

19 November 2025

URGENT UPDATE

The Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) issued an expropriation notice for the entire acropolis of Sebastia and surrounding area, in a grave development that represents annexation of one of the region's most important heritage sites.

Today (November 19th, 2025) the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) [published an expropriation order issued last week \(November 12th, 2025\)](#) for the heritage site of Sebastia and the surrounding area which includes plots of land belonging both to residents of Sebastia and the neighbouring town of Burqa. This development would make Sebastia the fifth antiquities site in the West Bank to be expropriate since Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967. The expropriation will include approximately 550 privately owned agricultural plots used mainly for the local olive industry. The pretext for the expropriation: "The preservation and development of the site as a visitor-accessible site for the general public."

Sebastia is one of the most significant ancient cities in the region and a site included, since 2012, on UNESCO's tentative list of World Heritage Sites for the State of Palestine (the tentative list consists of sites which are candidates for inscription to the list of World Heritage Sites). The intention is clear – to sever the ancient site of Sebastia from the Palestinian historic town of Sebastia, connect the site to Road 60 and turn the site into a settler-led tourist attraction (similar to the City of David in Silwan, East Jerusalem). [This development follows government decision 491 \(May 2023\)](#), which [allocates](#) 32 million NIS to develop what Israeli authorities call the "Shomron (Samaria) National Park" in a plan that entails massive development of the site, including a visitors' centre, a parking lot, and a fence which will separate the acropolis from the rest of the town.

- במ"ס -

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ההגנה
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הנדון: הודעה על כוונה לביצוע הפקעה לאתר ארכיאולוגי סבסטיה

הרינו להודיע על כוונה לבצע הפקעה לאתר ארכיאולוגי סבסטיה, מכוח סעיף 2 לצו בדבר חוק הקרקעות (רכישה לצרכי ציבור) (יהודה ושומרון) (מס' 321), תשכ"ט-1969, הצו בדבר הקמת מינהל אזרחי (יהודה והשומרון) (מס' 947), התשמ"ב-1981, ובהתאם לסעיף 4 לחוק הקרקעות (רכישה לצרכי ציבור), מס' 2 לשנת 1953, בהתאם לצו הפקעה ה'02/25.

גושים וחלקות:

אדמות כפר	גוש	חלקות בחלופה א
בורקא	20 מוסדר	8-10, 12-15, 17-29, 68, "ס" דרך בין חלקות
	21 מוסדר	1-10, 12, 13, 35-41, "ס" דרך בין חלקות
	2 מוסדר	103-112, "ס" דרך בין חלקות
סבסטיה	3 מוסדר	24-29, 31-131, "ס" דרך בין חלקות
	5 מוסדר	9, 10, 12-15, 73-85, 91-94, 96, 108, 109, 112, "ס" דרך בין חלקות
	6 מוסדר	כל החלקות
	11 מוסדר	41, 43, 46-55, 57-60, 62, 63, 65, 68, 70-100, 102, 104, 105, 153-168, "ס" דרך בין חלקות
	15 מוסדר	1-17, 22-28, 30-34, "ס" דרך בין חלקות
	16 מוסדר	כל החלקות

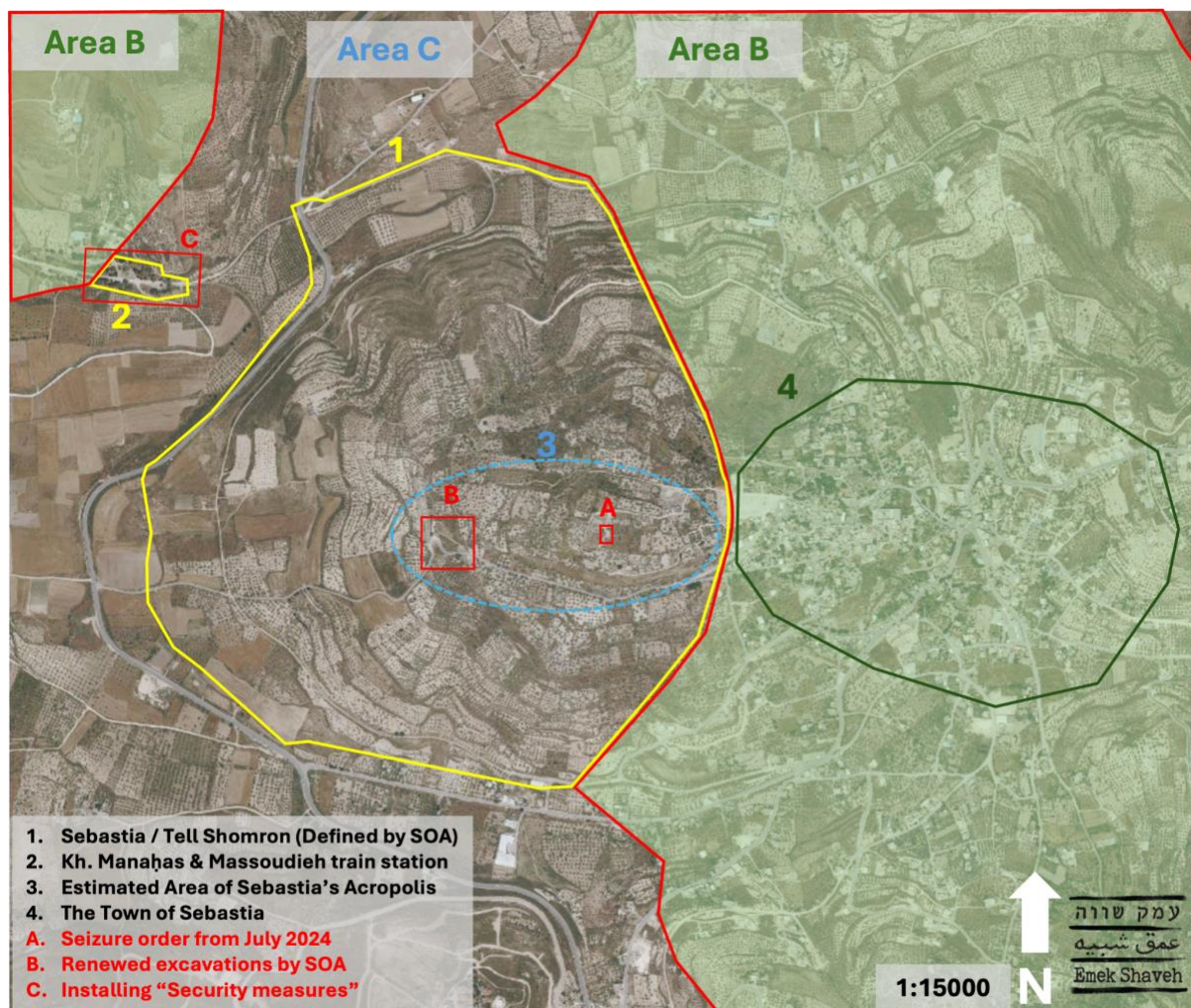
מקום התכנית: אתר ארכיאולוגי סבסטיה.

אדמות כפר: בורקא וסבסטיה.

מטרת ההפקעה: שימור ופיתוח האתר ופתיחתו לאתר קולט קהל לכלל הציבור.

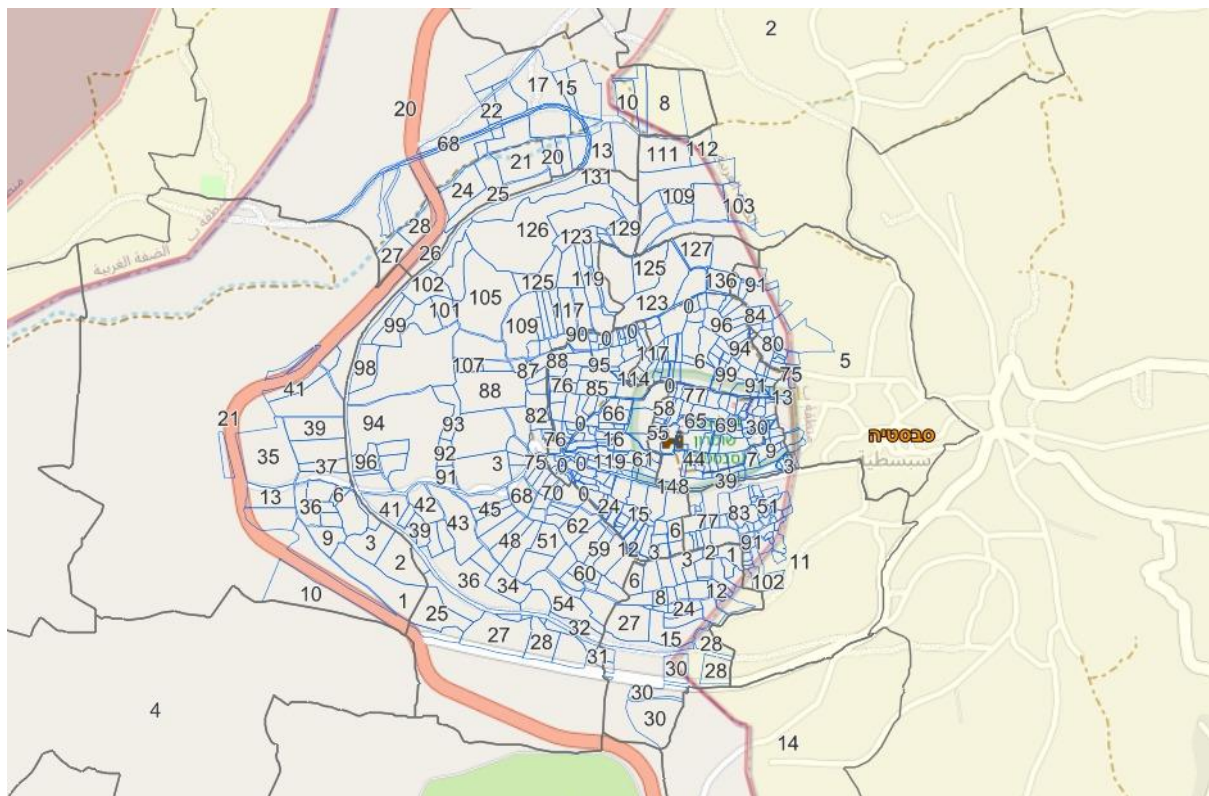
מסמכי הבקשה להפקעה נמצאים במשרדי לשכת התכנון המרכזית, במשרדי לשכת ראש ענף תשתית במנהל האזרחי בבית אל, וכן במשרדי מפקדת התיאום והקישור בשכם. כל המעוניין רשאי לעיין במסמכי הבקשה להפקעה בימים ובשעות בהם המשרדים פתוחים לקהל, ובתיאום מראש במספרי הטלפון 02-9977019 (לשכת התכנון), 02-9977752 (ענף תשתית).

Notification of intention to expropriate land for the purpose of "preservation and development of the site" as it appeared today in Hebrew on the Civil Administration's website.



Map of site of Sebastia (areas C and B)

This expropriation order follows a smaller [military issued order to seize land at the summit of the ancient site of Sebastia](#) announced last July 2024. Emek Shaveh and the municipality of Sebastia submitted an objection to the seizure of 1.3 dunam but both were rejected by the ICA. The latest expropriation follows the commencement of excavations by the Staff Officer for Archaeology (SOA) [in May](#) 2025.



Map of expropriations with plot numbers. Line in pink designates Road 60. The archaeological site is only a fraction of the total expropriated area. Source: COGAT's GIS.

The decision will finalise the process of severing the site from the town, ending hundreds of years of cultural continuity bonding the people of Sebastia with the main archaeological site, putting an end to Palestinian-led tourism to the site which is the main source of revenue for the town, the local olive oil industry, and likely imposing a permanent military presence.

Emek Shaveh's statement in short:

Israel is taking weaponisation of archaeology to new heights. In this cynical move Israel is flagrantly violating international law, turning archaeology into a tool for settlement and annexation while depriving the Palestinian residents of Sebastia and Burqa of their land and cultural heritage.

Background:

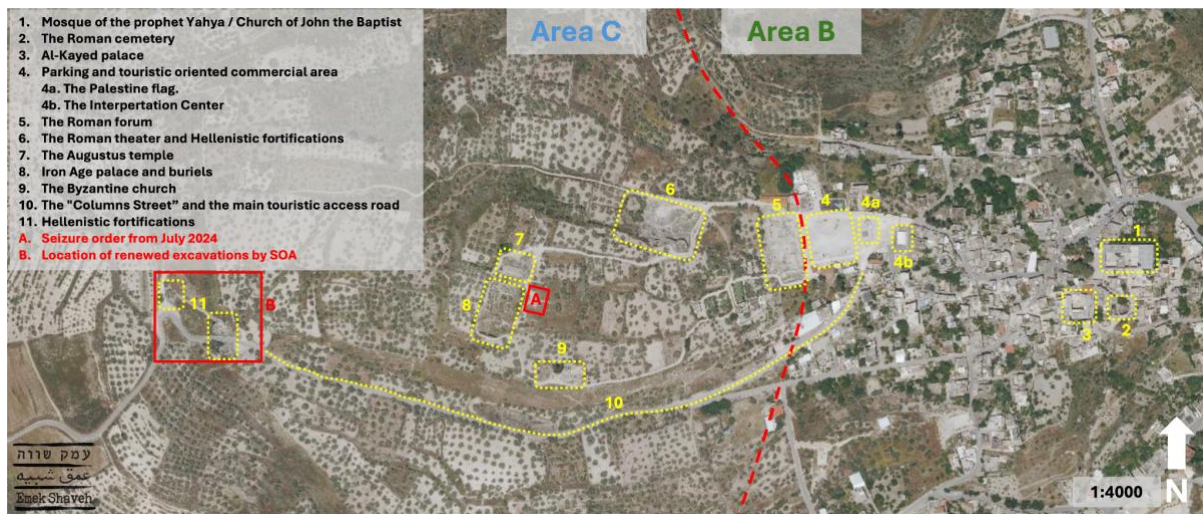
Sebastia consists of a multilayered archaeological mound (acropolis) which spans millennia and a historic town situated in the northern West Bank near Nablus.

Excavations since the early 20th century have revealed a continuum of diverse cultures and peoples. The site has been associated with the Iron Age Shomron/Samaria capital of the Israelite Kingdom, a Roman city built by Herod and named after Augustus (Sebaste), and sites associated with St John the Baptist including a Byzantine church and a Crusader period Cathedral subsequently turned into a mosque dedicated to the Prophet Yahiya (John the Baptist).

The acropolis (Area C) and the town (Area B) have always formed a single cultural and historical landscape. The site is the primary cultural and economic anchor of the town. For decades, local families have earned livelihoods through tourism, hospitality, conservation work, and cultural programming. Local Palestinian heritage groups, the Municipality of Sebastia, al-Quds University, ATS Pro Terra Sancta, the Mosaic Centre, and international partners have carried out community-led conservation. These initiatives strengthened local identity, created jobs, and demonstrated how shared heritage can be a foundation for inclusive development and community resilience.

Since the Oslo accords, but particularly in the past six years, repeated Israeli interventions have aimed to disconnect the acropolis from the living town, limiting Palestinian access, undermining local conservation efforts, and advancing a narrative that privileges historical periods associated with a biblical past at the expense of others. This was given impetus by a campaign which first emerged in 2019 whereby settler organisations - with the backing of senior government officials - have accused the Palestinians of destroying antiquities while simultaneously promoting plans to develop heritage sites in the West Bank as settler-run tourist attractions. Associated with the ancient northern Israelite city of Samaria (Shomron), Sebastia is the flagship of this plan.

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Main archaeological remains at Sebastia (acropolis and town)

The new confiscation notice covers the entire acropolis, including all open archaeological areas, historic remains, and access routes. It follows a series of measures taken by the current government aimed at changing the cultural landscape of the West bank (listed in a chronological order):

- May 2023 : Israeli Government [budgets 32 million NIS](#) to develop Tel Sebastia into a tourist site
- July 2023: Government [announces 120 million NIS](#) for the development of antiquity sites in the West Bank
- 2024–2025: A bill advanced in the Knesset [seeks to extend Israeli antiquities law](#) into the West Bank, replacing the Civil Administration's Staff Officer for Archaeology (SOA) with a civilian authority under the Ministry of Heritage. If passed it would represent annexation de jure of antiquity sites in the West Bank.
- June 2024: [Cabinet decision](#) allows the SOA jurisdiction over sites in Area B, in contravention of the Oslo Accords which stipulated that civil matters in Area B will be governed by the Palestinian Authority, including governance of archaeological sites.
- July 2024: A military seizure order for 1.3 dunams at the summit of the mound enabled the installation of a military surveillance pole. Objections to the plan submitted by landowners from Sebastia and Emek Shaveh [were rejected](#) in May 2025.
- May 2025: The Ministry of Heritage announces [commencement of new excavations](#) and conservation works in Sebastia.
- August 2025: [Sixty site declarations distributed across the northern West Bank](#), marking highest ever declarations distributed at once. Thirty of them were newly designated sites (from May 2025).

- Additional budget announced for preservation and development of Jewish heritage in West Bank (Sum mentioned in [recent update](#) now known to be higher, at 40 million NIS)



Environmental Affairs Minister Idit Silman and Head of Samaria Regional Council Yossi Dagan at Sebastia, October 1st 2023.

Emek Shaveh's Full Statement: Under the guise of caring for heritage, the Israeli government is investing two hundred million shekels in turning heritage sites into weapons of control, dispossession, and annexation. The plan to expropriate privately-owned land is anything but preservation. Its goal is to establish a touristic settlement in a move that will sever the people of Sebastia from their lands and heritage, ending hundreds of years of cultural continuity. This is making a mockery of international law, particularly the 1954 Hague Convention on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict and its two protocols. A UN Independent Commission of Inquiry

recently [determined](#) that Israeli excavations at Sebastia are illegal under international law.

This moment requires clarity. What is unfolding is a clear act of weaponising archaeology and cultural heritage for the purpose of land grab, cultural appropriation, and ethnic cleansing. We believe heritage professionals—both in Israel and internationally—must take a principled and unequivocal stand against the exploitation of their discipline for these unholy political ends which undermine professional ethics and violate cultural and human rights as set out by international law.

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