

Update: Cornerstone laid for Hinnom Valley Bridge and IAA's Growing Involvement in Area C

1 message

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Update

Cornerstone laid for Suspension Bridge over Valley of Hinnom

On Thursday 6th of October, a cornerstone was set for the pedestrian bridge over the Valley of Hinnom/Wadi Rababa in Jerusalem. It was officiated by Minister of Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage Ze'ev Elkin, Minister of Tourism Yoel Razvozov, and Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Leon. Director of the Israel Antiquities Authority Eli Eskosido was also in attendance. The event took place at a location next to the Elad Foundation's venue called "Bayit BaGay" ([a House in the Valley](#)) where one side of the bridge is scheduled to "land". The bridge will link with Mount Zion and at 200 meters will be the longest suspension bridge in the country. The budget for the bridge is set for 20 million NIS and will include landscaping, lighting and street furniture.

At the event Minister Elkin said: *"the suspension bridge is an important strategic project led by the Ministry for Jerusalem Affairs and other partners. We are working to turn the Hinnom Valley into a developed tourism zone and in so doing achieve two additional goals: one is to strengthen the sense of security and sovereignty in the area, the other is to ease access to the Old City."*



Simulation of the planned suspension bridge by the JDA as it appeared on Yisrael Hayom website.

The bridge is another project in a list of new projects which are transforming the valley, such as [the cable car](#), and the Elad Foundation's Farm in the Valley (also called [Center for Ancient Agriculture](#)). All of these are part of the larger strategy to establish a continuum of biblically themed tourism ventures and Jewish residential settlements in the Silwan-Hinnom Valley area using a variety of legal and administrative mechanisms to displace Palestinians from their homes, shrink their public spaces and downplay their heritage.

In 2018 Emek Shaveh and Peace Now filed an [objection](#) to the plan with the Jerusalem District Planning Committee after it had been approved by the local planning committee. We objected to the fact that such a facility with significant political implications and an impact on the historic skyline was approved through a simple building permit process, thereby evading public scrutiny or debate. We argued at the time that "*the proposed bridge is located in one of*

the most sensitive and significant areas in Jerusalem and one of the most important in the world. The Old City basin is one of Jerusalem's most precious cultural, religious and historical assets, as well as politically significant. Construction and development in this area should be done in a careful and considered manner, following a meaningful public discussion and in the context of a true planning vision." Eventually, however, the district committee [accepted](#) the Municipality's and the Jerusalem Development Authority's position that the footbridge is a 'road' and allowed according to city plan no. AM/9.

Olive Harvest in the Valley of Hinnom

Recently we described how the rapid takeover of the valley has led to [conflict](#) with the Palestinian landowners. Over the past week tensions escalated when the Elad Foundation invited the Israeli public for olive harvest events in the valley during the holidays. On Thursday a group of women soldiers were brought to harvest olives in the fenced area of the farm. As [noted](#), much of the land in the valley is privately owned Palestinian land belonging to residents of Silwan and Abu Tor/a Thori and taken through [landscaping_\(or_gardening\)_orders](#) and a portion of the land has been claimed by the Custodian for Absentee Properties (several plots of which within the last year-and-a-half). The Palestinians have been cultivating and harvesting olives from those trees for generations. Elad's announcement last week prompted the Palestinians to bring forward the olive harvest to Friday the 7th. The morning hours went by smoothly but as the time approached for a pre-Sabbath event at the farm, police and border police descended on the harvesters forcefully clearing them off the area using stun grenades. Once the event in the valley ended, the harvest by the Palestinians and activists resumed and has been peaceful until the moment of writing.

Emek Shaveh's Response: For hundreds of years, the Palestinian residents of the area have cultivated the olive trees and harvested the olives in the Valley of Hinnom. Attempts to block them this year is another manifestation of a policy of reshaping the identity of the Historic Basin by displacing the Palestinians from their lands and heritage and replacing them with settlements and tourist attractions shaped by an exclusivist national-religious brand of Judaism.

Israel Antiquities Authority shares map for non-existent national park in Area C

Last week the Director General of the Israel Antiquities Authority Eli Eskosido publicized the map below on his telegram channel with the title "Welcome to

the Hasmonean Palaces National Park" featuring the logos of the Israel Antiquities Authority, the Nature and Parks Authority and the Binyamin Regional Council.

Although such a national park is being planned, it does not yet exist. Conversely, the Palestinians and the City of Jericho (who do exist) have no representation on the map. Finally, the Israel Antiquities Authority does not have any jurisdiction in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) yet its logo appears on a venture in Area C. The Civil Administration's Staff Officer for Archaeology, however, does have jurisdiction over Area C but its logo does not appear on the map.

The publication of the map by Mr. Eskosido is another manifestation of steps towards de facto annexation in the realm of antiquities which we wrote about [earlier this year](#) following the Knesset's committee's recommendation of expanding the Israel Antiquities Authority remit into Area C.



Map of the Hasmonean Palaces "National Park" from DG of IAA Telegram channel.

Background:

The Hasmonean Palaces (and Herod's Winter Palace) is a 120 dunam site southwest of present day Jericho. The site was excavated for the first time in the 19th century in pursuit of biblical Jericho. In the 1950s it was excavated once again by American archaeologists who found remains of a royal garden from the Roman period (also called "Herodian" or "Second Temple Period")

called the "the sunken garden". In the 1970s and 1980s an excavation was conducted by the Israeli archaeologist Ehud Netzer. The structures at the site are dated to the second-first centuries BCE (Hasmonean/Hellenistic period) and consist of frescoes, courtyards, magnificent halls, pools, fountains and water cisterns which attest to advanced technological capabilities and resonate with Jericho's overall archaeological landscape.

The Oslo Accords divided responsibility for the archaeological sites between the Palestinian Authority (Areas A and B) and the Staff Officer for Archaeology at the Civil Administration (Area C). According to Clause 9 in Annex 3, twelve sites of "archaeological and historic importance to the Israeli side" were noted on a map including the Hasmonean Palaces. The site is in fact an Israeli enclave (i.e. in Area C) in the center of a Palestinian population.

According to a settler organization "Guardians of Eternity" the site is subject to consistent vandalism which they attribute to Palestinian intention to cause damage to any evidence of Jewish history and identity. According to Guardians of Eternity, the northern (Israeli) area is safeguarded while the southern Palestinian side is on the verge of being completely destroyed. Over the years, the Staff Officer for Archaeology took multiple actions to minimize the damage such as confiscating tools and demolishing what it deemed illegal construction.

In 2018 conservation work by the Israel Antiquities Authority on the site ended. It was funded by the Ministry for Jerusalem and Heritage to a sum of 10 million NIS, in the framework of an initiative led by Minister for Jerusalem and Heritage Ze'ev Elkin. In a tour which took place in 2019 for the IAA's conservation team it was said that the Binyamin Regional Council is interested in receiving the rights to manage the site. In recent years, there have been many public tours to the area. This past May, members of the Knesset's Education Committee visited the site.

Emek Shaveh's response: The plan to turn the site into a tourist attraction is part of the tourism development thrust advanced by settler bodies and the government entailing massive investment in archaeological sites in an effort to normalize Area C as a legitimate tourism destination for the Israeli public.

The investment in this site is an outcome of a persistent campaign by Guardians of Eternity (Regavim) and the Shiloh Forum which exploits historical, religious and cultural affinities of the Jewish people to sites in the West Bank with the aim of galvanizing the Israeli government to expand and deepen its control. This latest involvement by the IAA in the Hasmonean Palaces should be considered within this context. Although damage by Palestinians to the site

is a problem, for the most part this takes the form of light construction. It is certainly not an expression of a Palestinian Authority led plan to destroy Jewish heritage in the West Bank as the settlers repeatedly claim.

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