the Jewish tradition that the Shekinah (presence of God) went into exile through this gate, and will return through the gate in the form of the Messiah. From the 10th–15th centuries CE, Jews, both residents of the city and pilgrims, prayed in front of the Gate of Mercy and not in front of the Western Wall, as is customary today – likely as they were forbidden to enter the city at the time, and the area of the Gate of Mercy was closest to where the Temple was believed to have stood.

According to Christian tradition, Jesus entered Jerusalem through this gate to celebrate Passover, accompanied by his disciples. In the New Testament, they entered the city carrying palm fronds and singing psalms. According to an early Muslim tradition, Muhammad entered the Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif, through this gate at the end of his night journey. This tradition has changed over the years, and today the Western Wall is customarily identified as Muhammad's point of entry to the Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif.

In recent years, right-wing activists try to gather at the gates to blow the shofar during the Jewish New Year's holiday. This act which is perceived as a provocation by Palestinian communities was prevented by the Israeli Police. However, during 2022, MK Simcha Rotman used his parliamentary immunity in order to perform this act.

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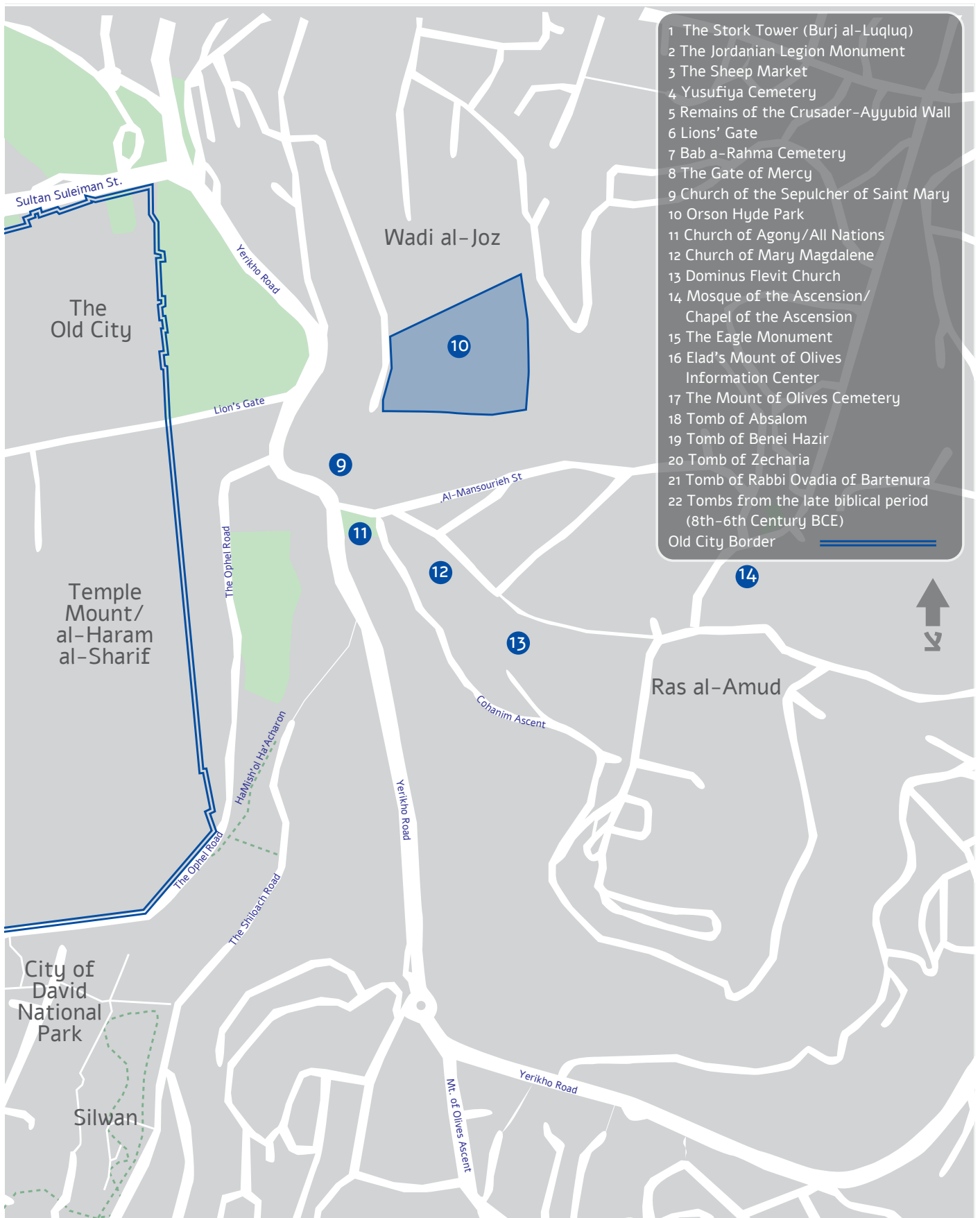
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# Part Two: Important Christian Sites





# Important Christian Sites



## The Story of Jesus' Capture

In Christianity, the sanctity of the Kidron Valley stems from its identification with the site where Christ was captured prior to his crucifixion. In the New Testament, after Jesus' last supper with his apostles on Mount Zion, they came to the Kidron. When arriving at the northern part of the valley, near Lions' gate, Jesus asked to pray alone near Gethsemane. In the early 20th century, the Church of All Nations was established on this site. While praying, Jesus resigned himself to his fate knowing that he would be caught and crucified by the Romans to atone for the sins of humankind. In the Christian tradition, the olive trees in the garden of Gethsemane are believed to have been present during Jesus' time and were witnesses to his prayer. Once completing his prayer, Jesus joined the apostles who were waiting for him in a cave known as the "Cave of Betrayal" or the "Cave of Gethsemane" near the Church of the Sepulcher of Saint Mary. In the cave, Judah Iscariot kissed him on the forehead so that the Roman soldiers who ambushed him could identify and arrest him.

## Church of the Sepulcher of Saint Mary

As noted above, according to the Christian faith, this cave is the site where Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus and handed him over to the Romans. According to some Christian traditions, the church next to the cave is where Mary, mother of Jesus, was buried. These traditions evolved from a text from the second century CE known as "The Dormition of Mary." As such, this church is among the most sacred sites in Christianity. Ownership of the church is regulated by Status Quo agreements between Christian denominations. The plaza at the church's entrance is surrounded by a wall that descends into two separate underground spaces – the cave in which Mary was believed to have been buried, and the Cave of Betrayal.

The Status Quo agreements deemed equal division of ownership over Mary's cave, between the Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches. The Coptic and Syrian churches were also granted the right to hold ceremonies on site (Copts twice a week and Syrians once a week). Furthermore, the Catholic Church was granted the right to pray in this space although it does not take advantage of it, claiming that the Status Quo agreements do not consider that until 1757 it had ownership of the church before being stripped of it due to political conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and Western European powers. On the other hand, the Catholic Church has exclusive possession over the Cave of Betrayal.

### Description of the chambers

#### Tomb of the Virgin Mary

In the Christian faith, following Mary's death, her body was placed in a burial cave near the Kidron Valley for three days until she ascended to heaven and was reunited with Jesus. This tradition was established in the Byzantine period (324–638 CE). In the fifth century, the Patriarch of Jerusalem Juvenal (422–458), ordered the construction of a crypt (a ceremonial burial cave customarily hewn within a church) over burial caves that date back to the first century CE. The tomb attributed to Mary was separated from the rock and carved in the shape of a cross. Emperor Maurice (539–602) seems to have built a church over the crypt at the end of the sixth century. In 614 the Persians (Sasanians) conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the church. As early as 630, Byzantine forces

occupied Jerusalem again, and the city's patriarch Modestus worked to restore the Church of the Sepulcher of Saint Mary. During the Crusader period, under the rule of Godfrey of Bouillon (1060–1100), a Benedictine monastery was built on site, and monks rebuilt the church, surrounding it with high walls. Upon Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem (1187) the church was destroyed again but since Jesus is also sacred in Islam, Mary's tomb was not destroyed.

Queen Melisende, daughter of the Crusader King Baldwin II, is buried at the southern end of the cave. Following the death of her husband, King Fulk of Anjou, she ruled the kingdom of Jerusalem until her son, Baldwin III, came of age. However, due to tensions between the two, Melisende fortified herself in the city's citadel and refused to transfer the kingdom to her son. Ultimately, she gave up the crown and was granted power only over the city of Nablus.

Struggles and disputes over control of Jerusalem's holy sites, including this church, broke out between the Catholic and Orthodox churches and continued over a long period of time. In the 14th century, with the support of the Mamluk government, the Catholic Franciscan order took over the tomb. During the Ottoman period, the balance of power between the churches changed – the authorities granted the Orthodox Church, whose center was Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, preferential status over the Catholic Church, and thus sided with its claims. The church has remained under its control ever since.



## The Cave of Betrayal

The Cave of Betrayal is also hewn in stone with multiple crosses painted on its ceiling. This cave is under the control of the Franciscan Catholic Monastery. Various traditions in Christianity teach of differences in the significance and importance granted to the cave. One of them alleges that following the Last Supper, Jesus and 11 of his apostles went to the Cave of Betrayal, after which Jesus left with three of them to Gethsemane, where

he prayed. Upon their return, Judas Iscariot met them and surrendered Jesus to the Romans. According to another tradition in western Christianity, this cave is the prison where Jesus stayed during the Night of Sorrow after being handed over to the Romans.



## Orson Hyde Park

A garden of approximately eight dunams was created in memory of Orson Hyde, one of the leaders of the Mormon Church who came to the Mount of Olives in 1841 and offered a prayer to dedicate Jerusalem to the Jewish people, giving expression to a precept in the Mormon faith which considers the Jews to be the chosen people, and the Mormons an inseparable part of the nation of Israel as descendants of Joseph. The Mormons support the State of Israel.

Following the announcement regarding the establishment of Jerusalem Walls National Park (1974), and the inclusion of the Kidron Valley within its bounds, Teddy Kolek, the mayor of Jerusalem at the time, acted to grant the Mormon Church the land on which Orson Hyde Park was ultimately established. The garden was designed by landscape architects Lipa Yahalom and Dan Tzur. Both are responsible for the development of many national parks and heritage sites – including Gan HaShlosha (HaSakhne) and the burial ground for the first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, and his wife Paula. They decided to refrain from constructing large buildings in the garden and planted vegetation native to Jerusalem and its environs. The garden features paths and shaded sitting areas – with views of the Kidron Valley and Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif.

## The Status Quo among the Christian churches

The Status Quo agreement (also known as the “Berlin Agreement”) was signed between the Catholic and Orthodox churches in 1878. It intended to regulate ownership over holy sites in Christianity, including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Church of Mary’s Tomb in Jerusalem, along with the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. These sites had been the source of ongoing disputes regarding ownership and management, and the agreement intended to resolve them.

The Christian faith is comprised of multiple denominations, each of which maintains a different approach to the Christian way of life. In the first few centuries following the emergence of Christianity as the dominant religion in the Roman Empire, all Christians remained under the same leadership. With the expansion of the Christian faith, theological disputes resulted in divisions within the church. The major divisive event took place in 1054 and is known as “The Great Schism,” following which two Christian churches were established: the Western Church which was controlled by Rome and developed into the Catholic Church, and the Eastern Church, whose center was in Constantinople, and developed into the various orders of the Orthodox Church. The Protestant church emerged only in the 16th century and is thus unrelated to the disputes between Catholics and Orthodox and the Berlin Agreement.

Despite the schisms, at first there were no power struggles between the western and eastern churches regarding ownership over Christianity’s sacred sites, but once the Christians conquered the Holy Land during the Crusader period (1099-1290), tensions emerged. The Crusaders, who were the Vatican’s emissaries, saw the Eastern Orthodox Church as an apostate, thus adding a religious dimension to the political and military importance of controlling the holy sites.

Catholics initially had the upper hand and controlled most of the holy sites in Jerusalem. With the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by the Muslims, the Muslim rulers and leaders of the Orthodox Church began to forge close relations. As a result, especially following the Ottoman Empire’s conquest of Jerusalem in 1517, the Orthodox Church received the support of the Ottoman government in power struggles over sites sacred to Christianity. This support was also informed by political and military developments, as the Ottoman Empire’s primary struggles involved the European powers that had accepted the Catholic religion.

The Ottoman Empire began to decline in the 19th century and became dependent on European powers for its survival. Its relations with Christianity also changed. At this point, the primary struggle between representatives of both churches took place between Russia, which represented the Orthodox Church, and France, which represented the Catholic Church. Both powers exerted pressure to advance the rights of their respective churches causing considerable tensions in the region and beyond. Tensions at the holy sites were among the causes of the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853.

In 1878 an agreement was signed in Berlin determining the parameters of each church’s possessions and rights at holy sites, and the rules of worship. The sites to which the status quo applies are: the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Chapel of the Ascension, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary (including the Cave of Betrayal) and the Church of the Nativity. Since 1967, consecutive Israeli governments remain committed to maintaining the arrangements between the Christian denominations.

## Church of Agony – Church of All Nations

The “Church of Agony”, also known as the Church of All Nations, is located in the area known as Gethsemane. In the Christian tradition, Gethsemane is the garden where Jesus confronted God, agonizing and ultimately reconciling with his fate. It is among the most important churches in the Christian world and is visited by thousands of pilgrims each day. The church is called The Church of All Nations, as its construction was funded by donations from all over the world in the 1920s. However, excavations on site indicate that it stands on the ruins of churches from the Byzantine and Crusader periods. The remains of these churches suggest that the tradition identifying Gethsemane with this area dates to ancient times.

During the Byzantine period, a basilica was built on the site with three naves (aisles), each of which was separated by a row of columns. At the end of each nave is an apse. A portion of the Rock of Agony, upon which Christians believe Jesus prayed to God, is prominently placed at the center of the middle apse. There is a reservoir at the entrance to the church, to which a drainage channel directed water to the eastern side of the church from an unknown source. Very little information exists about this church in historical sources. Yet excavations conducted on site by the IAA in collaboration with a Franciscan research institute in the early 2000s, make it possible to determine that the church was likely destroyed when Persian forces conquered Jerusalem in 614 CE.

During the Crusader period, a church was rebuilt on site – although when exactly was the first stage of its construction remains unclear. It is likely that the first phase of the church was built as early as the 11th century, during the Fatimid period, a time characterized by tolerance toward other faiths. Following the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders (1099), a new larger church was built. It is likely that the church was destroyed in 1187, after Saladin’s conquest of Jerusalem, but was rebuilt at the beginning of the 14th century. Shortly after in 1347 it was abandoned and destroyed yet again and not rebuilt until modern times.





On behalf of the Catholic Church, Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi was responsible for the construction of many churches throughout the Holy Land from the 1920s through the early 1960s, and he rebuilt this church in the 1920s. As noted above, the church was built with funding from international donors, and the flags of their countries are featured on the ceiling of the church. The church is built in a Roman-classical style, which is considered the architectural style characteristic of the First Century, thus avoiding conflicts between members of the various sects who contributed to its construction. The ceiling of the church is low and has 11 domes. This church also has three naves, yet an apse was only built at the end of the middle nave.

Alongside the church is a garden with eight very old olive trees which according to tradition stood on the same site when Jesus came to pray there after the Last Supper. These olive trees were said to be the only witnesses to Christ's agony.

## The Meaning of the Name Gethsemane

Many scholars have pondered the meaning of the name "Gethsemane", since it is known that oil is produced through an olive press and not a wine press, as the Hebrew meaning of the name "Gat" seems to imply. To answer this question, it is necessary to examine where and how "Gethsemane" appears in ancient writings.

The name "Gethsemane" does not appear in the Talmud or Jewish writings from the Second Temple period, but only in Christian sources transliterated into Greek. Some scholars have claimed that the transliteration "Gethsemane" is a corruption of "Gai Shmanim," meaning the valley where oil is produced. Others explain that the transliteration of the name originally comes from "Ged Shmanim." According to one explanation, the Hebrew letter "daled" (equivalent to the English letter "D") that appears at the end of the word "Ged," served as the Hebrew letter "taf" (equivalent to the English letter "T") until later transliterations spelled it as "Gethsemane." This interpretation warrants examination of the meaning of the word "Ged." Per one interpretation, based on the Greek transliteration of the Bible in the Septuagint translation, "Ged" is a tall wall. In this context it is possible that "Gethsemane" originally refers to the steep bank of the Kidron Valley. This interpretation corresponds with Gethsemane's location on the slopes of the Mount of Olives (also known as the "Mount of Anointment," after the "oil of anointment").



## The Church of Mary Magdalene

The Church of Mary Magdalene is built on the western slope of the Kidron Valley. It is unique in that unlike most other churches in Jerusalem, it was not intended to commemorate an event related to Christ, Mary or the disciples. Its construction reflects the geopolitical struggles during the 19th century between European powers seeking to increase their control over the Holy Land and Jerusalem in particular.



In the second half of the 19th century, European powers showed a renewed interest in the Holy Land including Jerusalem and purchased land in and around the Old City, establishing public buildings and churches which represented their interests. Tsar Alexander II, who ruled Russia from the years 1855–1881, founded the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, which purchased thousands of dunams of land in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

The church was established under the reign of Tsar Alexander III, who succeeded Alexander II in 1888. The Tsar chose to dedicate the church to his mother Mary whose patron saint was Mary Magdalene. The church is characterized by a striking exterior – gilded onion-shaped domes. This impressive monument visible from a distance suggests an intention to strengthen the Orthodox church's position in the region. This is especially evident in view of the contrast between the church's magnificent exteriors and modest interior design – simple decorative frescoes and minimal furniture.

As noted, the church was dedicated to Mary Magdalene, who, according to the New Testament, was one of Christ's apostles and the first to see him resurrected after his crucifixion. Yet, as noted above, the church is not associated with any of the stories related to the figure of Mary Magdalene herself. Over the years, several traditions have been associated with this church. For example, along the church's courtyard, a cave was revealed that the Orthodox Church believes to be the Dormition Church, where Christ's

apostles fell asleep while waiting for Jesus to return from praying in Gethsemane. Another example may be seen in a pillar that stands in front of the church's main gate, known as the Pillar of Betrayal. Tradition has it that Judas Iscariot kissed Christ at this site to signal to the Roman soldiers that he is the one they should arrest. The identification of these two events with the Church of Mary Magdalene is disputed, as the Catholic faith believes both to have taken place in a cave near the Church of the Sepulcher of Saint Mary.

Three women are buried in the church: Princess Elizabeth, from the German royal family who married Sergei of the Russian House of Romanov. Elizabeth was known for being kindhearted and loved by the Russian people. Despite this love, in 1919, during the Bolshevik revolution, she was murdered along with all members of the royal family. The bodies of the family members were initially transferred to China, where they were buried, yet later, on the orders of Victoria, Elizabeth's younger sister, her bones were removed and transferred to the Church of Mary Magdalene in Jerusalem, thus fulfilling her wish to be buried there. To this day, her remains are displayed in a glass box to the right of the church's pulpit. On display to the left of the pulpit are the remains of Barbara, Elizabeth's gentlewoman, who was also murdered alongside her. Alice, the mother of Prince Philip, spouse of Queen Elizabeth II of England, is also buried in the church – she lived in the monastery adjacent to the Church of Mary Magdalene in the 1930s and requested to be buried alongside her relative Elizabeth. Following her death in 1969, this request was fulfilled.

## Dominus Flevit Church

The Dominus Flevit Church was built on the Mount of Olives cemetery in the 1950s. During excavations on site prior to its construction, the remains of a cemetery from the end of the early Roman period (First Century CE) and the Byzantine period (324–638 CE) were found. The excavations also uncovered the remains of a monastery and church dedicated to Saint Anne (mother of Mary, the mother of Jesus). This cemetery was part of an extensive series of cemeteries that surrounded Jerusalem, which included the Mount of Olives, Bab a-Rahma, and Yusufiya cemeteries. The church was designed by the architect Antonio Barluzzi, who designed and constructed many churches throughout the Holy Land, including the Church of All Nations. He designed the church in the shape of a teardrop to commemorate the weeping Christ on the Mount of Olives as he prophesized the destruction of Jerusalem. Unlike most churches in the Christian world that face east toward the sunrise, this church faces west, as Barluzzi claimed that Jesus must have looked towards the city of Jerusalem as he prayed. Remains of the ancient church and monastery are integrated into the church floor.



## Mosque of the Ascension – Chapel of the Ascension

The Mosque of the Ascension situated on the Mount of Olives is an example of traditions and beliefs passed on from one religion to another. In the Byzantine period, the site was identified with the story of Christ's ascension to heaven 40 days after his resurrection. During this period a chapel was built on the site to commemorate the event. According to written testimonies, the church was an open-air circular structure built at the end of the fourth century CE around two niches in the rock that were identified as Jesus' footprints. Present-day visitors to the site are able to identify one footprint. Scholars speculate that over the years one footprint was removed from the site to Rome or to Constantinople or it is hidden on the Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif. Others speculate that over the years worshipers who visited the site scratched off small pieces of the footprint until it was completely worn down. The church seems to have been destroyed in 614 following the Persian conquest of Jerusalem and rebuilt thereafter. It was once again destroyed by al-Hakim, the sixth caliph of the Fatimid dynasty.

The chapel was rebuilt following the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders. Like the Byzantine chapel, the Crusaders structure was also built around the footprints, yet the Crusader version is octagonal, not round, though also an open-air structure. Rooms for monks were constructed around the chapel. Following Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem, Muslims, who also believe in Jesus' ascension to heaven, began to worship at the site. They closed the open chapel and adapted it to Muslim worship. Today, believers of both faiths are permitted to pray at the site.

Traditions surrounding the Chapel of the Ascension and the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif, are quite similar. Akin to the Chapel of the Ascension, the Dome of the Rock is also built around the Foundation Stone, on which believers identify the footprints of Muhammad prior to his ascent to heaven. Both structures are built as octagonal structures. Moreover, outside the Dome of the Rock stands a structure known as "Qubbat al-Miraj" that is quite similar to the Chapel of the Ascension. The Chapel of the Ascension's importance in Islam is an example of the transmission of beliefs and tradition between religions, including shared architectural approaches to the design of places of worship.



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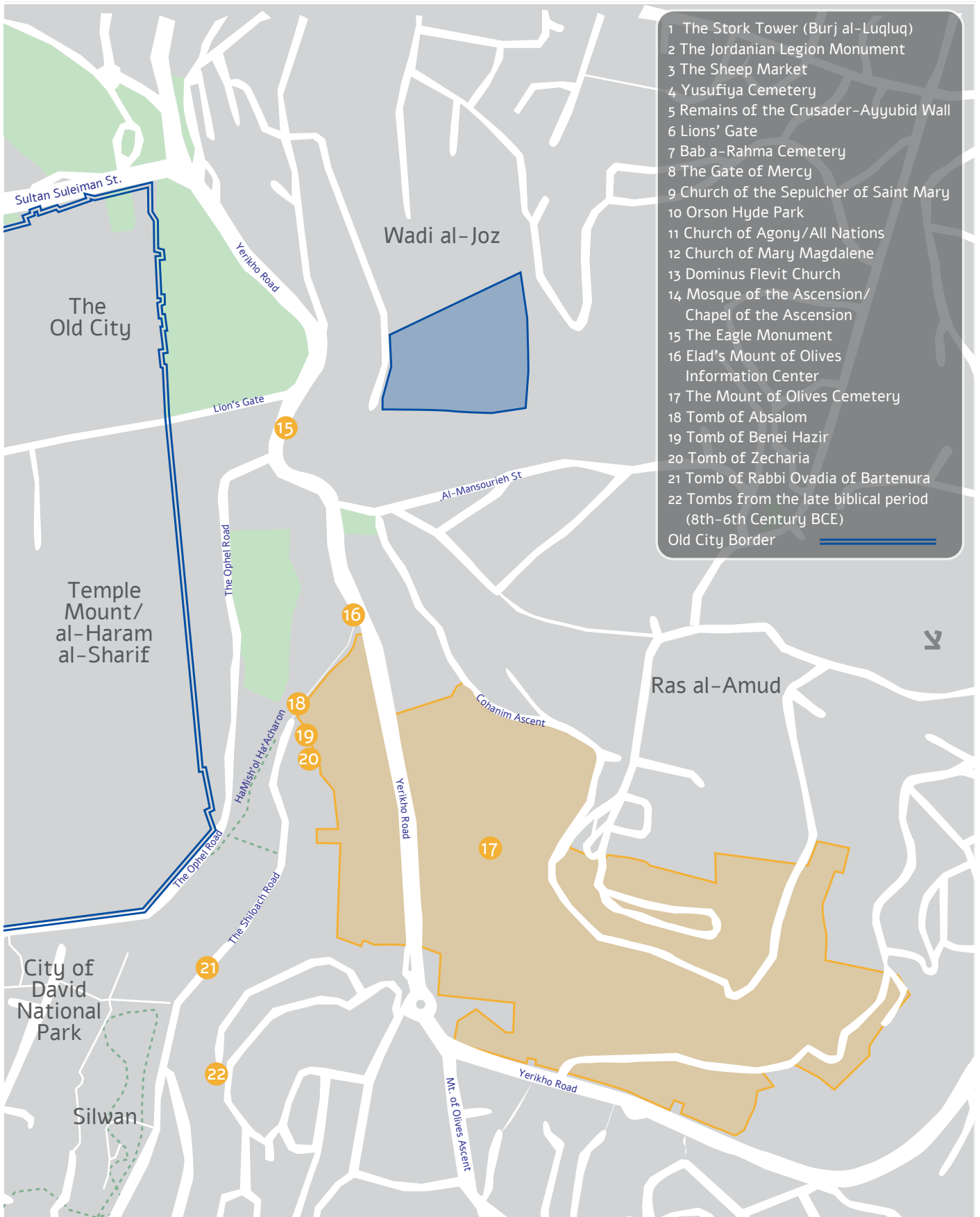
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# Part Three:

## Important Jewish sites

# Important Jewish sites



## The Eagle Monument

Yona Palombo's life is intertwined with the story of Jerusalem following the establishment of the State of Israel. She immigrated to Israel from Chile and married the ironsmith and artist David Palombo. They built their home on Mount Zion and were the first Israelis to live there. David Palombo was a well-known artist who designed the gates to the Yad Vashem Museum's Yizkor Tent, and the entrance gates to the Knesset, known as the Palombo Gates. These gates were sculpted together by David and Yona, who was also an ironsmith and artist. David died in a car accident in 1966. Over the years Yona was invited several times to repair the gates that stood at the entrance to the Knesset. In 2007 they were replaced with new gates.

Following the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, soldiers from the paratroopers' reconnaissance battalion and the families of the five fallen soldiers from the unit, asked Palombo to design a monument in their memory. Inspired by a sculpture that she had designed in her studio in the form of a dove with one wing stretched toward the sky and the other broken which reminded them of their unit's badge, they asked her to design a monument based on that image. The monument reaches a height of five meters, and at its base Palombo placed Jerusalem limestone engraved with the names of the fallen soldiers. Over the years, the artist added stones with the names of fallen soldiers from the unit who fell in other battles and sites throughout Israel's wars.

Palombo continued to live on Mount Zion until the end of her life where she opened a museum in memory of her husband David. In 2022, she died in a fire that broke out in her home, and destroyed it.



## Elad's Mount of Olives Information Center

The Mount of Olives Cemetery Information Center provides information on the location of burial plots. The information center is managed by the Elad Foundation and its establishment is one of several projects that it has promoted in recent years in an effort to expand control over larger parts of the Old City Historic Basin – including the highly controversial plan to build a cable car that will cross the Hinnom Valley from the First Station to the Kedem compound, a visitors center planned by the Elad Foundation which is slated for construction in the neighborhood of Silwan near Dung Gate. The cable car has a second phase, yet to be approved, which would extend the route to the Mount of Olives. In the face of the Elad Foundation's attempt to obtain a monopoly over heritage sites in Jerusalem's Historic Basin, other Jewish organizations are also competing for control over the area. One such example is an attempt by the International Committee for Har Hazeitim (meaning "the Mount of Olives" in Hebrew) to establish a new visitors center. The international committee was established under the auspices of the Lubinsky brothers, American Jewish businessmen known in part for the car dealerships they own. The committee was established in 2012 and has worked to promote plans to preserve the cemetery. In 2017, a plan to establish a new visitors center for the cemetery near the mosque in the neighborhood of Ras al-Amud was approved through an expedited procedure. According to the plan, the center will provide information on those buried in the cemetery, and it will include a synagogue, training center, libraries, a souvenir shop, cemetery showroom, auditorium, and will include research institute for cemetery mapping, observation post, and more. In early 2022, an agreement was signed between the Jerusalem Municipality and the committee for the establishment of the visitor center. Should it be established, it will be among the few tourist sites in Jerusalem's Historic Basin that is not managed by the Elad Foundation.





## The Mount of Olives Cemetery

The Mount of Olives Cemetery is the largest Jewish cemetery in Jerusalem. The graves are easily hewn in the mount's soft limestone. Archaeological investigations near the cemetery found graves that dated back to the Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 BCE). Graves were found that dated back to the Iron Age (1000–586 BCE also referred to as the First Temple period), on the western slopes of the Mount of Olives, above the Kidron Valley and opposite ancient Jerusalem. The tombs are attributed to the nobles of the Kingdom of Judah. Other tombs are dated to the Hellenistic (332 BCE – 37 CE) and Early Roman (37–132 CE) periods, known as the Second Temple period.

No evidence was found of an active cemetery on the Mount of Olives between the first century CE and the 10th century. Activity on site only resumed thereafter. It is likely that the resumption of burials on site is partially related to the fact that Jews were granted permission to settle in Jerusalem again during this period. From this period on, Jewish burial on the Mount of Olives had been on high demand, due to the belief that the Jews buried there will be the first resurrected upon the coming of the Messiah. Over the generations, many Jews from all over the world came to Jerusalem in their final days to be buried on site, and the Jewish community in Jerusalem charged huge sums of money for this privilege. To date, the cemetery remains a prestigious burial site in the eyes of many Jews, both religious and secular. Important rabbis were buried on the mount including Rabbi Yehuda Salant and Rabbi Kook, as well as important Zionist leaders, including Menachem Begin, who chose to be buried on the Mount of Olives rather than in the resting place for the great leaders of Israel on Mount Herzl.

During the period when the area was under Jordanian government rule, the administration allowed acts that caused damage to Jewish cemeteries, and large parts of the cemetery were severely impaired – many headstones were displaced and used for purposes such as road paving and the construction of new buildings. Furthermore: In 1964, the Intercontinental Hotel (currently the Seven Arches Hotel) was established on the peak of the Mount of Olives. Following its establishment, with the support of the Jordanian government, an access road to the hotel was paved through the cemetery and many graves were destroyed in the process. In 1967 Prime Minister Levi Eshkol ordered the demolition of the access road.

On November 15, 1967, the first burial was held in the cemetery under Israeli rule. The deceased was Rabbi Selina Shushan of England who had purchased the burial plot 30 years prior.



## Resurrection in the Kidron Valley

The main reason for the sanctity and importance of the Kidron Valley – in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity – beyond its physical proximity to the Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif – is its association with resurrection.

According to the Jewish faith, upon the resurrection of the Messiah, son of David, he will enter Jerusalem through the Gate of Mercy, at which point all the dead will be resurrected, beginning with those buried on the Mount of Olives. Over the ages, wealthy Jews have sought to be buried on the Mount of Olives, even if they had never visited Jerusalem in their lives. Muslims too believe that on the Day of Judgment when all Muslims will be resurrected, the first to be resurrected and judged for their actions will be those buried in the Bab a-Rahma and Yusufiya cemeteries in the area. In Christianity, the Kidron Valley is associated with the site of Mary mother of Christ's ascension, according to which three days after Mary's death, she is believed to have been resurrected and ascended to heaven. Another tradition has it that Mary did not die – as she was too pure to – but rather fell into a deep sleep. Thought to be dead, she was placed in the grave and three days later ascended to heaven.

## Series of Nobles' Tombs in the Kidron Valley

Magnificent tombs and tombstones were carved into the section of the Kidron Valley's eastern slope, near the neighborhood of Silwan. Their design is typical of architectural concepts between the First century BCE and the First century CE – during the Second Temple period. Their magnificence suggests that they had been part of the necropolis of the Jerusalem's nobility during that period. Below is a description of some of them.

### Tomb of Absalom

The "Tomb of Absalom" is the northernmost tomb in the series of monumental tombs built on the eastern slope of the Kidron Valley. Traditions identify the structure with the tomb constructed by Absalom, son of King David (2 Samuel 18:18). The written verse indicates that the tomb was erected in the "King's Valley." Yet, an archaeological study of the structure revealed that the tomb was built during the Roman period, in the first century BCE – hundreds of years after Absalom was alleged to have lived. Archaeologist Gabriel Barkay suggested identifying the Tomb of Absalom as the tomb of King Agrippa

I, due to the importance attributed to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount under his reign.

The tomb was built in two sections. Aboveground, a tomb was carved into the cliff, like other tombs in the area. The structure is shaped like a cube and has four columns along its facade. The ceiling of the tomb is conical, in the shape of a kettle lid. Like the other tombs, the Tomb of Absalom's design draws on different



construction styles. It offers further indication that residents of Jerusalem combined varied traditions in different realms of their lives, including burial traditions. A Greek inscription was revealed on its facade, which based on the script form dates to the third century CE and reads “This is the grave of Zechariah, the martyr, the holy priest, the father of Yohanan.” The inscription may be identifying the site with the father of John (Yohanan) the Baptist, whose name was Zechariah. Yet the writings of the New Testament do not mention that the father of John the Baptist died as a martyr. While the entire area is charged with both Jewish and Christian traditions, the inscription likely indicates an integration of the tradition associated with John’s father and that of Zechariah Ben Jehoiada. On the south side of the tomb an opening was found that leads to a square burial pit. While the pit is mostly empty of findings, inscriptions written by monks from the Byzantine period were found on its walls, attesting to the importance of this structure for Christians at the time.

## Tomb of Benei Hezir

The Tomb of Benei Hezir is a series of tombs which judging by the reliefs on the façade date to the Hellenistic period (the third to first centuries BCE). This tomb has two facades. The southern facade is built in the Greek style typical of this period, namely distyle in antis. In this style, two pillars were hewn between two pilasters. A Hebrew inscription was found above the pillars: “This is the grave and Nefesh [burial monument] of Eliezer Hania Yoazar Yehudah Shimon Yohanan Benei Yosef Oved Yosef and Elazar Benei Hania, Kohanim of the Hezir family.” Benei Hezir were members of an important priestly family based in Jerusalem during the Second Temple period. The grandeur of the tomb suggests their abundant wealth.

Above the inscription is a frieze (decorated lintel) and cornice (ornamental molding) in the Greek Dorian style, one of the three architectural orders of the late Hellenistic period. Scholars are divided about whether a pyramid was hewn into the rock above the tomb like at other tombs from this period. If there had indeed been a pyramid, the Benei Hezir tomb would be in keeping with other tombs that had amalgamated different architectural traditions with the reliefs on the façade attesting to Greek influences and the pyramid to Egyptian influences.

The northern facade consists of two fronts – two vertical strips – with a niche between them – a strip that penetrates approximately 30 centimeters into the cliff face. At the base of the niche is a simulated entrance. A balcony was hewn between the two fronts, indicating that they were built during the same period. Archaeological research has been unable to explain the function of this facade. A spacious vestibule leads out of it into a central hall, within which three niches were carved – wherein the bones of those buried were placed. Stairs were found inside the tomb that served as an ancient entrance from the carved tomb. The lower steps of this staircase were removed as part of a change to the entrance of the tomb during a later period.

## Tomb of Zechariah

South of the Tomb of Benei Hezir is a monolithic structure carved into the cliff. It is not a gravesite but rather a memorial structure, referred to as a “Nefesh” [meaning “soul” in Hebrew] in the Bible. The structure is sealed such that it is not possible to bury anyone within. The structure is cubical, and columns were carved into its façade in the Ionian style – one of the three Greek architectural orders characteristic of the late Hellenistic period. The roof is built in the shape of a pyramid and a cornice was designed between the cube and the pyramid. As noted, the foundation’s design is Greek influence, while the cornice and roof design reflect Egyptian influences. A courtyard was carved around the tomb and is surrounded by the high walls of the cliff into which the structure was hewn.

We do not know whom the structure was intended to commemorate. Popular tradition attributes it to the priest Zechariah Ben Jehoiada, who according to the book of Chronicles lived in Jerusalem during the First Temple period and was brutally killed by order of Jehoash, King of Judah (2 Chronicles 24:17–22). The style of the structure, however, indicate that it was constructed in the late Hellenistic period (First Century BCE), approximately 800 years after the period in which biblical Zechariah would have lived. Another tradition attributes the tomb to the prophet Isaiah, yet archaeological proof is lacking.



## The Tombs of Avraham Shlomo Zalman Zoref and Rabbi Moshe Biderman

The identification of the Tomb of Zechariah with Zechariah Ben Jehoiada imparted a sanctity to the tomb in the 18th century as a result of which Jews who lived in Jerusalem sought to be buried nearby. Near the cliff behind the Tomb of Zechariah, are two tombs – those of Avraham Shlomo Zalman Zoref and Rabbi Moshe Biderman. The fact that these two tombs are so close to the Tomb of Zechariah attests to their importance to the Jewish community of Jerusalem. Both rabbis lived and worked in Jerusalem in the mid-19th century. Rabbi Moshe Biderman was the second Rabbi of the Lelov Hassidic dynasty. This Hassidism founded in Lelov by Moshe Biderman’s father, Rabbi Dovid Biederman, was brought to Jerusalem by Moshe Biderman, and became an important part of the Jewish community in Jerusalem’s Old Yishuv. Following his death in 1850, Moshe Biderman was buried near the Tomb of Zechariah.

Avraham Shlomo Zalman Zoref raised money for the Jewish community in Jerusalem. In 1836



he was granted permission to renew the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem by Muhammad Ali Pasha, who ruled Palestine during that period. Zoref was responsible for rebuilding the Hurva synagogue in the heart of the Jewish Quarter in the Old City. Yet the construction of the synagogue spurred the wrath of the Sephardi and Muslim communities in the Old City. An attempt on his life by Palestinians left him paralyzed. Ten months later he died of his wounds. Today he is considered as the first victim of hostilities against Israel.

Rabbi Avraham Shlomo Zalman Zoref had a large family that played an important role in the establishment of the State of Israel. His grandson was Yoel Moshe Salomon, among the founders of Petah Tikva. His great-grandson, Haim Salomon, founded the pharmaceutical company Salomon, Levin and Elstein, which later developed into the international pharmaceutical company Teva.

In 1960, following the decision to conduct an archaeological dig around the Tomb of Zechariah to see if a burial cave was located beneath the structure, both tombs – of Rabbi Moshe Biderman and Avraham Shlomo Zalman Zoref – were damaged. On the wall above the site where their graves were located an inscription was placed explaining that this is their gravesite. In 2010 new grave markers were placed for both.

## Tomb of Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura

Near the Gihon Spring is a small, modest, slightly neglected cave. Since 2004, this cave has been identified with the burial site of Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura (approximately 1445–1500). He was among the greatest commentators on the Mishna who lived at the end of the Mamluk period. He was born in Italy and arrived in Jerusalem in 1488 where he settled. Throughout his life he made a great contribution to the development of the Jewish community in the city. He was the chief rabbi of the city, where he established a yeshiva and renewed its burial society. Both the date of his death and burial place



remain unknown. The only information about his burial place may be found in the writings of Moses Hagiz (1671–1750), among the sages of Jerusalem in the 18th century. In Parashat Masei, which he wrote in approximately 1733, he noted: “Today this spring [referring to the Gihon] is known to be in the south of Jerusalem [...] and is the bulk of the cemetery near the sealed cave where Mordechai and Rabbi Kalonymus and Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura were buried.” It is important to remember that these words were written approximately 230 years after Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura’s passing. That is, what is known about the Tomb of Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura is that he is buried in a cave near the Gihon Spring. Nevertheless, since 2004 the Elad Foundation, under the leadership of Aryeh King (who later became the deputy mayor of Jerusalem), promotes a celebration in his memory in the cave every year on the third of Sivan. Because the day of his death is unknown, this date is arbitrary and was chosen due to its proximity to Shavuot, according to King. The Elad Foundation has invested extensive financial resources in developing the cave and making it accessible to the public. In 2022, the Israeli government committed to transfer 1,000,000 NIS toward the tomb’s development, even though it remains unknown whether the person in whose memory the celebration takes place is indeed buried therein.

## Development of the Settlement Enterprise in the Kidron Valley?

In recent years, the Kidron riverbed in its entirety has suffered neglect. Due to a lack of infrastructure, villages in the West Bank emit their wastewater into the valley, which results in public health hazards. This problem also exists in Jerusalem, where the Kidron Valley runs between the neighborhoods of Silwan and Ras al-Amud – the infrastructure in both neighborhoods also suffers from abject neglect. In order to address the issue over the years, plans were considered to establish a proper infrastructural system and to clean the valley.

However, development processes that have been accelerated in the Old City basin since the 1990s, focused on the Elad Foundation's attempt to develop ancient sites in the area into tourist sites. As Elad attests, the primary goal of these actions is to Judaize this area of Jerusalem. For the most part, Elad's actions are part of broader development plans, supported by government and municipal authorities, including the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA), the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), and the Jerusalem Development Authority (JDA). For example, in 2011 the INPA and JDA promoted a plan to develop tourism in the Kidron Valley. To that end, they invested approximately 20 million NIS in developing paths, building terraces, placing signs and restoring monumental tombs scattered along the eastern slope of the valley. These plans were integrated into the Elad Foundation's ongoing attempt to develop this area into the "King's Garden," mentioned in the Bible. Though archaeological research has not uncovered evidence of the garden's existence, since 2005 Elad and the Jerusalem Municipality have promoted a joint plan to recreate the garden in this area of the Kidron Valley.

Efforts continue to harness touristic development in the Kidron Valley area to expand the Elad Foundation's takeover of the territory. For example, in 2022 the JDA budgeted for the development of the Kidron all the way to the north-eastern corner of the Old City walls, an area known as the "Sheep Market". One million shekels are currently 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.

Another plan which surfaced early last year is the plan to expand the Jerusalem Walls National Park into the Mount of Olives and parts of the Hinnom Valley. The plan initially tabled for discussion in early 2022 included an area which is home to some of the most important churches in Christianity. 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. However, if these plans come to fruition, the entire territory is likely to fall under the Elad Foundation's control, resulting in a complete transformation of the Historic Basin's multilayered cultural landscape.

While it is necessary to develop local infrastructure to preserve the Kidron Valley's important historic values, the abundant resources invested in the area by national authorities and the municipality benefit the settlers' touristic plan exclusively and contribute nothing to resolving the Palestinian neighborhoods' serious infrastructural issues, nor do they benefit the local residents in any way.

## The Tombs of Jerusalem Toward the End of the Biblical Period

At the foot of the neighborhood of Ras al-Amud are tombs that date back to the eight to seventh centuries BCE and are identified with the cemetery of the nobles of Jerusalem from the days of the Kingdom of Judah. The most well-known of these tombs is that of tomb of the Shebna inscription, and the Tomb of "Pharaoh's daughter", named after its design that is reminiscent of Egyptian architecture, and is considered the most magnificent of the tombs from this period in the region. Most of the tombs among this group were family tombs, in which family dynasties were buried for generations. The biblical term "gathered unto his forefathers" seemingly describes a physical action – laying the body of the deceased along with those of their ancestors in the same place. The tombs examined had a similar design and purpose: a hewn square opening leading to a square room; with stone benches carved alongside the room's other three walls, on which it was customary to place the deceased with burial offerings. In the corner of the room, an alcove was found where the bones and former offerings were gathered.

The tombs are currently located between the homes in the neighborhoods of Ras al-Amud and Silwan. Some of them are hewn into the bedrock at the edge of the neighborhood, while others are found within in the narrow streets.



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