

Update: New Archaeological Excavation in the West Bank Sponsored by Israeli University

1 message

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Update

New Archaeological Excavation in the West Bank Sponsored by an Israeli University

Yesterday (25/7/2022) an archaeological excavation sponsored by the Israeli Bar-Ilan University commenced at Tel Tibnah, an archaeological mound in the Ramallah district near the villages of Nebi Salah and Deir Nisham. The excavation will be managed by Dvir Raviv PhD and will take place until August 19th, 2022. The project has several fundamental legal and ethical issues, which raise questions about the motivation for initiating this project in the first place. **Emek Shaveh** and **Haqel** call for the immediate cancellation of the project.

Tel Tibnah (recognized by this project as Timnath-Heres) is an archaeological site covering more than 100 dunams, approximately 25 acres (according to data from the Civil Administration). Some researchers identified it as the burial place of Joshua. The site was surveyed several times by Israeli archaeologists who identified remains of a significant multilayered site. However, the site has never been excavated in an organized and methodical way.

As an archaeological site in occupied territory, International humanitarian law

(IHL) restricts the occupying power and demands the protection of the site's cultural assets. The implication is that the occupying power can initiate only what is commonly known as "salvage excavations" (excavations necessary only when circumstances place the ruins under threat) and prohibits academic research projects. As mentioned before, projects such as the one in question, might be in violation of IHL.

To the best of our knowledge, the site is situated on private and public lands of three Palestinian villages: Deir-Nisham, Beit Rima and Nebi Salah, and lies in proximity to the village of Abud. These lands are used by the local Palestinian population for agriculture and herding. In addition, within the site there is a spring that serves for drinking and irrigation. Initiating archaeological projects on privately owned land, even if these are declared as archaeological sites, **demands that notification be given to the owners of these lands and their approval is required in advance**. Entering private property without the permission of the owner is defined as a criminal act of incursion, even more so when conducting actions that might damage property and prevent access to the property, as is a frequent occurrence throughout the West Bank.

The local residents unambiguously submitted their objection to the proposed excavations which will have a dramatic effect on their lives, impact their freedom of movement and violate their property rights. So far, this objection has not been taken into consideration.

The main question at stake is the State of Israel's range of legitimate courses of action and that of Israeli academia. Initiation of an academic archaeological excavation serves, by nature, a scientific-academic motivation. This project does not serve an immediate necessity or mitigate against a pending danger, and does not meet the criteria as a "salvage excavation", nor does it serve the local population living around the site. Any attempt to "govern" archaeological sites that are not within the sovereign borders of Israel is a political act and not a scientific one.

In addition, the claims of "antiquity robbery" should not justify state actions, and the political act should not be concealed as an archaeological one. The erosion of the distinction between heritage protection on the one hand and settlement and annexation on the other, threatens the future of archaeology.

Both Emek Shaveh and Haqel have directly approached all the relevant actors to highlight the problematic nature of the project. The only response we have received was from Dr. Raviv with whom we have a dispute regarding the project. However the ICA, the Staff Officer for Archaeology within the Civil

Administration, the Israeli Archaeological Council, Bar Ilan University and the Israel Antiquities Authority have yet to respond. In addition MK Mossi Raz approached the head of the Higher Education Council - Minister Yifat Shasha-Biton, but we have yet to receive a response.

Emek Shaveh's and Haqel's Response: We believe that the arguments presented above are more than sufficient to determine that the archaeological project of Tel Tibnah should be reconsidered and halted immediately.

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