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## Wall from Islamic Period Prevents Continued Excavation of Tunnel between Silwan and the Old City

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March 21, 2019

Press Release

### Wall from Early Islamic Period Prevents Continued Excavation of Tunnel between Silwan and the Old City

Over the past three years, the Israel Antiquities Authority has been excavating a tunnel along the route of an ancient street that was dated by the excavators to the Byzantine period. The project was initiated with funding by the Elad Association and is supported by the government of Israel as part of the [Shalem Plan](#) to connect Silwan to the Old City through underground tourist routes. In 2018, the government allocated a record sum of [approximately NIS 47 million](#) for archaeological excavations in Silwan / City of David.

The ancient street was excavated from the Givati Parking Lot located at the entrance to the village of Silwan (No. 2 on the attached map) parallel to the route of another tunnel known as "the Pilgrim's Route," which is about five meters west of it (marked with a black line, parallel to No. 10 on the map). During the excavation, the

excavators reached the foundations of a massive wall that they identified as part of the Umayyad palace complex (built in the 7th century CE, at the beginning of the Muslim period). A number of these palaces (some identify them as government buildings) were exposed by the Hebrew University's archaeological excavations at the Southern Wall, later turned into a tourist site now known as the Davidson Center (No. 6 on the map). Remains of the buildings are visible south of the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif to this day. The wall that is now being exposed is located just above the Byzantine street, and if it is not taken down, it will not be possible to continue digging the tunnel into the Davidson Center.

The Israel Antiquities Authority now faces a dilemma. From a professional standpoint, the wall should be left in its proper place, but the practical significance of this is a halt to the excavation, which began as part of a government decision to connect Silwan with the excavations south of the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif.

This quandary began with an earlier scientific wrongdoing committed in its choice of an excavation method for the tunnels that fell out of use in archaeological research about a hundred years ago, in part because of cases like this. The excavation, managed by the Antiquities Authority and funded by the Elad Association in Silwan, uses horizontal digging that does not allow for identification of the different strata, vital to understanding the relationship between the various periods. This severe limitation is the basis for the consensus among archaeologists today that data revealed using this method is lacking in scientific merit.

In the reality of Jerusalem, where remains of building are not only scientifically significant but have symbolic and emotional resonance as well, the damage caused by the tunnels excavations has a negative impact on the possibility of presenting the city's many cultures and their histories in a balanced manner. This is not only an archaeology-tourism problem, but a political problem of ignoring and even erasing certain historical strata, in order to present Jerusalem in a manner that serves the settlement enterprise in the Old City basin.

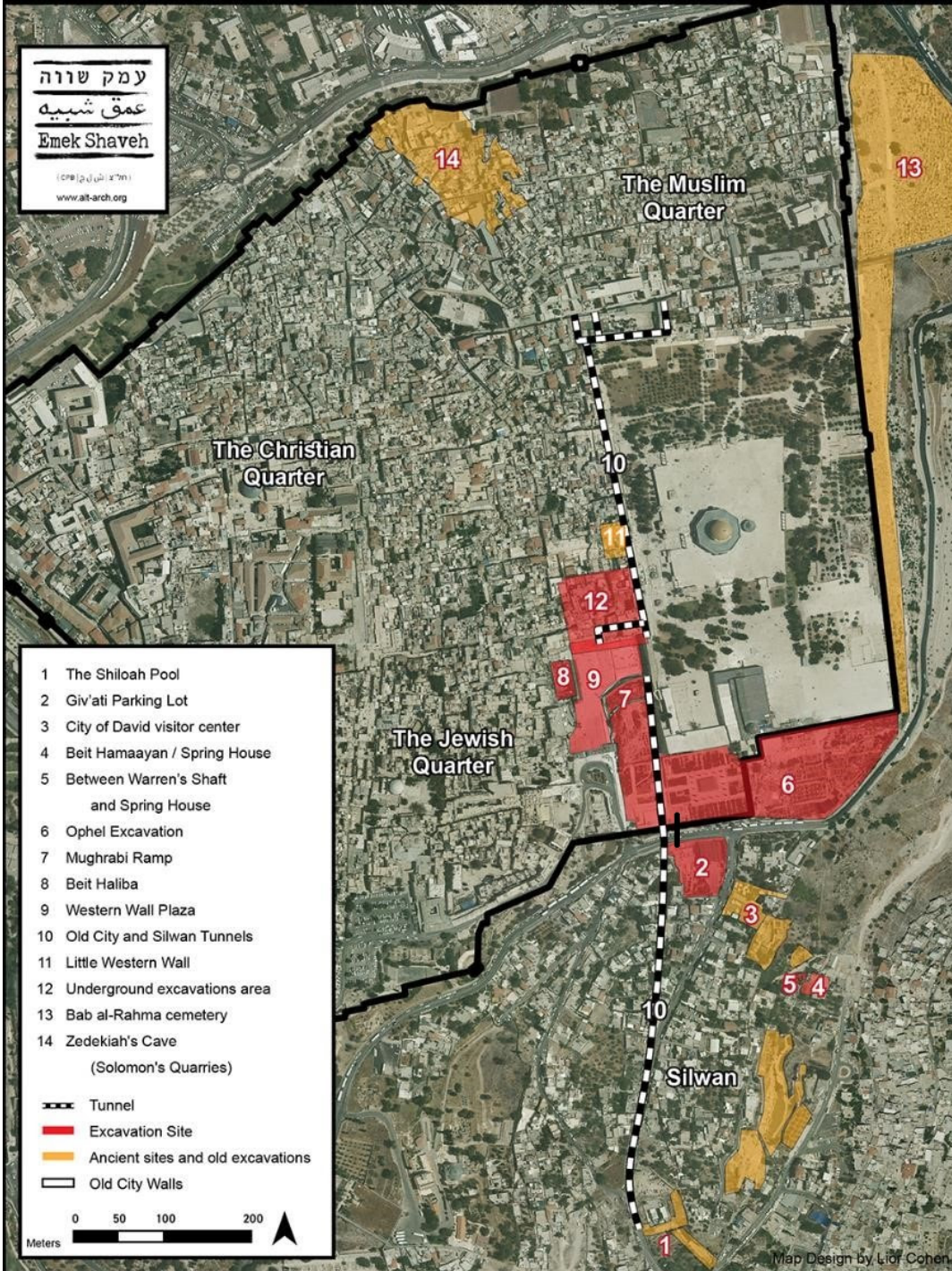
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# Main Archaeological Sites in Jerusalem's Historical Basin







Givati Parking Lot excavations – facing north The entrance to the tunnel is at the left edge of the photo