



Archeological Heritage in Area C



By Hamdan Taha

Introduction

Being a meeting place for civilizations and a cultural bridge between the East and the West, Palestine has played an important role in human history. Earliest archeological evidence of civilization in the area dates back to the Prehistoric Period and marks the emergence of the first settled societies in the Neolithic Period and of urban life in the Bronze Age. Furthermore, as Palestine has unique geological features and an extraordinary cultural landscape, the wealth and diversity of this cultural heritage is an important asset for the sustaining of the cultural identity of the Palestinian people and for the economic development of Palestine.

According to the Palestinian national database of archeological and historical sites, the Occupied Palestinian Territory within the borders of 1967 contained circa 7,000 sites that reflect the cultural wealth and diversity of the Palestinian areas. They are classified as follows:

- 350 historic centers
- 2,000 major archeological sites
- 5,000 archeological features
- 60,000 historical buildings

The history of these sites ranges from the Paleolithic Period to modern times, and more than half of them (53%) are located in Area C. They consist of main human settlements (Tells and Khirbah), as well as thousands of archeological features such as ancient roads, milestones, water springs, cisterns, pools, caves, cemeteries, water channels, and hundreds of holy shrines (*maqams*), in addition to cultural and natural landscape and geological features. These archeological sites in Area C represent an integral part of Palestinian cultural heritage, as they are historically associated with Palestinian population centers, and belong to the Palestinian community. They include major prehistoric sites along Wadi Khareitun in Al-Bariyah, located east of Jerusalem and

Bethlehem; furthermore the Natufian site in Wadi An-Natuf near Shuqba; major urban centers at Tell An-Nasbeh, Tell Taannek, and Tell Dothan; a large number of historical Roman, Byzantine and Islamic sites; and finally holy places that are distributed throughout the country (eg. the site of Baptism, Qubbat Rahel and the Bilal mosque), in addition to thousands of archeological features. The division into Areas A, B, and C is artificial and part of a transitional arrangement in which Area C temporarily remains under the control of the occupying power.

Oslo Agreement

Following the 1993 Palestinian-Israeli agreement, Jericho and Gaza were handed over to Palestinian control, and by December 1995 the Palestinian National Authority was given control throughout the West Bank and Gaza in several spheres of responsibility, including archeology in Areas A and B. According to the Declaration of

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Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangement for Palestinians, final negotiations were to be completed by May 1999, but the mutually agreed-upon timetable that called for power transfer has been delayed and never implemented by Israel. In some parts of Area C, powers and responsibilities in the sphere of archeology will be

Damaged landscape at Wadi Natuf.



transferred gradually to the Palestinian jurisdiction; eventually, this will include the entirety of Palestinian Territory in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza.

The Palestinian Department of Antiquities was established in 1994, during a time of complex difficulties, and renamed the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (DACH) in 2002. It manages the archeological resources in Areas A and B and can be viewed as the revival of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities that had been established in 1920, under the British Mandate, and ceased to exist with the political

But the new situation gives the Palestinian archeologists, who won autonomy at the end of the last century, an independent role to explore the history of Palestine from its primary sources, a task reserved until recently for foreign and Israeli archeologists - who often made political and ideological use of these data and their interpretation without objective scientific controls. The establishment of a national body for the management of antiquities and cultural heritage marks the beginning of a Palestinian field school in archeology and signals the return of Palestinians



Tell el-Fureidis (Herodion).

events of 1948. Because Israel had occupied its premises in 1967, at the outset, in 1994, the new department possessed neither archeological record files nor documentation of the finds of archeology previously undertaken on its soil. It lacked sufficient space and logistical support, and, due to inadequate opportunities for field training under occupation, the Palestinian Department inherited a shortage in qualified personnel.

again to history. This is evident through the wide range of activities in excavations and restorations, the rehabilitation of historic centers, and international cooperation undertaken in the last two decades.

Israeli Management Structure in Area C

After the Israeli military occupation in 1967, the archeological resources in the OPT were managed by the Israeli military government through a series of Israeli military orders. Order (119) gave the responsibilities of the Director of Antiquities, as per Jordanian law of 1966, to the Israeli military governor; and order (1166) changed the structure of the Advisory Council to include representatives of the Israeli Antiquities Authority and Israeli academic institutions. In subsequent years, these responsibilities were shifted among Israeli Civil Administration officers, but it is noteworthy that Palestinians were never involved in this council.

The tasks of the Archeology Staff Officer and of the Israeli Archeology Department of the Civil Administration in Area C include drawing and implementing the archeological policy of the Civil Administration; conducting archeological excavations and surveys in Area C; granting permits for excavations, surveys, and building licenses; and granting permits for the transfer of archeological objects from the Area C to Israel, including for participation in archeological exhibitions outside the Palestinian areas. Since 2012, the Archeology Department of the Civil Administration was also involved in establishing museums associated with Israeli settlements. The Israeli Group Emeq Shavi observed that these activities are part of a policy of using archeological excavations to emphasize the Israeli historical narrative as a means to strengthen Israeli presence and control of Area C through the integration of archeological sites into Israeli settlements. This policy, as it is highlighted here, contradicts with Israel's responsibility as an occupying power, as specified in international law. However, in absence of a final peace agreement, Israel remains a military occupier in the Occupied Palestinian

Territory, and therefore remains bound by international humanitarian law as outlined in the Hague Convention and Regulations of 1907, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the Hague Convention and Protocol of 1954, the UNESCO recommendation on International Principles Applicable to Archeological Excavations - which was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its ninth session in New Delhi on 5 December 1956, and many other resolutions and recommendations concerning cultural property in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The State of Palestine was acknowledged as a full member in the UNESCO in 2011 and given non-member observer status by the UN General Assembly in 2012. Palestine has acceded to a significant number of international conventions relating to cultural heritage, including the Hague Convention of 1954 and the World Heritage Convention of 1972.

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Archeological Excavations

The Israeli Archeology Staff Officer and the Archeology Department of the Israeli Civil Administration have conducted a large number of research- and salvage-excavations in the Palestinian Occupied Territory. According to Israeli statistics, more than 1,000 excavations were conducted in the Palestinian areas between 1967 and 2007, including more than 300



Maqam Hasan Ar-Rai.

excavations in East Jerusalem. Major excavations were carried out in East Jerusalem, inside the town, and in the surrounding areas, including Silwan and the surrounding hills. Long-term archeological excavations were carried out at a number of sites in the West Bank and the Gaza strip, including Telul Abu Alayeq near Jericho; Tell Al-Fureidis, east of Bethlehem; Mount Gerizim and Tell Seilun, near Turmus Aya, in the Nablus district; Tell Ar-Rumeida in Hebron and Susiya near Hebron; and Deir Al-Balah in Gaza; as well as a large number of salvage excavations throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Needless to say, these excavations yielded thousands of archeological artifacts.

Most of these excavations were selected for ideological reasons and clearly associated with Israeli settlement

plans. Israeli settlements were given control over archeological sites in Deir Al-Murasras in the Maali Adumim settlement, Mount Ebal in Nablus, Tell Ar-Rumeida in Hebron, and Tell Seilun in the Shilo settlement.

Archeological Parks in Area C

Israel declared a number of sites in the West Bank and Area C as archeological parks, including the City Wall in Jerusalem, Khirbet Qumran, Tell Al-Fureidis, Sabastiya, Mount Gerizim, and Tell Seilun. The ADCA conducts archeological activities in the areas declared by the Israeli military commander as natural parks and nature reserves, which fall under the responsibility of the Office of Nature Reserves and the staff park officers in the Israeli Civil Administration. Such

enclosed by the Israeli Separation Wall. Some of these sites (Khirbet Qumran, Umm Ar-Rihan, Tell Al-Fureidis, Sabastiya, Mount Gerizim, monasteries in Al-Bariyah, and the Shuqba cave) are listed in the Palestinian inventory of cultural and natural cultural heritage sites of outstanding universal value.

Destruction of Cultural Heritage Sites

Many previously excavated sites have been left unprotected. Since 1967, great damage has been inflicted on archeological and historical sites in the Palestinian areas. They have suffered from military bombing and shelling

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areas include Wadi Khareitun, Al-Bariyah, Wadi Al-Qelt, and the nature reserves of Umm Ar-Rihan, now



Mount Gerizim.



Mar Saba.

that caused partial or total destruction and from Israeli incursions - such as in 2002, when a series of archeological and historical sites were demolished, including the church of St. Barbara in Abud and the historic cores of Nablus and Hebron. A wide range of historical sites in Gaza has suffered repeatedly from Israeli military activity. Furthermore, hundreds of archeological sites in Area C have been looted and plundered, and there has been an active illegal trade of cultural properties.

The Separation Wall

A major threat is caused by the Separation Wall constructed by Israel in the OPT and in and around Jerusalem. Composed of concrete walls, razor wire, trenches, and fences, it cuts into the West Bank and separates people

from their land and history. Besides its direct human, economic, and social negative impact on Palestinian life, the Separation Wall has devastating consequences for the rich archeological remains and many cultural heritage sites and, most importantly, the cultural landscape of Palestine. The implemented and the projected Wall will encircle the Palestinian population centers, turning them into a series of disconnected blocks. At the same time, the 462 Israeli settlements inside the Palestinian areas already control more than 900 archeological sites and features. After completing the Wall, Israel will control more than 3,500 archeological sites and features, including circa 500 major archeological sites that constitute a significant part of the Palestinian cultural resources.



Removed Roman mosaic pavement from Nablus.

Museums in Area C

As part of the Israeli policy to reinforce its control over Palestinian cultural heritage, in 2012 Israel applied the Israeli Museum Law to the West Bank settlements, which included the establishing of a Museum Council in the OPT. The council is composed of representatives of Israeli institutions and settlements. About fifteen settlement museums are listed, including three major museums, among them the Samaritan Inn Museum that hosts primarily mosaic heritage from the West Bank and the Pottery Museum in the Qadumim settlement.

Hundreds of thousands of archeological artifacts have been transferred from the Palestinian territory to Israeli museums and institutions: mosaic pavements from near the Gaza shore, anthropoid coffins from the cemetery of Deir Al-Balah, mosaic pavements from Nablus and from Deir Samaan and Deir Qal'a in the Salfit area, and paintings from the site of Telul Abu Alayeq in Jericho. Archeological artifacts from Palestinian areas have been exhibited in Israeli museums, such as the King Herod exhibition in Jerusalem, and have been presented in international exhibitions, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibition organized by the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada.

In sum, the archeological resources in Area C are an integral part of the Palestinian cultural heritage, and

the full integration of these resources will not be possible without putting an end to the prolonged Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land.

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Article photos courtesy of Dr. Hamdan Taha.