

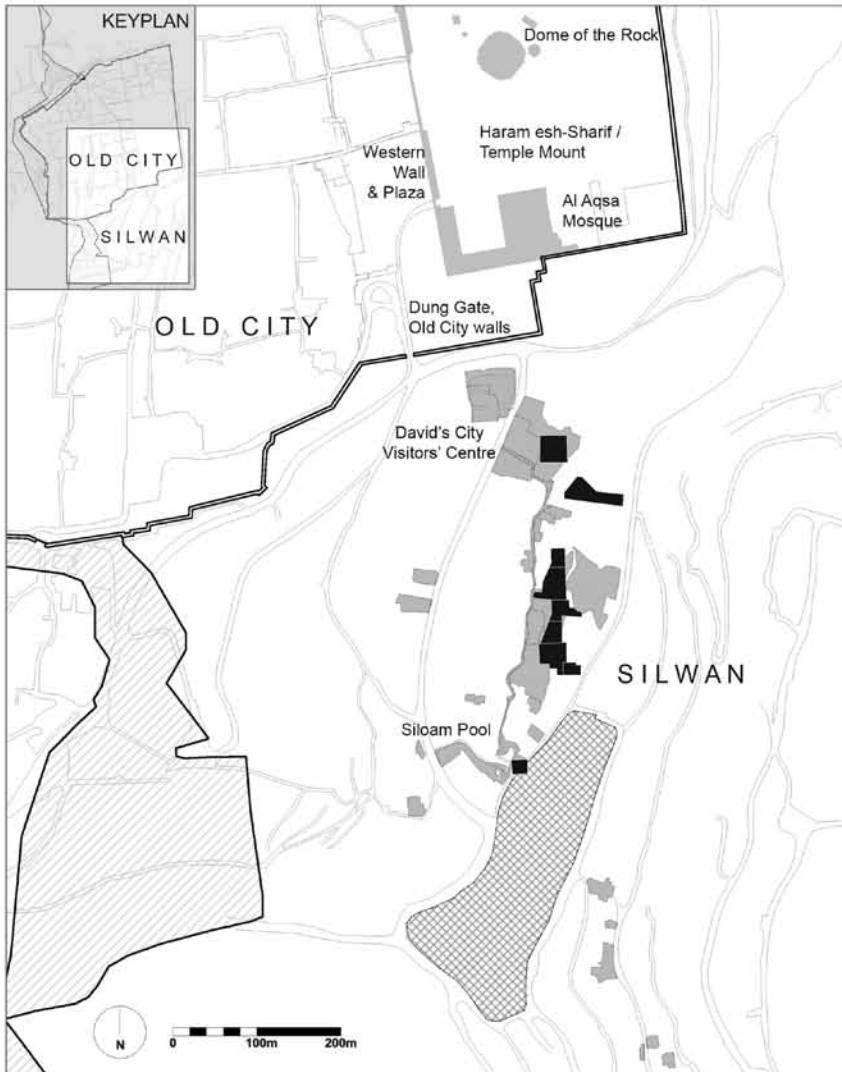


‘City of David’: Urban Design and Frontier Heritage

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View of Silwan from excavation area in Wadi
Hilwa. *Source: Conflict in Cities.*

Amongst Jerusalem’s many venerated and contested sites, the City of David, just south of the Old City, stands out for the speed with which it has recently become the centre of national and international attention. This fame has developed along two parallel lines. The site has developed from a patchwork of excavations pits into a rapidly expanding archaeological park and religious settlement, becoming established as a major Israeli national monument and one of Jerusalem’s leading tourist attractions; visitor numbers at the City of David archaeological park have rocketed up from 25,000 in 2001 to 350,000 in 2007. At the same time, the park has become perhaps the leading instance of claims of land grabbing and injustice, serving as a rallying



**City of David settlement in Silwan
2008**

KEY

-  Green Line 'No man's land', 1948-67
-  Israeli settler controlled areas
-  Israeli excavation areas, 1979-85
-  El Ad's planned King's Valley settlement and park

**Conflict in Cities
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Fig. 1: Map of Silwan site. *Source: Conflict in Cities.*

cry for Palestinian resistance to, and international criticism of, occupation.¹ The role of archaeological heritage in ethno-national conflicts has a long history in Israel/Palestine and elsewhere in the Middle East and has been the subject of a growing academic literature.² Nadia Abu El-Haj's much cited *Facts on the Ground*³ has done much to advance our understanding of the uses of archaeological practice in the formation of a secular Jewish Israeli colonial-national identity and the claims to territory it has served to instate.

This article addresses the continuously shifting politicization of archaeological heritage on two distinct levels. Firstly it focuses specifically on the growing influence of ultranationalist religious settler associations in ongoing settlement and urban redesign of East Jerusalem. Secondly it draws attention to the importance of the spatial design strategies mobilized to this end, leading to a distinctive form of what has recently been termed 'heritage manufacturing'.⁴ A previous article published in this journal revealed the exclusionary narrative propagated by ultranationalist settlers at the City of David.⁵ In this article we explore the ways in which this nationalist, neo-biblical narrative has been developed into an urban design and landscaping strategy, charting the dramatic physical transformation of the site in the past ten years.

The Transformation of an Excavation Site

The City of David archaeological park is located in Palestinian East Jerusalem where a steep and narrow spit of land extends southward from Dung Gate in the Old City wall (Fig. 1). The park is in an area known to Palestinians as Wadi Hilwa; the Palestinian urbanized village of Silwan covers both sides of the valley. Today, the estimated population in the area is around 16,000 Palestinians and about 400 Jewish settlers.⁶ Like many ancient sites in Jerusalem, the meanings associated with the area shift according to different cultures and traditions. Archaeological evidence indicates the existence of urban settlement from the middle Bronze Age. Iron Age strata have been attributed to the biblical conquest of King David. The term 'City of David' was first suggested by the French archaeologist Raymond Weill in 1920, and only systematically adopted by Israelis in the 1960s.⁷ To Christians Silwan is known as the site of one of Christ's miracles, the Siloam pool, where Jesus returned sight to a blind man. From the Palestinian point of view the City of David is an area that is part of Silwan, one of Jerusalem's oldest villages with a very long tradition of Arab habitation as well as a modern Palestinian neighbourhood.

Despite its claim as the site of the primordial Israelite capital, the popular idea of the City of David is a remarkably recent phenomenon. Following the annexation of East Jerusalem after the 1967 War twelve areas of a total of four thousand square meters were declared state lands and slated for excavations. Israeli archaeology in Silwan followed from over a century of archaeological excavations, all of which had focused exclusively on the biblical period. From 1978-85, Israeli archaeologists identified evidence of twenty-one strata dating from the fourth millennium BCE

right through to the late medieval period in the fifteenth century CE.⁸ Yet, despite its archaeological importance, the City of David area remained relatively obscure sporadically visited by Israelis or foreign tourists. In fact, it first achieved notoriety among the wider public as a hotspot in the controversy between secular Israeli archaeologists defending their right to pursue scientific research against attacks by the ultra-orthodox community opposing the potential desecration of Jewish tombs. Archaeology and heritage were not yet at the core of Israeli-Palestinian tensions in Silwan. With the onset of the first Intifada, in which Silwanese were known to play an active role, Israeli and tourist visitor numbers dropped sharply and further plans for excavations and park design were temporarily abandoned; for some, the area was no longer considered safe.

It is at this point that the small, private, not-for-profit organization, El-Ad (the Hebrew acronym for 'To the City of David'), took the initiative and filled the vacuum left by the municipality's withdrawal. Closely tied to the far right settler movement Gush Emunim, El-Ad was founded in 1986 with the explicit goal of settling Jews in Silwan, which they understand to be the work of returning the land to the Jewish people. Today El-Ad manages and exercises tight control over the park, excavations areas and Jewish settlement. Moreover, it has been planning to extend the archaeological park into the neighbourhood of al-Bustan, known to Israelis as the King's Valley. The original plan not only entailed the demolition of about 90 'illegally built' Palestinians homes, but also new residential development for settlers. The recent revival of this plan by the new mayor Nir Barkat, has stirred Palestinian resistance and international condemnation.

El-Ad controlled sites were acquired through a series of contested purchases, as well as expropriations, which have been de facto handed over to them through complex channels involving a number of state authorities and public organizations in the past twenty years. The primary claim is based, however, on the unique biblical significance of the Silwan site and the need to salvage its archaeological remains, for which El-Ad has taken quasi-exclusive responsibility.⁹ The organization's most significant breakthrough came in the mid-1990s when the Israel Nature and Public Parks Protection Authority subcontracted El-Ad to run the City of David Park.

El-Ad has been keenly aware of the inherent potential of the park as a site for national veneration, as well as religious and heritage tourism. For the former the site can be framed in terms of the Jewish people's significant past, ethnic continuity and precedence. To the latter it caters more broadly to widespread modern fascinations with origins, antiquity, and more specifically, for some Christian groups it appears tangibly related to paradigmatic events of both the Jewish Bible and the New Testament. The prominence of archaeological evidence harbours even greater potential for testimonies to authenticity than the reconstructed Jewish Quarter. But it has been through an overall urban design strategy that the El-Ad version of heritage has been most comprehensive at David's City.

Building and Inhabiting the Neo-biblical

The narrative El-Ad's presents to visitors focuses exclusively on David's conquests and ignores any non-biblical aspects of the site. Tied to the increasingly contested archaeological work it sponsors and controls,¹⁰ El-Ad's privileging of biblical history is intimately related to a repressive erasure of Palestinian heritage and contemporary urban life.¹¹ What is most striking about the City of David is that El-Ad's nationalist monopolization of heritage rearticulates the site, not only in narrative, but also in distinct spatial terms. The City of David is formally treated as a settlement; making homes for Jewish people is seen as an integral part of El-Ad's heritage stewardship.¹² As suggested by the title of their visitors' film, 'Where it all began ... and still continues', the active inhabitation of the site by El-Ad settlers is seen as a direct re-enactment of the paradigmatic, biblical narrative into which the site's meaning is locked. El-Ad have taken their own narrative by the letter as the architectural and urban programme for the park. Some clearly identifiable and overt signs, most prominently flags, exist; however the character of the resulting habitation is often highly ambiguous, like the park itself where official limits are quite consciously left ill defined, leaving room for further expansions. The nature of such architectural representations and their significance in altering urban conditions in physical and symbolic terms have only recently come into clearer focus.¹³

El-Ad has inserted two distinct types of dwelling in the middle of the archaeological sites, which together compose the neo-biblical city. On the one hand, there are temporary shack houses, similar to the settler caravans in the illegal outposts of the West Bank. On the other, there are carefully rebuilt houses (Fig. 2). This latter residential type appears to embody El-Ad's long-term vision most clearly. What in many cases amount to nearly new constructions, are meant to adapt and belong to the El-Ad vision of the landscape through a series of salient features. They are simple, low-rise elevations stepped into the sloping topography of the hill, adopting a typology, which Israeli architects extrapolated from the Arab village and systematically reconfigured as a so-called biblical or Mediterranean vernacular in the late 1960s.¹⁴ Exterior walls are carefully clad with the local Jerusalem limestone, a sure sign of post-1967 Israeli planning influence.¹⁵ All windows are modestly sized and arched avoiding any modernist references and further show-casing the stone facades. Close proximity to archaeological sites is actively sought. One of El-Ad's most ambitious plans envisages a synagogue and communal facilities immediately above an excavation area by the visitors' centre (Fig. 3). This physical overlap with archaeological sites leans on the symbolic programme of the Jewish Quarter, in which the insertion of carefully selected and exposed archaeological finds is used as a means of authentication, a form of restoration simultaneously embodying preservation and regeneration of the original and immutable meaning of a primordial relationship to the land established in the biblical era.

The appeal of settlers' houses works on a number of different registers. On one level, the neo-biblical character of the Jewish Quarter, originally developed in a



Fig. 2: Neo-biblical house for settlers in archaeological park. *Source: Conflict in Cities.*



Fig. 3: Area slated for development above excavations area by visitors' centre. *Source: Conflict in Cities.*

secular ideological context in the 1970s to create a sense of belonging for Jewish Israelis, has been readily accepted as appropriate by the religious right. By the same token El-Ad is thereby creating more permanent, acceptable dwellings for well-to-do supporters, especially from abroad, as is increasingly common in the Jewish Quarter.¹⁶ On another level, this aesthetic lends itself equally well as a suggestive backdrop for the theme-park character developed at the visitors' centre. Originally borne out of a very specific Israeli strand of post-modernism's search for locale and tradition, the Israeli vernacular serves as a prop in El-Ad's narrative re-design of Silwan as the City of David, with wide-ranging western appeal. International visitors can identify settlers' houses with the virtual representation of buildings in the ancient David's City as witnessed in the visitors' film. The architectural similarity acts as evidence of continuity and the veracity of the rejuvenation story they are being told.

The spatial character of the City of David is post-modern in one further respect, which problematizes its concocted neo-biblical evenness. The provisional shack and restored house both rely on a heavy infrastructure of security arrangements. Security is in fact the only visible way in which the presence of the Palestinian population is implicit in El-Ad's design of the park. Watchtowers, tall fences above walls, heavy steel doors and CCTV cameras are ubiquitous aspects of all settlers' homes in the City of David. El-Ad's ambivalent discretion in displaying its control over the site is manifested in the fact that the private security guards, substituting for municipal or state protection, wear no uniforms or tags identifying them with El-Ad. The level of security stands out even by the stringent standards of West Jerusalem and the Old City and East Jerusalem settlements. Securitization goes hand in hand with privatization as a mechanism of control over movement within the park and settlement. Points of access to previously public archaeological areas are increasingly controlled by El-Ad. Since the area is part open to the public, and part Palestinian, the settlement is, however, not so much a homogenous community, as the Jewish Quarter appears today; rather it constitutes a terrain of gated houses and mini-complexes, which dominate and fragment the area through their control of security infra-structure. Security is not concentrated merely along hard borders at the periphery; rather it pervades every alley and path adjacent to settler-controlled spaces. As the objective of such practices, the Palestinian residents have to confront such instrumentalisation of their purported status on a daily basis.

El-Ad clearly seeks to alter the character and meaning of Silwan as a whole. As is common in other high profile parts of Jerusalem, paths and streets within the City of David and leading to the visitors' centre from Dung Gate (next to the Western Wall Plaza) are paved with Jerusalem stone, a hallmark of post-1967 Jewish Israeli urban redevelopment. Here, the stone surfaces extend into the Palestinian neighbourhoods as settlers take over houses there. Seemingly banal facilities such as municipal bins installed along improved paths through the park, feature the municipal crest with its Lion of Judah; the installation of streetlamps associated exclusively with Jewish and tourist parts of Jerusalem cements the transformation of the urban backdrop. El-Ad has also recently encouraged the municipality to systematically replace existing Arabic

street names in Wadi Hilwa with Hebrew names with strong biblical connotations. Prominent municipal street fixtures, as well as renaming street signs, represent a well-established and contested practice marking out national territory in ways immediately recognizable to both Israelis and Palestinians in the everyday.¹⁷

Great care is selectively invested in green areas adjacent to archaeological excavations and El-Ad controlled terrain. Sprinkled lawns and flowerbeds complement the iconography and narrative of rebirth. The deep ambiguity of the gardens' olive trees, symbolizing rootedness as much as dispossession represent the horticultural pendant to the neo-biblical architecture of settler homes. Both Israelis and Western tourists can feel less threatened or alienated than they might by the 'messiness' and density of the Old City. Equally, they may be more likely to feel comfortable contemplating a polished face of heritage characteristic of increasingly homogenous tourist-historic cities across the globe. These spatial extensions of affinity are in many respects more effective than narrative constructions in cementing connections between Jewish Israeli and global biblical heritage.

However, just beneath the surface, El-Ad's urban design also deepens the fragmentation and contradictions observed above in relation to the combination of purist neo-biblical architecture and a heavy-handed security apparatus. This is true both within the core area of contestation, Wadi Hilwa/City of David, and in the topography of Silwan as a whole. Carefully restored houses are but a stone's throw from rundown Palestinian houses and courtyards. El-Ad's shining visitors' centre is only thirty metres away from the beleaguered plot of land, on which local Palestinian activists have set up a tent exhibiting a banner, criticizing the ongoing excavations, stating 'to dig a tunnel means to destroy a village', referring, in English and Arabic, to an El-Ad project to link different parts of the site. The aesthetically upgraded green zone separates El-Ad dominated Wadi Hilwa from the historical and contemporary core of Silwan on the other side of the Kidron Valley. El-Ad's gardens face the uncollected rubbish piled up before the tightly stacked Palestinian houses climbing up the slope across the valley. The Silwan area also continues to be used as a waste and sewage drainage basin for the city, yet many of its houses continue to lack access to their own sewage systems, as well as proper electricity supply and other amenities. Severe over-crowding combined with systematic municipal neglect, which is characteristic of Palestinian East Jerusalem in general contributes to slum like conditions in Silwan.¹⁸ El-Ad is constructing a deeply antagonistic topography, a new subtype of 'frontier urbanism' developed in the settlements of East Jerusalem's suburban periphery, in which heightened visual confrontation is combined with absence of any form of everyday interaction (Page. 29).

In the space of a few years an entire neighbourhood of Jerusalem has been reconfigured to conform to a very particular hegemonic ideological and territorial project. The potency of the City of David as heritage site appears proportional to the negative excesses bound up with the modern cult of heritage, which David Lowenthal has coined an 'eclipse of reason and a regression to embattled tribalism'.¹⁹ While

Silwan/City of David is not the only world example to be harnessed and distorted by a nationalistic agenda, its central place in a bitter and enduring conflict zone makes it especially volatile and worrying.

We have argued that the act of inhabiting, of familiarizing through urban design is key to the profounder effects that heritage manipulation is taking in Silwan. While Silwan had been able to withstand one hundred and fifty years of archaeological excavations, carried out by international and local interests, far right heritage stewardship combined with a concerted urban design strategy only needed a fraction of this time to threaten its very existence as a Palestinian neighbourhood. In the effort to put its particular concept of the City of David on the map, El-Ad has opted for an architectural design strategy both familiar and appealing to a wider Israeli and Western tourist public. Such an urban design envelope for heritage is both a condition and an opportunity for the settler movement in Jerusalem. The fact that visitors from Israel and tourists from abroad seem relatively blind both to the physical fragmentation of Silwan as well as the deceptive and abusive territorial project which underlies it, certainly speaks of the modern power of what Lefebvre calls 'conceived space' over lived experience in urban heritage design.²⁰ Seen in this light it is perhaps not surprising that the relative shift from secular to religious and from public to private agency in heritage management in Jerusalem goes hand in hand with a corresponding urban character.

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Endnotes

- 1 The critics of the City of David include Israelis. Archaeologist Rafi Greenberg, who works with a group of Israeli and Palestinian activists, is leading the debate among Israeli archaeologists on the political use of their work; see www.alt-arch.org and Rafi Greenberg. 2009. 'Towards an Inclusive Archaeology in Jerusalem: The Case of Silwan/the City of David', in *Public Archaeology*, 8.1, p. 35–50.
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- 4 Nezar AlSayyad (ed.). 2001. *Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage: Global Norms and Urban Forms in the Age of Tourism*. London: Routledge.
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- 6 Ir Amin. 2008. 'State of Affairs – Jerusalem 2008', Jerusalem, p.27 www.ir-amim.org.il/eng/?CategoryID=254 (accessed 15 February 2009).
- 7 Greenberg, 2009, p. 39-41
- 8 J. M. Cahill and D. Tarler. 2000. 'Excavations Directed by Yigal Shiloh at the City of David, 1978–1985', in H. Geva (ed.) . *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*. p. 31–45 (p. 38–40).
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- 10 The excavations sponsored by El-Ad have been subject to increasingly severe criticism; see for example: Israel Finkelstein et al. 2007. 'Has King David's Palace in Jerusalem Been Found?'. *Tel Aviv*, 34.2, p. 142–64.
- 11 On the nature of such memorialisation, see: Paul Connerton. 2008. 'Seven Types of Forgetting'. in *Memory Studies*, 1.1, p. 57–71, p. 60-61.
- 12 In their own words, settlement is referred to as 'residential revitalization'; it is stated as one of El-Ad's core commitments in its management of the site. See: www.cityof david.org.il/IrDavidFoundation_Eng.asp.
- 13 Wendy Pullan. 2006. 'Locating the Civic in the Frontier: Damascus Gate'. in M. Miessen and S. Basar, ed., *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice*. Cambridge: MIT Press, p. 109–22; p. 231–55.
- 14 Alona Nitzan-Shifan. 2004. 'Seizing Locality in Jerusalem'. in N. AlSayyad (ed.). *The End of Tradition?* London: Routledge, p. 241–4.
- 15 Eyal Weizman. 2007. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. London: Verso, chapter 1.
- 16 See R. Nachum-Halevi. 2008. 'The Cost of a Home near the Wall'. *Ha'aretz*, 14 January 2008.
- 17 Yasir Suleiman 2004. *A War of Words: Language and Conflict in the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 159–75.
- 18 Amir S Cheshin, Bill Hutman, Avi Melamed, *Separate and Unequal. The inside story of Israeli rule in East Jerusalem*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- 19 David Lowenthal. 1996. *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. New York and London: Free Press. p. 3.
- 20 Henri Lefebvre. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.