

# Alternative **Tourism** Journal



**Issues and Perspectives  
in Archaeology**  
*Implications for Palestinian Tourism*

**Alternative Tourism Journal** is an initiative of the Alternative Tourism Group-Study Center Palestine (ATG). It is a journal which offers an alternative narrative of the situation in Palestine and the way it impacts on tourism.

ATG is a Palestinian NGO specializing in tours and pilgrimages that include a critical examination of the history, culture, and politics of the Holy Land. ATG operates on the tenets of "justice tourism" and seeks empowerment of the local community through affirmation of Palestinian cultural identity, and protection of eco-rights. Above all, ATG seeks to promote justice in the Holy Land with tourism as one of its instruments.

Copyright© ATG-2020

Published in Palestine by the Alternative Tourism Group-Study Center (ATG)

Written & Researched by: Dr Ranjan Solomon

# Table of Contents

<b>Preamble</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Palestine's Heritage Under Occupation</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Biblical Archaeology in Palestine</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Biblical Archaeology</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Emergence of Palestinian Archaeologists</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>The Use of Archaeology in Jerusalem as a Political Weapon</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Bethlehem as a Pilgrimage Destination</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Apartheid Wall and Status of Palestine's Cultural Heritage</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>UNESCO and Palestinian Archaeology</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Colonies, Heritage Stealth and Obliteration of Identity</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>International Law and Archaeology</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Combating Cultural Genocide - Architectural Preservation of Old Palestinian Cities</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>34</b>

## Preamble

With a distinctive history and geographic location, Palestine is a land of unmatched heritage. It is allied to civilizations, empires, prophets, and saints and one which has evolved into a cultural mosaic that represents tremendous potential for Palestine's present and future. An example is the case of Jerusalem, a known city for its pluralism before the *Nakba* and the Israeli Occupation. The fabric of the city comprised of Assyrians, Muslims, Armenians, Jews, Copts, Catholics, Orthodox, Moroccans, Gypsies, Africans, and Maronites, were amongst those who flourished in the city. However, the Israeli occupying Authority with its challenge to compel Jewish-Zionist exclusivity over the land has endangered this historical identity.



## Palestine's Heritage Under Occupation

Archaeological heritage in Palestine is a huge store of human data that has remained as evidence of the way communities from the past have lived their lives. Archaeology is able to show up the quality of life of various ethnic, national and religious groups. It often leads archaeologists into a quandary that is compounded when political and religious factors feature, as in the case of the establishment of the State of Israel. Despite Israel's policies and measures, Palestine has exerted tremendous efforts to preserve its heritage and to counter the systematic denial of the country's tourism potential. Among those efforts is Palestine's membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Heritage Organization (UNESCO), achieved in October 2011.

Cultural heritage is a cultural treasure and, is what tourism analysts and practitioners would call, a 'non-renewable resource'. Ideally, it is to be managed by a specialized entity that is qualified to guard, care for, assess and value historical buildings, archaeological sites, and relics. By such preservation, items that have heritage value contribute to enhancing historical consciousness and understanding, community



self-appreciation, and heighten tourism value. However, ideology and politics can undercut the importance of such cultural heritage, particularly if politics is used as a pretext to justify occupation and land confiscation. Archaeologists must join with local communities to create a sense of pride and curation, so that the populace acts as allies in the encounter to protect cultural heritage.

This approach could well serve Palestinian communities. Archaeological remains in Palestine constitute an enormous resource for human knowledge that has been left in the ground with ethnic, national and religious groups. This vast wealth has created a dilemma for archaeologists, who continue to struggle to create a successful mean of managing and protecting resources adequately. The situation has been exacerbated by political and religious motivations, most particularly since the establishment of the State of Israel.

By consolidated and globally coordinated efforts, Palestinians can gain better control of and access to their cultural heritage. This is easier said than done because Palestine lives under an occupation that refuses to go away even 53 years after it was inaugurated by a rampaging occupation power which has done worse with each year of the occupation. Israel has snatched more land and, systematically and by design, seized land that resides in Palestinian Territories. It has done so not with intent to protect archaeological materials as universal heritage but to profit from appropriating ownership of these sites for advantage and economic profit under tourism arrangements. If, indeed, these sites had remained as Palestinian, which is the real case, then the visitor/pilgrim/researcher/historian would visit and study it in its authentic context and situation. Right now, it is a situation where the visitor sees and grasps a distorted version of the reality by involving local government authorities, archaeological and heritage professionals and residents of local communities.



Since the time of the British mandate, Zionist and, later, Israeli politics of nation-building has strongly influenced Biblical archaeology'. It has, however, appreciably undermined the integrity of Israeli scholarship. Israel's nationalistic distortions have contaminated archeological arenas. It is the exertion of solid field-level study by serious researchers who set out to write objective versions of Palestinian history independent of biblical perspectives that have prompted corrective interpretations and challenged inaccuracies of interpretations by biased Israeli researchers. These new research projects have, since the 1980s, thrown up accurate versions of heritage and, thus, challenged the legitimacy of the Judeo-ethnocentrism which dominates nationalist Israeli claims on the heritage of ancient Palestine and the Bible.

Preserving and affirming heritage reinforces the collective memory in the survival of Palestinian people. The Palestinian past cannot be erased and should not be dismissed if a genuine peace is sought.

## **Biblical Archaeology in Palestine - Predating the Creation of Israel**

Undergirding the imperative of exploring biblical archaeology is recognition that such an approach permits an understanding of the peoples that inhabited the Holy Land alongside their history, culture, identity and movements. This makes it possible to know the exact location of the stories and compare them with fact. In that sense, Biblical archaeology has offered evidence of Biblical narratives. Contemporary archaeologists are moving from this paradigm to one in which they are seeking to locate the historical context in which it was written. Biblical archaeology can shed light on the knowledge that we have regarding certain historical data described in the biblical stories such as governments, people, battles and cities. From this setting, such an approach provides some specific details reflected in the books of the Bible for example the Siloam Tunnel, the Pool of Bethesda, Calvary and others that effectively relate to those described in the Biblical stories.

Archaeological explorations in Palestine, “the Holy Land”, began in the 19th century. It was when Western scholars wanted to corroborate the historicity of the Bible and, later on, to establish links for the Jews to the land. The British took the lead in this regard. They launched a Palestine Exploration Fund in 1865 which, according to records, predates all other archaeological organization in the world. It was exclusively dedicated to the study of Palestinian history and archaeology and aimed to accumulate as much information as possible about the composition of the Bible and reveal the Judeo-Christian roots of the Holy Land through archaeology.

In 1870, the American Palestine Exploration Society was established by the Americans, the French founded the French School for Biblical Studies in 1882, and the Germans established the German Society of Oriental Research in 1898. These institutions carried forward archaeological fieldwork in Palestine over the years aimed

to strengthen the role of the Biblical perspective in the rewriting of the history of Palestine without taking into consideration the cultural heritage of those who still lived in the Holy Land.

Unfortunately, those efforts concluded in a gravely flawed political act - the British army occupation of Palestine after World War I. What followed were many excavations and a chronology of events drawn up corresponding with eras named after ethnic groups and cultural-religious phenomena described in the Bible. Even from the British Mandate era there has been a Department of Antiquities in Palestine. The lack of well-trained Palestinian archaeologists at the time, to manage the vast archaeological heritage resources that were known, restricted the growth of the effort. In line with their political and, somewhat racial preference, the British Mandate Authority encouraged and facilitated the creation of a Jewish national home and supported the efforts of as many Jewish archaeologists as possible and led to what we witness today. The result is an imbalance between Palestinians and Jewish immigrants, with the latter using archaeology as a tool to justify their claims to the land and thereby to justify its confiscation from the Palestinians.



Biblical archaeological activities have thus become an avenue for archaeologists, historians, clergymen, explorer and treasure-seekers, to pillage Palestine of its antiquities and deposit them in European and American museums. Some even made their way into private collections of the aristocracy. These activities also produced a colossal amount of written literature which were always one-sided and became the foundation to build upon after the founding of the State of Israel.

Moreover, Biblical archaeology has turned out also to be the exploitative intention of numerous notable falsifications committed for inexplicable reasons in some cases. There exist clashes of dates when artefacts were recovered.

The Catholic Church also engaged in extensive excavations in the area where the Biblical narratives are set mainly. Their intent was to throw light on the historical, cultural, economic and religious background to the texts. Their goal was not to establish whether or not the Biblical narratives were genuine or not. It was just taken for granted. At the same time, there were sections of the church historians of the Catholic Church who chose an approach in more detailed inquiry. This set of people organized (and still do) archaeological campaigns with the intention of knowing for certain that the Bible is factual and that its narratives should be understood as historical events.

Archaeological investigations often adopt scientific methods which enumerate a chronology of events and that enables the inquirer to give numerical order to the Biblical stories. These explorations sometimes establish what they have set out to find, namely where the Biblical narratives took place. In other instances, they integrate events that have been taken as historical fact, providing arguments that show that certain stories are not historical narratives but belong to a different plot.

The eminent archaeologist William G. Dever in an article on “Archaeology” in The Anchor Bible Dictionary confirms his firm view that there are negative effects of the close relationship that has existed between Syro-Palestinian archaeology and Biblical archaeology, which has caused the archaeologists working in this field, to resist adoption of the new methods of “processual archaeology”. Dever’s basic assumption is that “Archaeology certainly doesn’t prove literal readings of the Bible...It calls them into question, and that bothers some people. While, lay people think that archaeology is there to prove the Bible, archaeologists do not think so”.

True, it can be said, that what we call Biblical archaeology, perhaps 150 years ago, scholars, mostly western scholars, have attempted to use archaeological data to prove the Bible, and for a long time it was thought to work. The truth of the matter today is that archaeology raises more questions about the historicity of the Hebrew Bible and even the New Testament than it provides answers, and that is very disturbing to some people. Dever also wrote: “Archaeology as it is practiced today must be able to challenge, as well as confirm, the Bible stories. Some things described there really did happen, but others did not. The Biblical narratives about Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Joshua and Solomon probably reflect some historical memories of people and places, but the larger number of portraits of the Bible are unrealistic and contradicted by the archaeological evidence”.



## **Biblical Archaeology – Post Israel**

Biblical archaeology burgeoned in 1948 and onwards after Israel was established by the UN Partition agreement. Israeli archaeologists focused almost exclusively on aspects related to the presence of Israelites and Jews in Palestine. Many of these investigations were predisposed to the extent that when a multi-layered site was uncovered, they only depicted material from the Biblical period and ignored other periods that would account for eras that projected Palestinian heritage.

Getting closer to the post-Israel times, during the 1950s, archaeology practically became a national trend. It articulated an obsessive pursuit to craft the common history of a national state which had citizens from all over the world. A link between new settlers and the ancestral land was reaffirmed and sites. They were politicized to a point where they became signs of national identity and unity in political, religious and military strategies. It assumed nationalistic proportions. Archaeology emerged as a virtual national diversion and a sort of apparatus to forge social solidarity between and among Jews who were immigrating from all corners of the globe.

Because Israel is part of the Christian Holy Land, there arose interest among theological institutions to indulge in archaeological excavations. Israel became one of the most widely excavated countries. Israeli archaeology was not merely nationalistic in scope. It also emerged as a symbiotic partner and descendant of Biblical archaeology. It virtually degenerated into a weapon of the current occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Within a few years after the 1967 war and Israel had occupied the West Bank, significant functions were taken up by settler organisations, such as Gush Emunim, by excavating archaeological sites identified with important ancient Israelite locations from the Iron Age. One such is the settlement of Khirbet Seilun Shilo, 2 km

northeast of Turmus Aya, which was first set up as a temporary archaeological camp. The name of the ancient colony has been preserved over time in the Arabic name for the site, 'Khirbet Seilun'. It is now one of the largest Jewish colonies in the West Bank. Numerous other colonies have also been created in proximity of archaeological sites. The name Beth El was given to the new Israeli colony near the Palestinian village of Betin (north of Ramallah). This is not only a large residential colony, but also a huge army base and the headquarters of the Israeli army and civil administration for the entire West Bank. So it is easy to see how Israel has created an aura of identity based on archaeology to mobilize Israel Jews to identify with the sites and the colonies surrounding them.

To cement their claims, the Israeli army created an archaeological office headed by army personnel to control all archaeological sites and activities in the Occupied Territories. This occurred after the 1967 war and so it is clear that archeology has been militarized and is sustained by military impositions to justify their false and illegal claims. Numerous archaeological explorations have been conducted from 1967 until today, in violation of the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and the Hague Convention of 1954, under the pretext of 'salvage excavations'. Land has been confiscated from its Palestinian owners in the name of archaeology, because the antiquities law allows the state to expropriate land containing historical sites. The Government is free to expropriate or buy any land or antiquity if it is in the interest of the Department to expropriate or buy it. To make it easy and appear legal, Israel approved the Israeli Antiquities Law of 1978 which reads: "An antiquity site whose expropriation is necessary, in his opinion, for the purposes of preservation or research... or to facilitate excavations therein." Israeli archaeologists who work in Palestine pay attention to certain layers at some archaeological sites and neglect or destroy others.

In the Old City, around Old Jerusalem the situation is even worse. Elad, a right-wing Jewish settler organization controls the majority of archaeological excavations including Silwan area. It should be noted that some Israeli archaeologists have tended to ignore the entire cultural heritage of Palestine as a heritage record have confined their excavations and research only on those remains relevant to Jewish history and tradition. By contrast, Israeli archaeologists have used archaeology as a tool for proving the right of the Jews to the land. In many cases Palestinian requests for permission to build have been denied and properties have often been confiscated in the name of archaeology. Palestinian communities suspect that archaeology is one of the instruments of the occupation and is linked to land confiscation through dubious heritage claims. By destroying archaeological sites which might be associated with Jewish claims to the land, they hoped to erase records that would obliterate claims on which the occupation has been founded. Certain sites were ransacked and/or ruined because they were seen to be obstructing a Palestinian's right to exercise ownership, especially in those cases when the authorities have prohibited construction which is part of the natural growth of villages, in order to protect archaeological remains. Unfortunately this stately was counter-productive because they also erased Palestinian history.



## **Emergence of Palestinian Archaeologists**

According to the study, 'Palestinian Archaeology: Knowledge, Awareness and Cultural Heritage', in the last two decades alone a new generation of Palestinian archaeologists has arrived. They have been instrumental "in fostering awareness, spreading knowledge, and protecting and preserving archaeological sites." There has been an increase in cultural awareness because of these efforts. Many people have a positive feeling about the establishment of the Palestinian Antiquities Authority, and this has motivated land-owners to respect archaeological sites more than before. Palestinian archaeologists deal in an unbiased manner with all of the cultural heritage of Palestine as part of their inheritance, regardless of its temporal, religious or ethnic origin (e.g. Prehistoric, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim).

Awareness of the value of national cultural heritage has increased among Palestinians during the past two decades. Degrees in archaeology have been awarded (e.g. al-Quds University), private museums have been set up (e.g. the Museum of Artas village near Bethlehem), collections of regional costumes have been exhibited (e.g. the work of Maha el-Saqa in Bethlehem), and historical buildings have been preserved (e.g. the work of RIWAQ, al-Funun, the Bethlehem 2000 project (see also Focus, 2004)). All these institutions are working in support of a Palestinian cultural identity in which an understanding of the past and the protection of cultural heritage figure prominently.

### **The Palestinian Department of Antiquities**

The Palestinian Department of Antiquities was established in 1994 after the Oslo Accords between the Palestinians and the Israelis. This department inherited the very difficult situation created by more than thirty years of Israeli oversight of archaeological work in Palestine (since 1967). They were tasked with the protecting of an enormous number of archaeological sites, conducting salvage

excavations, preventing looting, and spreading awareness about the value and need to preserve ancient sites. These were not easy tasks. Inadequate funding and a lack of trained archaeologists in the region have severely curtailed the pace of improvement.

### **Non-Governmental Institutions**

In addition to the Palestinian Authority's Department of Antiquities, several non-governmental institutions dealing with cultural heritage also have been established. Two prominent organizations are The Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange (PACE), the Centre for Architectural Conservation (RIWAQ) Hebron Rehabilitation Center, and Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation (CCHP). These institutions contribute to the protection and development of Palestinian cultural heritage.

The establishment of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, the development of an educational infrastructure for archaeological training, and the activities of cultural heritage NGOs are a reflection of the presence and efforts of the increasing number of capable Palestinian archaeologists. These men and women are now part of an effort aimed at research, public education and cultural heritage protection. An enormous amount of work remains to be done in order to develop a greater sense of connection between the local people and the innumerable archaeological sites located in Palestine.



## The Use of Archaeology in Jerusalem as a Political Weapon

In an article “The use of archaeology in Jerusalem as a political weapon” from 2014, Matthew MacEgan reports how in May 2014, Israeli archaeologist Eli Shukron claimed to have revealed the citadel captured by the Biblical King David during his purported conquest of Jerusalem around 1000 BC. This was just another claim prepared by archaeologists based on Biblical accounts which, as yet, lack substantiation from contemporary scientists and historians. Moves such as this have met with vehement criticism for applying discriminatory and partial perspectives of history in order to belittle the presence of indigenous Palestinian populations. There is even suspicion that the methods and practices adopted by such archaeologists are often dubious because they have one sole purpose- to create a partial view that caters to affluent economic backers overseas. Their goal is clear; they want to eliminate the original inhabitants and create extravagant tourist attractions that do two things, in the main: Falsify history, and bring in the tourism dollars. Palestinians, who defy the tainting of their original claims, are compelled to dwell in congested and difficult conditions due to the illegal actions of heritage organizations in obtaining land.

It is useful to place on record the fact that 2013 was an unprecedented year for tourism, with 3.5 million visitors. Archaeologist tour guides came under censorship for applying a very restricted archeological assessment practice, namely their restrictive practice of using the Bible as their prime, even exclusive, tool of reference when they guided travelers through the areas. Some of this category of tour guides describes the Bible as their guidebook.

Matthew MacEgan avers: “The amount of historical material that could potentially be provided to tourists in Jerusalem is staggering and should be carefully analyzed and elaborated by any serious archaeologist or historian concerned with the legacy of this

region. According to UNESCO, both cultural and natural heritage considered to be of outstanding value to humanity should be protected, conserved, and appropriately presented so that it may be transmitted to future generations in accordance with modern scientific methods.

The emphasis on using the Bible as a primary tool of interpretation smacks of Zionism, an ideology and national movement that seeks to establish a Jewish homeland in the former Palestinian mandate, considered by its proponents to be the “Land of Israel.” Throughout the lifespan of this tendency, Zionists have used religious texts and traditions as tools to keep Israelis and Palestinians separated into their respective national categories, fostering violent and deadly opposition over many decades of strife.”

The roots of the land crisis in East Jerusalem reach all the way back to the World War I, when a secret agreement was made between the British and French governments to divide up the Middle East following the war in view of the impending collapse of the Ottoman Empire. This coincides with the decision of the League of Nations created the mandate system to hand the newly carved-out land of Palestine to Great Britain. This coincides with the Balfour Declaration, which promised support for a Jewish national home in Palestine in order to placate British Zionists.

In the wake of the World War II and a rapid growth in the Jewish population of Palestine, the withdrawal of the British from Palestine and the declaration of an Independent State of Israel in 1948. This left the western half of Jerusalem in Israeli hands while East Jerusalem fell under the rule of the Kingdom of Jordan.

This division remained until 1967, during the Six Day War, when the Israel Occupying Forces captured East Jerusalem. Although East Jerusalem is not recognized as Israeli territory by the majority of political powers today, its law and jurisdiction in the area remains

a stark fact for its residents. Nearly 400,000 Palestinians still live in East Jerusalem, where a neighborhood known as Silwan has become a target of Elad, over the past several years. Elad claims to have found the location of King Solomon's garden, the alleged place where he wrote the "Song of Songs." No archaeological evidence has been presented to substantiate these assertions.

The refusal of the municipality to issue construction permits has resulted in many of the Palestinian homes sitting on the verge of collapse in Silwan. Elad's renovation of East Jerusalem renders homes of thousands of Palestinian families destroyed and replaced with tourist attractions based on falsified history.

For as long as a clandestine settler organization with narrow political interests tied to wealthy financiers overseas, Elad's goal to convert East Jerusalem into a tourist resort geared toward a specific religious group are both appalling and unprincipled. Heritage cannot be jeopardized simply for profit for its financiers.



## Bethlehem as a Pilgrimage Destination

The town of Bethlehem in the West Bank, some six miles south of Jerusalem, is revered by millions as the birthplace of Jesus. According to the New Testament account of the apostle Matthew, Joseph and Mary were living in Bethlehem in the southern region of Judea at the time of Jesus' birth and later moved to Nazareth in the northern Galilee region. In the more popular account of the apostle Luke, Joseph and a very pregnant Mary traveled more than 90 miles from their residence in Nazareth to Joseph's Judean hometown of Bethlehem to be counted in a Roman census. Regardless of the variation, both apostles agree that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, the city where King David had been born a thousand years earlier. The Christian Messiah could thereby be considered a descendant of the House of David--a requirement for followers of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Bethlehem has been a destination for pilgrimage for at least 1500 years, with Christmas being considered the most celebrated religious festival worldwide. Upon the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, projects such as Bethlehem 2000 aimed to develop the capacity of the city. During the Second *Intifada*, Bethlehem's infrastructure was either destroyed or damaged by Israeli Occupying Forces, including a siege of the Church of the Nativity and placing military tanks in the Nativity Square for almost 40 days.

The Birthplace of Jesus is not an event only revered by Christians. Islam also recognizes Jesus (as the "divined inspired prophet" called Issa). Both Muslims and Christians, living together in Palestine for the past 14 centuries, have protected this Holy Site among others, including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

Bethlehem is a collection of very fertile villages that grows almonds and, more importantly, olives for oil. It's so fertile because Bethlehem

sits on an enormous aquifer, which eventually became the water source for Jerusalem in around 200 BC. There were so many Jewish pilgrims coming to Jerusalem that the city couldn't cope. The older water supply was contaminated by the animals slaughtered in the temple. They needed fresh water and this came from Bethlehem.

Bethlehem was built specifically to sit on top of the aquifer and be the defensive military installation guarding the whole infrastructure. It's a fortress town amongst a series of villages, which is why the Bible always talks about the best tasting water coming from Bethlehem. That's what Bethlehem is: a place that guards the water. About 2,300 years ago, they built a reservoir. Over the course of history another three gigantic reservoirs were built just to the south of Bethlehem, which became known as Solomon's Pools. They're still there.



## **Apartheid Wall and Status of Palestine's Cultural Heritage**

Palestine is still under Israeli military occupation. Consequently, heritage protection and preservation as well as combating antiquities looting unfortunately attract relatively tiny attention, among either public officials or the general populace. The political conflict has sent the preservation of heritage resources to lower priority. Challenges derive from a mix of internal and external factors, a lack of coordination among the relevant local parties concerned with cultural heritage; the negligence, based largely on ignorance, of the local populace; a lack of awareness on the part of Palestinian society generally; active illegal digging and looting, as well as the forgery of heritage objects; the absence of national museums; poor law enforcement; insufficient master planning for development and inadequate oversight of housing and other construction; the pressure of population growth; a lack of financing and of well-trained human resources in the area of cultural heritage conservation; the absence of a comprehensive, strategic policy, generally accepted by all parties, designed to protect, manage and develop the local cultural heritage; the Israeli excavations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, from the beginning of the occupation in 1967 and continuing to the present. There is also the infringement of both the Israeli colonies in the West Bank and the Israeli Apartheid Wall. All these factors, have led to the mutilation or absolute loss of thousands of heritage resources.

### **Constructing Israeli Apartheid Wall as a Prelude to Destroying Heritage**

In June 2002, following a decision by the Israeli ministerial cabinet, Israel's government began constructing the separation ("apartheid") wall. The truth is that the wall was a pretext for annexation and confiscation of land. The planned separation barrier confiscated areas include closed military zones.

The total number of archaeological and heritage sites and features isolated between the Green Line and the barrier concluded that within the Palestinian areas the total number of archaeological and heritage sites and features fully controlled by Israelis, is about 4,500, including over 500 major archaeological sites. This constitutes some 45% of the heritage resources of the Palestinian Territories. The total number of archaeological sites and features severely damaged (either partially or totally destroyed) by the construction of the apartheid barrier itself add up to about 800, which means that, from this one activity, about 6.7% of the heritage resources in the Palestinian Territories have been forever lost.

As a result of several successful appeals highlighting the potential impact of the barrier's construction on cultural heritage resources, Israel's High Court of Justice demanded that some changes in the route of the Wall were to be made. The Israeli military officials in charge of building the Apartheid Wall have responded to these orders.

The route of the Wall was sometimes changed, to ensure that



the most significant heritage sites would not be damaged. In the process, however, it had the effect of confiscation of additional land from Palestinian farmers and isolating an even larger number of heritage resources from their natural landscapes.

Israeli institutions conducted salvage excavations, before construction has began, at archaeological sites which would otherwise be damaged by the proposed route of the Wall. The excavations were hastily carried out and with enormous pressure on excavation teams.

Israeli Antiquities Authority conducted a salvage excavation at several spots, unearthing several constructions of historic and aesthetic value. Two of the most significant discoveries at this site were a huge Byzantine church with mosaic pavements and a large house whose remains still stand to a height of some 2.5m. In the end, the Israelis constructed the wall across the middle of the archaeological site, dividing it into two parts

Estimates of the total number of archaeological and heritage sites and features isolated between the Green Line and the Wall are 2,800 sites. As a result of several successful appeals highlighting the potential impact of the Wall's construction on cultural heritage resources, Israel's High Court of Justice has demanded that some changes in the route of the Wall should be made. The Israeli military officials in charge of building the Apartheid Wall have responded to these orders in three main ways:

The route of the Wall was sometimes changed, to ensure that the infrastructure works would not damage some of the most significant heritage sites, by moving it within the PNT. It is noteworthy that these modifications did not relocate the barrier in the immediate vicinity of the endangered site, but far away from it, leading in effect to the confiscation of additional land from Palestinian farmers and isolating an even larger number of heritage resources from their natural landscapes.

Israeli institutions sometimes conducted salvage excavations, before construction has begun, at archaeological sites which otherwise damaged the proposed route of the Wall. The two main aims of such excavations were not only to explore the history and stratigraphy of the sites but also to unearth cultural materials in order to move them to Israel institutions. The excavations, carried out without prior consultation with the relevant Palestinian institutions, were characterized by haste and inaccuracy due to the political pressure on the excavation teams.

Sometimes a thick layer of earth or base material was laid over sites along the route of the wall, to avoid damaging the cultural materials during the infrastructure work.



## UNESCO and Palestinian Archaeology

On 23 November 2011, Palestine became a member of UNESCO, and acceded to and ratified a number of UNESCO's Conventions. Observers view this membership as decisive, or at least significantly dispositive, in the debate on the international recognition of Palestinian statehood. UNESCO is characterized as a springboard by which Palestine can further recognition of its international sovereignty, which, at the present time, is inexorably stalled.

In an article titled UNESCO, Palestine and Archaeology in conflict, David Keane and Valentina Azarov argued: "For more than a century, Palestinian cultural heritage and property has been the subject of capture and destruction by other states. Palestine's accession to various UNESCO conventions testifies to the effect that no other sovereign controls its cultural heritage and property. Palestinians have habitually asserted internationally-recognized principles as a point of departure in "final status" negotiations on what is termed the "archaeology file," yet have been unable to maintain complete control of such property".

### **Israeli Infringement and Over-Excavation on Palestinian Tourism via Archaeology**

Rami Kassis, Director of the Alternative Tourism Group, writing for Tourism Watch, a German-based tourism advocacy group comments on the issues of Human rights and Israeli infringement on Palestinian tourism. He observes that the Palestinian situation is so definitively defined by the absence of the human rights, it makes any discourse on tourism and human rights inseparable from political circumstances being played out under the occupation. He continues: "Israel has annexed the most significant archeological sites and tourist monuments. The encroachments of Palestinian spaces and heritage under the name of tourism often seem harmless to the naive or undiscerning tourist. The fact, however, is that these policies of Israel impinge on the right to self-determination, freedom

and independence. By the systematic control and confiscation of the tourist sites; and control of the tourism services and industry, Israel obstructs the Palestinians from the potentials and benefits of tourism resources – a clear dispossession of access to legitimate Gross National Income, per capita income”.

Kassis points to how “it is important to assert the view that Palestinian culture, civilization and history represent a central dimension of national identity”, He affirms a PLO Negotiation Affairs department position: “Despite its small size, Palestine has an abundance of historical, religious and cultural heritage sites. Every inch of this land has a story to tell, every hill the scene of a battle, and every stone a monument or a tomb. One cannot understand the geography of Palestine without knowing its history and one cannot understand its history without understanding its geography.”

Kassis underlines that “accordingly, it is of great importance to argue for a Palestinian archaeological entity that transcends ideological concerns over archaeological materials, and emphasizes on the protection of archaeological materials as a universal heritage”. Furthermore, as Israel controls all border crossings, including airspace, the vast majority of tourists and pilgrims visit the Holy Land in tours that limit as much as possible their interaction with Palestinians. As a consequence, there are significant places of pilgrimage and cultural landscape, among others that are missed or ignored by a large number of visitors.

Palestinian archaeological sites are among the most excavated and fragile sites in the world. After Israel occupied the Palestinian Territories in 1967, the responsibility for archaeology was placed in the hands of the Israeli military, exacerbating the deterioration of Palestinian heritage. International law has been breached and Palestinian heritage abused by countless illegal Israeli archaeological investigations, destruction of heritage sites, and illicit trafficking of artefacts. In fact, so many heritage sites of deep importance and,

which are Palestinian archaeological treasures, have been put under full Israeli control. Three worthy of mention include Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque/ Rachel's Tomb, The Herodion Mountain, and the hugely visited Dead Sea. Israel's tourism industry does not merely stop at exploiting the above mentioned Palestinian sites, is utilizing Israeli hotels in occupied territory, as well as rooms and other hospitality services offered by Israeli-colonial settlements. Hence there is a twinning of profiteering from heritage pilfering.

Israel conquests as a measure to delimit Palestinian heritage has coincided with military infringements. In 2000, during the second *Intifada*, the military operations deliberately demolished the historic centres of Nablus and Hebron, and subsequently constructed the separation wall inside the Palestinian Territories, causing unprecedented and irreversible damage to Palestinian heritage. The separation wall also cuts off hundreds of archaeological sites annexed to Israel or to illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank. International law considers it the explicit duty of Israel, since they are the occupying power, to combat clandestine excavation and to conserve and protect Palestinian heritage. Since 1967, Israel has monopolized archaeological activities in the Palestinian Territories. Israel has stuck to its flagrant violations of this legal obligation.



# Colonies, Heritage Stealth and Obliteration of Identity

There is significance and historical consequences to the civilian communities inhabited by Israeli citizens in colonies built predominantly on lands within the Palestinian territories, which Israel has militarily occupied since the 1967 Six-Day War. Israel effectively annexed East Jerusalem with the Jerusalem Law and considers colonies in the expanded boundaries of East Jerusalem to be neighborhoods of Jerusalem and not colonies. The international community considers Israeli colonies in the Israeli-occupied territories illegal under international law, violating the Fourth Geneva Convention's prohibition on the transfer of a civilian population to or from occupied territory.

## East Jerusalem

Following the capture and occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem in 1967, the Israeli government effectively annexed the formerly Jordanian occupied territory and extended the Jerusalem municipality borders by adding 70,500 dunams of land with the aim of establishing Jewish colonies and cementing the status of a united city under Israeli control. The Jerusalem Master



Plan 1968 called for increasing the Israeli population of Arab East Jerusalem, encircling the city with Israeli settlements and excluding large Palestinian neighborhoods from the expanded municipality.

But they went further. Occupied spaces that became colonies were renamed as a powerful tool for reinforcing competing national Zionist ideologies. Implicit in this competition are two major Biblical and Talmudic place names are reintroduced to reinforce the bonds between the Jewish community in Israel and the land. This was the approach of the founders of the State of Israel



## **Capture and Destruction of Palestinian Cultural Heritage**

Palestinian culture is influenced by the many diverse cultures and religions which have existed in historic Palestine, from the early Canaanite period onward. Cultural contributions to the fields of art, literature, music, costume and cuisine express the Palestinian identity despite the geographical separation between the Palestinian territories, Palestinian citizens and the diaspora. The hemorrhaging of Palestinian cultural property is now occurring in a context where archaeology has been used by Israel “as a pretext to gain territorial control” and exercise sovereign rights “over Palestinian lands to further its colony enterprise” and exploit natural resources. Archaeology has been, and continues to be, used as a pretext for the procurement of territory. The presence of archaeological or Biblical sites is used to justify confiscating Palestinian lands and building illegal colonies.

## International Law and Archaeology

Israeli involvement in the management of Palestine's cultural heritage since the occupation of the Palestinian Territory in 1967 has been intense, requiring investigation in terms of its compliance with international humanitarian law. The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its First Protocol ("1954 Hague Convention"), much of which constitutes customary international law, complements and reinforces the protection afforded to cultural property by the laws of war found in the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention and 1907 Hague Regulations.

When "ownership of an antiquity is vested in a nation, one who removes the antiquity without permission is a thief, and the antiquities are stolen property", Patty Gerstenblith, a distinguished research professor of law at DePaul University, wrote in a 2016 Department of Justice guide to cultural property law. However, Palestine's status is a point of difficulty. While the ruling Palestinian Authority refers to itself as the "State of Palestine", and the territory is recognized as such by more than 70 percent of the UN's 193 member states, Israel considers the West Bank and Gaza as "disputed territories", and sees Jerusalem as its "eternal capital". Here is a dilemma.

But the Israeli government's position is that the West Bank is not occupied territory but the Israeli territory of Judea and Samaria, and so the 1954 Hague Convention and other laws of war, which govern occupation and other aspects of armed conflict, do not apply. However, the international community outside of Israel is unanimous in understanding the West Bank as occupied territory.

## **Combating Cultural Genocide - Architectural Preservation of Old Palestinian Cities**

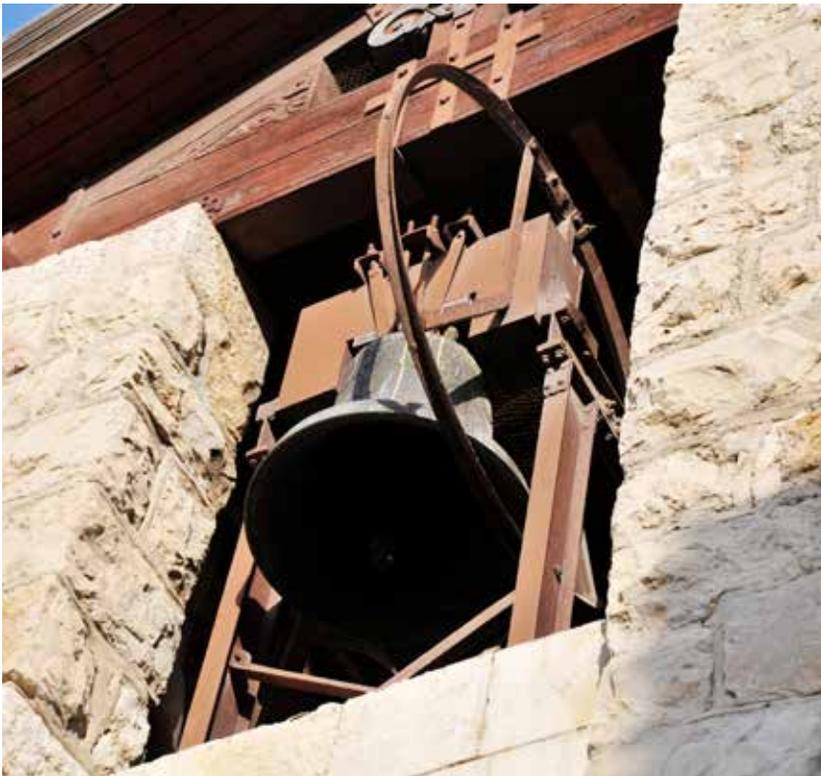
There is now a RIWAQ's Registry of Historic Buildings, which has revealed that almost 50% of the historic buildings in rural areas of the West Bank and Gaza are located in or around 50 villages. RIWAQ's vision is to focus on those 50 villages for the foreseeable future, working on rehabilitation projects to target improvement of services, infrastructure, and living conditions of the public and private surrounding spaces. At a time when Palestine is facing setbacks in the political and economic spheres, RIWAQ's 50 Villages endeavor hopes to make a qualitative addition on the regional scale. Empowering communities by offering means to improve their environment and living conditions implies responding to the urgent issues they face daily.

Heritage architecture, in this sense, is no longer seen as a passive act rooted in romantic values as is common in many countries; rather, it is a dynamic form of enacting change. The concept and definition of heritage has gradually advanced, opening up possibilities for new understandings of urban spaces, buildings, and individuals. These possibilities embrace contemporary activities, meanings, and practices that one can draw from the past to shape the future.

Similarly in order to revitalize the old city of Hebron as a cultural and economic center, the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC) carries out projects in architectural preservation. These projects target all areas of the old city from housing to historical buildings to basic infrastructure. In so doing, HRC aims to incentivize the return of inhabitants to the old city by improving livelihood and economic activity in the area.

## Conclusion

Palestinian cultural heritage is one of the most intensively abused, excavated and subsequently disturbed worldwide, a result of more than a century of management from different administrations, each with its own methods of research and distinct political purpose. With some 200,000 artifacts removed from the Occupied Palestinian Territory annually between 1967 and 1992 about with approximately 120,000 removed each year since 1995, this bleeding of Palestinian cultural property is occurring in a context where archaeology has been used by Israel as a pretext to gain territorial control and exercise sovereign rights over Palestinian lands [in order] to further its settlement enterprise and exploit natural resources.



## References

**Al-Houdalieh**, Archaeological Heritage and Related Institutions in the Palestinian National Territories 16 Years After Signing the Oslo Accords, Al-Quds University, Palestine

**Taha, H 2004**, Managing cultural heritage in Palestine. UNDP FOCUS, 1:31-32.

**Kassis R**, Tourism and Human Rights, Tourism Watch, <https://www.tourism-watch.de/en/focus/tourism-and-human-rights-palestine>

**World Socialist website**,  
<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/08/14/isra-a14.html>

**Yahya, A** 2008, Managing heritage in War zone. Archaeologies  
[https://www.academia.edu/9846981/The\\_Story\\_of\\_Inscribing\\_Bethlehem\\_on\\_the\\_World\\_Heritage\\_List](https://www.academia.edu/9846981/The_Story_of_Inscribing_Bethlehem_on_the_World_Heritage_List)

<http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/curious.shtml>

<http://www.worldurbancampaign.org/hebron-rehabilitation-committee-architectural-preservation-old-city-hebron>

<https://www.riwaq.org/50-historic-centers>

<http://palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=932>

[https://www.academia.edu/632159/Palestinian\\_Archaeology\\_Knowledge\\_Awarness\\_and\\_Cultural\\_Heritage](https://www.academia.edu/632159/Palestinian_Archaeology_Knowledge_Awarness_and_Cultural_Heritage)

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1179/175355210X12747818485367>

<https://www.pef.org.uk/> , Palestine Exploration Fund

<https://www.nad.ps/en/publication-resources/publication/annexation-tourism> (“The Annexation of Tourism: Israel’s Policies and Their Devastating Impact on Palestinian Tourism”)

<https://www.nad.ps/en/publication-resources/publications/israel's-exploitation-palestinian-tourism-and-international> (“Tourism as a Tool to Normalize Occupation: Israel’s Exploitation of Palestinian Tourism and International Complicity”)

[http://www.antiquities.org.il/article\\_list\\_eng.aspx?sub\\_menu=2&section\\_id=42&Module\\_id=6](http://www.antiquities.org.il/article_list_eng.aspx?sub_menu=2&section_id=42&Module_id=6)

[https://www.academia.edu/9846981/The\\_Story\\_of\\_Inscribing\\_Bethlehem\\_on\\_the\\_World\\_Heritage\\_List](https://www.academia.edu/9846981/The_Story_of_Inscribing_Bethlehem_on_the_World_Heritage_List)

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1492/documents/>

<https://www.nad.ps/en/publication-resources/publications/israel's-exploitation-palestinian-tourism-and-international>

<https://www.nad.ps/en/media-room/media-briefs/palestines-heritage-under-occupation-focus-bethlehems-denied-potential>

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6089> (“Nominations to be processed on an emergency basis: Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir”)

<https://www.nad.ps/en/publication-resources/publication/annexation-tourism> (The Annexation of Tourism: Israel’s Policies and Their Devastating Impact on Palestinian Tourism)

