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Bi-Annual Update

Unprecedented Speed of Development in Jerusalem’s Historic Basin

Content

The cable car to the Old City ........................................................................................................ P. 1
Davidson Center .......................................................................................................................... P. 3
Beit Haliba .................................................................................................................................... P. 5
Excavations beneath the Western Wall Plaza ............................................................................. P. 6
Conclusion: The “Shalem” Program is Underway ................................................................. P. 7
Map ............................................................................................................................................. P. 9

The cable car to the Old City

In a meeting in May 2017 the Israeli government approved the construction of a cable car for tourists along a route from West Jerusalem, through Silwan/the City of David to the area near the Western Wall. As a first stage, the government has allocated 15 million shekels to advance the cable car plan up to the construction licensing phase. The cable car is slated to depart from the Baka neighborhood in West Jerusalem, pass through Mount Zion and continue to its final destination at the planned Kedem Center at the entrance to the Village of Silwan (No. 2 on the map). The government is clearly determined to advance the cable car plan, recently presented to the residents of the
western neighborhoods of Jerusalem in a bid to gain their support. The cable car is branded as an eco-friendly mode of transportation to appeal to a middle-class, environmentally conscientious public.

The Israeli government intends to advance the construction of the cable car in a quick planning process called the national infrastructure program (NIP). This is a planning process applied to development initiatives that the government defines as public priority initiatives. For the most part, the initiative is a matter of paving roads, railway lines, electrical infrastructure, etc. Projects classified as such are discussed in the Committee for National Infrastructure. A national infrastructure project is subject to an expedited permit procedure in the planning committee and gets priority over other programs. The duration of committee discussions, including submission of objections to the project, is shorter. For example, assuming that it takes seven to eight years to approve the construction of Beit HaHaliba in the Old City or the Kedem Center in Silwan, we assume that it will take half that time to approve the cable car.

Despite the decision to advance the cable car in an expedited planning procedure, the main obstacles at the moment are a lack of governmental budget (the 15 million NIS which have been approved is a very small portion of the overall cost of the project) and the fact that the Kedem Center, which is intended as the final station of the cable car, has yet to be built. As of writing, the planned Kedem Center has not yet received a construction permit. This permit depends among other things on the completion of the archaeological excavations at the site and the final approval of the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Jerusalem Municipality.

The Cable car in video – please [click here](#)
Davidson Center

The Davidson Center is an archaeological park situated south of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif (No. 6 on the map). The site is under the auspices of the Company for the Reconstruction and Development of the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem. The Elad Foundation and the State of Israel are in the midst of a legal struggle over who will manage the site. Recently an article in Ha'aretz newspaper reported about an agreement between the El'ad Foundation and the State that would allow the El’ad to manage the site. Beyond the report in the paper we have no further information about the agreement between the State and the Elad Foundation. In our assessment the State will not enable the El’ad Foundation full management of the site. It is possible that some areas within the site will remain under the direct management of the Company for the Reconstruction and Development of the Jewish Quarter.

Partial management of the Davidson Center would be a significant achievement for El'ad. It will allow the foundation to expand into the Old City and gain a foothold adjacent to the Western Wall Plaza and the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Creating a physical link and a shared branding between the “Davidson Center” and “City of David”, will increase tourism to the sites and strengthen El’ad’s influence. There is already a tunnel which connects the Givati Parking Lot excavations (No. 2 on the map) with the Davidson Center. In our assessment, additional links to the Davidson Center are likely in the future, such as with the Ritual Bath trail which recreates the Jewish pilgrims’ route to the Temple, and was inaugurated in February 2017 by Minister Zeév Elkin.
Beit Haliba

The Western Wall Heritage Foundation started building Beit Haliba at the Western Wall Plaza (No. 8 on the map) in the last few months. The construction began after an eight-year long process in the building and planning committees. Situated on top of what was once the Mughrabi Neighborhood, it is slated to rise three stories high and is the first building that the planning committees have approved at the Western Wall Plaza since Israel created it in 1967. The process of approving the construction plan has taken years and was subject to many objections by residents, archaeologists, planners, as well as Emek Shaveh. On the face of it, the structure will not significantly affect the status quo in the Old City, mainly because it is situated between the Western Wall Plaza and the Jewish Quarter. But now that the construction of Beit Haliba has been approved, it will be easier to approve additional structures, be it in the Old City or outside the walls. For example, Beit Haliba could set a precedent based on which it will be easier to approve the construction of the cable car and the Kedem Center.
Excavations beneath the Western Wall Plaza

In October 2017, the discovery of a theatre from the Roman period beneath the Western Wall Plaza (No. 9 on the map) was reported in the media. The archaeological excavation was carried out in the northeastern end of the Western Wall, beneath a site known as Wilson’s Arch. This excavation, like others sponsored by the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, was conducted in order to expand the area under the Western Wall tunnels (No. 10 on the map).

In 2009 and 2010 the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Western Wall Heritage Foundation discussed a plan to excavate the entire area beneath the Western Wall. It was agreed that the excavation would be carried out in stages and over many years.
Emek Shaveh's publication “Underground Jerusalem: The excavation of tunnels, channels, and underground spaces in the Historic Basin”, based on information we obtained from the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, touches on this project and the different stages to its completion. This is a national project supported and advanced by the Israeli government and the prime minister’s office.

In our assessment, the small excavation under Wilson’s Arch will be followed by more excavations as part of an extensive program to gradually create an underground level beneath the Western Wall Plaza.

**Conclusion: The “Shalem” Program is Underway**

On the face of it, each of the projects described in this document seems to stand alone. The cable car, for example, is viewed as a government sponsored transportation-tourism project; the Davidson Center is the subject of a domestic struggle between the El’ad Foundation and the government; Beit Haliba is a construction project by the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, and the excavation of the tunnels beneath the Western Wall are carried out in measured steps, supposedly guided by an eagerness to expose the past of the most ancient compound in the Old City of Jerusalem. A closer look will reveal that all these projects are interconnected. For example, the precedent of building Beit Haliba will pave the way for the construction of additional buildings in the Old City and the surrounding area, the underground spaces will merge into one big archaeological complex, and the cable car is intended to transport hundreds of visitors a day into the Old City on an overpass that will focus on the Old City’s Jewish history, meanwhile changing the architecture of the Old City and how it is perceived by the
It seems that the work of the various different bodies and foundations in different locations in the Historic Basin is guided by a single agenda - an entire plan introduced at the government meeting in May 2017 which envisions a unified archaeological-touristic space above and below ground, from Silwan to the Western Wall Plaza, extending to the Western Wall tunnels under the Muslim Quarter. Its purpose is to change the face of the Old City and create a new physical and narrative space which is under total Israeli control and excludes everything and everyone that contradicts Israel’s sense of national and religious proprietorship over all of Jerusalem.
Main Archaeological Sites in Jerusalem's Historical Basin

1. TAU Excavation
2. Givati Parking Lot
3. Underground Excavation
4. Beit Hanassyin / Spring House
5. Between Warren's Shaft and Spring House
6. Ophel Excavation
7. Mughrabi Ramp
8. Beit HaBaka
9. Western Wall Plaza
10. Old City and Silwan Tunnels
11. Little Western Wall
12. Burj al-Latlaq (Herod's Gate)
13. Bab al-Rahma
14. Zebediah's Cave (Solomon's Quarries)

- Tunnel
- Excavation Site
- Ancient sites and old excavations
- Old City Walls

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