From Territorial Contiguity to Historical Continuity

Asserting Israeli Control through National Parks in East Jerusalem
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Emek Shaveh is an organization focusing on the role of archaeology in Israeli society and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We view archaeology as a resource for building bridges and strengthening bonds between different peoples and cultures, and we see it as an important factor impacting the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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Introduction

The Subcommittee for Objections of the District Planning and Building Committee approved the establishment of the “Mt. Scopus Slopes National Park” on the lands of the villages of Issawiyya and A-Tur on November 15, 2013.\(^1\) This marked the conclusion of a two-year struggle waged by residents of the villages, human rights organizations, and political groups against the establishment of a national park in these areas.\(^2\) The process of establishing national parks in East Jerusalem began almost 40 years ago with the declaration of the Jerusalem Walls National Park (JWNP). As part of this park, which constitutes a green belt around the Old City, the Mt. Scopus Slopes National Park was the final stage in the seizure of areas around the Old City in the so-called 'historic basin' of Jerusalem.

Today, the area covered by the Jerusalem's national parks begins with the Abu Tor neighborhood in the southwest of the Historic Basin and ends with the aforementioned Mount Scopus Slopes National Park in the northeast. In the last few decades the Nature and Parks Authority and the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA)\(^3\) have advanced the development, preservation and excavation of the antiquities located on park lands.\(^4\) Now that legal and planning rights on these lands have been secured, efforts to excavate and develop archeological sites will no doubt be accelerated. Tourism and archaeological activities will constitute a key means in the process of infusing historical-national content as deemed appropriate by the State of Israel. As such, the creation of territorial contiguity of these parks in East Jerusalem is compatible and in line with the ideology of historical continuity in terms of Jewish presence in these areas.

In this document, we will focus on archaeological projects conducted in the national parks that set excavation and preservation as their goals, and on the connection of these projects to encouraging and supporting the Israeli hold on the area around the Old City. Needless to say, most of this area is located beyond the Green Line - the border between Israel and Jordan until 1967 - and is part of East Jerusalem.

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\(^1\) Y. Altman, “Approved: National Park that will Block Arab Contiguity in Jerusalem” [Heb.], walla, November 15, 2013.

\(^2\) On the decision-making process for approving the park, see Emek Shaveh’s publication How the Decision was Made to Declare the Mount Scopus Slopes a National Park.

\(^3\) For details, please see Appendix A – Main Actors Operating in the National Parks.

\(^4\) In the past, Emek Shaveh published a report about the national parks in East Jerusalem: Where Are the Antiquities? National Parks between the Old City of Jerusalem and Area E1, 2011.
From Mount Zion to Silwan

The valley separating West Jerusalem from the Village of Silwan is known as the Hinnom Valley, in Arabic Wadi Rababa. It separates Mt. Zion from the neighborhood of Abu Tor, and connects with the Village of Silwan to the east. The Green Line, which was the border between Israel and Jordan until 1967, ran through the valley, and part of Hinnom Valley was declared as a No Man’s Land. As of 1974, the valley has been part of the Jerusalem Walls National Park (JWNP). With the western part of the valley now in Israeli territory, Israel began to act in the valley and expand touristic development to the east, towards the Village of Silwan.

Exposure of the Byzantine-Hellenistic Jerusalem Walls on Mount Zion

On November 25, 2013, the IAA began archaeological excavations on Mt. Zion. The IAA had also overseen the archaeological excavations conducted there from 2007-8, financed by the Elad organization.\(^5\) The excavations are now being carried out in open areas south of the church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu. To the excavators’ surprise, as soon as work began, dozens of Palestinian residents arrived at the site, one of whom claimed that it was his private land and charged that they had no right to excavate there. An argument ensued at the site, the police arrived, a number of residents were detained, and the man claiming rights to the property failed to have the excavation halted via legal means.\(^6\) The excavation continued undisturbed.

As a rule, the IAA does not carry out excavations financed by private organizations that do not own the land. The decision to conduct excavations on lands of undetermined ownership, as in the case of Mount Zion, gave Elad a foothold in public lands and a way to make itself part of the tourist route it manages. A similar case occurred in Silwan, in the excavation of Birket al-Hamra / Shiloah Pool, where Elad underwrote the excavations even though the land was public. This site became part of a tourism route with paid entry.\(^7\)

The varied archaeological excavations on Mt. Zion, those conducted by the IAA and those carried out by foreign expeditions (mainly in the 19th and early 20th cent.) revealed, among other finds, a Byzantine wall and a Hellenistic wall. The Byzantine wall proves that 5th-6th cent. CE Jerusalem included the area of Mt. Zion.\(^8\) The excavations since the end of 2013 continue along the route of the Byzantine wall, as part of a plan to develop a promenade on the slopes of Mt Zion.

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5 Y. Zelinger, “Jerusalem, Mt. Zion Slopes”, Hadashot Archaeologiyot, 122, 2010. For details about the Elad organization, see Appendix A – Main Actors Operating in the National Parks
8 F.J. Bliss & A.C. Dickie, Excavations at Jerusalem 1894-1897, London 1898
Excavation on Mt. Zion
Sambuski Cemetery

East of the excavation areas discussed above, a mere few meters away, preservation and restoration work is underway on the Jewish 19th cent. cemetery known as “Sambuski”. In recent years, much effort has been invested in restoring the headstones and preparing pedestrian paths from Mt. Zion to the cemetery. Many stone slabs were left on the ground – most have been reinforced with concrete to anchor them and prevent further disruption. The tourist route running from Mt. Zion to the east will end at the houses of the Village of Silwan in the area known as Wadi Rababa.

[Image of Sambuski Cemetery among the Houses of Silwan]

Renovation of the Sambuski Cemetery among the Houses of Silwan

[Image of Stone slabs cemented into the earth]

Stone slabs cemented into the earth

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Tunnel from Silwan to Mt. Zion?

In 2013, the IAA began excavation of a tunnel that veers off from the main tunnel excavated in Silwan in 2004-2009. The current excavation is funded by Elad, and is part of the Silwan tunnels and Old City excavation project. The route of the new tunnel is based on excavations carried out in Silwan and Mount Zion at the end of the 19th century by Bliss and Dickie. It was then customary to excavate along a horizontal course, thus creating underground tunnels. Although this method allegedly passed from the world of archaeological excavation, in recent years the IAA has resumed this questionable pattern of excavation.

In order for the tunnel originating in Silwan to reach the Sambuski cemetery and the excavation area on Mt. Zion, the tunnel will pass beneath homes in the western part of the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood. Of necessity, such excavations will take place along a several-hundred-meter span, a most costly and complex engineering project. The last time a tunnel was excavated along several hundred meters in Silwan, the project dragged on for approximately five years (2004 to 2009).

Bridge over Hinnom Valley

In 2008, Elad established a 120-meter-long rope bridge over the Hinnom Valley. This bridge served as a main tourist attraction during the summer and autumn of that year, and was subsequently removed. The trip through the valley included a visit to rock-hewn graves of the 7th cent. BCE, a visit to the elaborate burial structures from the Second Temple Period, the Akeldama burial structure dated to the Crusader Period, and actual passage on the bridge leading to Mt. Zion. In January 2014, the Israel Lands Authority announced it was investing 6,000,000 ILS in the valley to erect a suspension bridge, renovate the Sambuski Cemetery, and prepare pedestrian paths. Construction of the bridge is currently being advanced by the authorities.

“Akeldama” – Crusader Period Burial Structure

This burial structure is located on the southern slope of the Hinnom Valley. The Monastery of St. Onuphrius was built near it in the late 19th cent. The burial structure, dated to the Crusader Period, is known as “The House of Bones” (Charnel House) and is identified as a mass burial site for Christian pilgrims who died in the Holy Land. After

11 Summary of meeting between Antiquities Authority and Elad, August 26, 2012; Emek Shaveh, “Underground Excavations of Jerusalem” No. 7 on map: “Tunnel follows Sewage system and ‘Herodian’ Street.”
12 “Time travel to ancient Jerusalem”, Achbar, 2008
14 Israel Lands Authority, “Israel Lands Authority will Invest in Suspension Bridge and Restoration of the Basin of Jerusalem’s Old City-Hinnom Valley - near Cinamateque Compound in the City”, January 26, 2014.
years of neglect, in 2011-2012 the IAA took steps to preserve the structure, funded by the Nature and Parks Authority and the Jerusalem Development Authority. Investment in the site coincides with the authorities’ policy for touristic development of the Hinnom Valley and its slopes. The Crusader structure is one of the outstanding structures on the southern slope of the valley.

For additional and detailed information regarding archaeological remains in the Hinnom Valley, see Emek Shaveh’s publication: Hinnom Valley / Wadi Rababa: A Socio-political, Archeological Overview, 2010.

Remains of the Crusader Structure near the Monastery of St. Onuphrius

Preservation Work on the Crusader Burial Structure ("Charnel House")
The Kidron

Al-Bustan Neighborhood

The Palestinian neighborhood of Al-Bustan is located in the Village of Silwan in the Kidron Valley. The neighborhood borders the Valley of Hinnom at its southwestern limits, and the City of David site at its northwestern edge. The neighborhood is located outside of the City of David site, and shares a border with the Jerusalem Walls National Park at its north-western side. Apparently, the name “Al-Bustan” (“the vegetable garden”) reflects on the gardens that had flourished in the valley until the beginning of the 1970s, prior to the massive construction in the neighborhood.

In 2005, the Jerusalem Municipality announced its wish to establish the “King’s Garden”, and to this end, its intention to demolish dozens of homes in the neighborhood. The plan was tabled as a result of international pressure.\(^{18}\) Beginning in 2009, Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat renewed contacts to advance the plan.\(^{19}\) The main claim of the Municipality, based on identification of the area as “The King’s Garden”,\(^{20}\) was that most of the homes were illegal and should be demolished in any case. The municipality claimed that the garden should be reconstructed and integrated into the City of David National Park.

Mayor Barkat’s plan is also on hold, following international pressure, which views the destruction of dozens of homes in the heart of Jerusalem as a political obstacle and a glaring violation of human rights.

The City of David site, located along the slopes above the Al-Bustan neighborhood, was excavated many times through the past 150 years. In contrast, Al-Bustan has never been excavated. Its location was outside of the ancient city of Jerusalem, and its archaeological importance is secondary to the findings in the City of David or even to the findings in the Hinnom Valley. The claim that a park resembling the biblical King’s Garden should be established there remains unsubstantiated by archaeological research. Moreover, researchers have identified the location of the King’s Garden elsewhere in the city.\(^{21}\)

While the Hinnom Valley is barely settled, and the City of David is primarily an archaeological site, Al-Bustan is a densely populated Palestinian neighborhood.

The major reason that the authorities are prepared to invest great effort in the demolition and clearing out of dozens of houses in Al-Bustan is that the planned park will create a contiguity of tourism sites from the Hinnom Valley to the Kidron Valley to the City of David (see map below). Elad is involved in a substantial portion of these tourism and antiquities sites. The regrettable destruction of a neighborhood based on unsubstantiated

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20 “The King’s Garden” is first mentioned in II Kings 20:4-5, as well as in the description of the flight of the Judean army from Jerusalem, Jer. 52:7-8.
historical identification points to crude manipulation of the historical story at the expense of the local population.

Jerusalem’s historic basin is the heart of the political conflict and the struggle for Silwan / City of David is a central part thereof. Therefore, the possibility of creating a green belt (the King’s Garden) in place of a Palestinian neighborhood is perceived by the Jerusalem Municipality as essential. Removal of the neighborhood will cut off the contiguity of Palestinian residents between the neighborhoods of Wadi Hilweh in Silwan and the remaining parts of the village.

Location of Al-Bustan / the “King’s Garden” between the Hinnom Valley and the Kidron

Al-Bustan Neighborhood

Tel Aviv University Excavation

In December 2012, Tel Aviv University began collaborating with Elad and the Antiquities Authority in the excavation of the southeastern edge of the City of David site, in the area known as Area E. The Tel Aviv University site is located outside the fence of the City of David site, but within the boundaries of the national park, and is immediately adjacent to the streets of the Al-Bustan neighborhood. The first excavation season ended in May 2013. The excavation took place in an area that was filled with rubble and no findings or remains of any importance were unearthed there. The excavation was resumed towards the end of 2013 and is planned to continue for approximately three more seasons. The excavations are streamlined with Elad’s plans to develop the City of David tourism site to the east, and towards the few open areas at the edge of the Al-Bustan neighborhood. From the government’s point of view, Israeli presence in the valley is necessary to create a continuity of antiquities sites from the Shiloah Pool and the Al-Bustan neighborhood, towards the Spring House excavations and the northern Kidron Stream.

The Spring House

In January 2014, Elad deposited the plans for construction of a tourism compound overlooking the Spring House in the Village of Silwan (City of David). The Spring House is an ancient structure above the main spring of the Village of Silwan – ‘Ein Um Darej, or the Gihon Spring. The spring and the structure are located at a central junction that joins the City of David site to the Kidron Valley Promenade and the Mount of Olives. The Spring House is situated between the Kidron Promenade from the north, the Al-Bustan Neighborhood from the south, and the excavation and tourism areas of City of David from the west. Above the Givati Parking Lot, a main tourism compound will be established, known as the Kedem Compound. The planned excavations and tourism centers—the Kedem Compound, the City of David visitor center, and Spring House tourist center—are contiguous along the northern boundary of the Village of Silwan. Thus, archaeological excavations and the tourism route separate the village of Silwan from the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount / Haram a-Sharif.

The Spring House is the main archaeological site in the Kidron Valley, which is part of the City of David archaeological park. The planned tourist center (1200 sq. m.) will incorporate the current building and the archaeological remains. It will include a museum and audio-visual presentation that emphasize the site’s linkage to the Jewish People.

For hundreds of years, the spring in the Village of Silwan served as a water source for residents, and later as a leisure site for neighborhood children and their parents. The spring is identified as a sacred place in Judaism and Christianity, and therefore, it was

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23 Y. Mizrachi, Remaking the City: Archaeological Projects of Political Import in Jerusalem’s Old City and in the Village of Silwan, Emek Shaveh, 2013.
24 Ibid.
25 Ir David Foundation, Bet HaMayan (Spring House), 2011
decided to omit it from the national park. However, since 1995, an ongoing archaeological excavation has been conducted there, the most protracted in Jerusalem, and the land was expropriated from the village for settlers’ needs and for the City of David tourism site. At the Spring House excavation site, remnants of towers and walls from the beginning of Jerusalem’s history (Middle Bronze Age II – 18-17 th cent. BCE) were discovered. These remains bear testimony to the beginnings of Jerusalem as a city ruled by a centralized government.26 Above this layer, shards and remains were found from the Iron Age and from the Late Muslim Periods (Mamluk and Ottoman Periods).27
Kidron Promenade and the Ancient Tombs

Like the Hinnom Valley, the Mount of Olives and the Kidron Valley served as burial grounds for thousands of years. The most ancient tombs in the valley are dated to the 7th-8th cent. BCE. Later, elaborate burial structures were constructed – Absalom’s Tomb, the Tomb of Zechariah, and the Tomb of Benei Hezir, from the 2nd cent. BCE – 1st cent. CE. The cemetery on the Mount of Olives is from the Middle Ages, and became the main cemetery for Jewish burial.28

Development of the Kidron Promenade and the Ancient Tombs, which began prior to 2010, reached its peak in 2013 with the installation of informational and directional signs in the Kidron Valley. The promenade, which encircles the Old City on its eastern side, creates continuity from the City of David in the direction of the Mt. of Olives, and effectively bars the residents of Ras al-Amud from the valley. The promenade and the burial structure emphasize the Jewish identity of the area.

See Emek Shaveh’s report: Graveyard Metropolis East of Jerusalem’s Old City (2011), with a focus on the Kidron Valley and the Mount of Olives.

28 Ibid.
Preparation of the Kidron Promenade

Sign on the Kidron Promenade
Emek Tzurim National Park

The Emek Tzurim National Park is located on lands of the A-Sawaneh neighborhood and the Village of A-Tur. The park is bordered on the north by the Mt. of Olives and The Hebrew University. It was declared a national park in 1998 on an area of approximately 41 acres and is the continuation of the Jerusalem Walls National Park. Since 2004, an initiative has been underway in the park area, known as the “Temple Mount Sifting Project”, an experiential activity for students and visitors. The project is funded by Elad in conjunction with the Nature and Parks Authority. The earth being sifted is discarded rubble from the Temple Mount / Haram a-Sharif, which was removed from the Temple Mount and emptied into the Kidron during the extensive construction work carried out by the Muslim Waqf in the 1990s. The IAA examined the rubble and found in it finds from all the active periods on the Temple Mount, including the modern period. In recent years, the connection between the sifting project and the efforts of Israeli and Jewish groups to determine the fate of the Temple Mount has intensified. The internet site of the sifting project presents updates and news regarding the struggle against the destruction of antiquities on the Temple Mount, Knesset discussions regarding Temple Mount antiquities, etc.

The initiative is presented as an essential salvage project and as a scientific endeavor of great importance, with a high public profile including colorful advertisements. In recent years an attempt was made to upgrade the sifting project to the status of a scientific project, in which the IAA would engage the sifters as sifting contractors at their excavations, both those run by Elad (the City of David excavations) and those run as ordinary salvage excavations. No doubt, the project has political overtones, its scientific significance was doubtful from the outset, and using it to sift layers of rubble from sites where proper excavations had already been held falls short of scientific standards. This use even increases the chances of counterfeiting and diverts the focus of the excavation from the site as a whole to the individual findings. Just as significant, although the sifting could have taken place elsewhere, the fact that the sifting takes place in Emek Tzurim—in East Jerusalem—emphasizes that the initiative is a key tool in the political struggle to justify Israeli involvement and presence on the Temple Mount and in the historic basin.

29 Emek Shaveh, Emek Tzurim National Park, Where Are the Antiquities? National Parks between the Old City of Jerusalem and Area E1, 2011.
30 Ibid., ibid.
32 Emek Shaveh, Archaeology on a Slippery Slope: Elad’s sifting project in Emek Tzurim National Park, September 5, 2012.
Mt. Scopus Slopes National Park

The Mt. Scopus Slopes National Park does not contain significant antiquities sites. Aware of the paucity of remains in the area, the Nature and Parks Authority determined three main goals for the development of the park: Development of desert agriculture, bicycle trails, and walking paths headed in the direction of the Emek Tzurim National Park.

The Nature and Parks Authority emphasizes the connection between the desert frontier and the fertile land. The watershed line passes through the area of Mt. Scopus / the Village of Isawiyya. The planned tourism routes will give the visitor a walking experience from the desert area (Mt. Scopus slopes) to a fertile area (Tzurim Valley). Development of the park will enable grazing and agricultural use that emphasize the desert-like nature of the slope. The approach to the park will be from the Mt. Scopus birding station and from the Village of Isawiyya. The Nature and Parks Authority declared that it would enable access to all residents, not excluding the local population.

Summary and Conclusions

The national parks around Jerusalem's Old City, from the Hinnom Valley to the Kidron Stream and the Tzurim Valley, are part of the historic basin (“the holy basin”) of Jerusalem. The parks surrounding the historic (holy) basin of the Old City will constitute a green belt that comprises the heart of the political conflict in Jerusalem. The tourism development at each site is based on its archaeological potential and the possibility of public promotion.

On the surface, declaration of the areas around the Old City as national parks created an infrastructure for Israeli activity that is not readily identified as political activity. But in effect, the only activity necessary around a site such as the Old City is the preservation of its archaeological sites. Alongside the real need for the preservation of certain structures, such as the case of “The House of Bones” (Charnel House) in the Hinnom Valley, the motivation to develop the national parks and invest in them reaches beyond their historical or scientific importance. A striking example is the investment of millions to restore the Sambuski Cemetery, whose restoration would have been doubtful were it not for its politically strategic location.

Indeed, the declaration of an area as a national park is often questionable, and as we explained, has often lacked clear archaeological considerations. For example, there is no reasonable archaeological explanation for the specific investment in the Mt. Scopus Slopes National Park – the site lacks archaeological significance. Emek Tzurim is a salient example of a project – sifting of Temple Mount rubble – that could have taken place in an open area, and not necessarily in a national park, or, moreover, in East Jerusalem.

Creating territorial contiguity and historical continuity is an action with several benefits for the authorities: 1. A prominent Israeli presence; 2. Recognition of Israel's historical right to these lands; 3. Limitation of Palestinian presence; 4. Archaeological excavation and preservation work that have marketing value. The Israeli public is attentive to new archaeological findings and arrives en masse to sites following media exposure.

The struggle for the national parks in East Jerusalem is political. For this reason, it can be assumed that the process of highlighting Jewish heritage in the ‘Green Belt’ will continue for the long term. As long as the State of Israel feels that it is struggling to confirm its sovereignty over ancient Jerusalem, the national parks will serve as a major factor. As a result, the Antiquities Authority and the Nature and Parks Authority have much work ahead. The path to a political agreement in Jerusalem passes through the decisions and activities of these organs. In this sense, archaeological excavations and national parks have the same effect as a range of Israeli political activities conducted in East Jerusalem, and may even offer a broader effect – at least on the Israeli public.
Appendix A – Main Actors Operating in the National Parks

**Nature and Parks Authority** – Governmental authority subordinate to the Minister of Environmental Defense. The Nature and Parks Authority is responsible for the declaration, operation and administration of the national parks. In 1997, the Nature and Parks Authority agreed to transfer operational responsibility of the City of David to Elad. In addition, the authority gave its consent to carry out the Temple Mount Sifting Project in the area of the Emek Tzurim National Park.

**Elad** – Acronym for “El Ir David” (“To the City of David”, founded 1986), it operates to strengthen the Jewish settlements in Silwan and to highlight and reinforce Jewish presence in East Jerusalem. The involvement of Elad in the national parks of East Jerusalem is materialized in the financing of archaeological excavations, the development of tourist attractions, and the operation of a significant portion of these sites. The heart of this organization’s activity was and remains the City of David archaeological site, but alongside expansion of its activity in all areas of the national parks, the organization operates extensively in the open areas, combining tourist and archaeological attractions, with support from the government and its agencies. Elad is not a professional archaeological organization.

**The Israel Antiquities Authority** – The government authority is subordinate to the Minister of Culture and Sport. The Antiquities Authority is the main organization that carries out excavations in Jerusalem. The authority is responsible for preservation work through its Conservation Department. The Antiquities Authority granted an excavation license to the Temple Mount Sifting Project even though it is not scientific activity requiring a license.

**The Jerusalem Development Authority** – A governmental/municipal company. A substantial part of its budget is from the State of Israel, and a certain part from the Jerusalem Municipality. The Jerusalem Development Authority is responsible for and funds many projects in the national parks, and is considered a main factor in the development plans for the historic basin. The bulk of the government budget for the development of the Old City and the National Parks passes today through this authority.

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34 Emek Shaveh, El’ad’s involvement in archaeological sites and projects in East Jerusalem 2012, November 2012.
Map of the Open Areas in East Jerusalem and Area E1
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