

There are 6000 archaeological sites in West Bank. Consequently, almost every village or town contains archaeological remains that require some form of oversight in order to avoid damage or destruction. These sites constitute a source of religious, cultural, and national reference. This is not something new. The overall interest of all parties in this region must be one that strives to safeguard these remains. When one side tries to appropriate the past, there is greater incentive on the other side to undermine this past. The destruction of archaeological sites is a painful subject for archaeologists across the Middle East, and include sites inside sovereign Israel. The main challenges are heightened development and conflicts. Hundreds of sites, including inside Israel, are damaged or destroyed due to the construction of roads and buildings. Many sites are damaged due to warfare and military infrastructure. One can only imagine how many sites were damaged during the construction of the separation barrier.

The destruction of antiquities should not constitute a pretext for political action and I think we should also refrain from camouflaging the political nature of this discussion as an archaeological act. Blurring the lines between archaeology and heritage on the one hand, and settlement and annexation, on the other endangers the future of archaeology. The question that is most important is what is legitimate for Israel to do (in this context). Archaeological actions taken in an undemocratic context, the Israeli archaeological activity in the West Bank is an act of taking control. From my professional perspective, this course of intervention carries a high price. The appropriate way to preserve ancient remains that have meaning for all people of the region is by cooperating with the Palestinian Authority on oversight and enforcement.