



שומרים על הנצח  
קואליציית ארגונים  
להגנה על עתיקות ישראל

## Mount Ebal Altar- information page

### Update and background:

**The Palestinian Authority's "targeted elimination" of the Mount Ebal Altar, a heritage site subsumed under Palestinian Development Masterplan of September 2023**

### Summary:

On 30 August 2023, a routine inspection of Joshua's Altar revealed that ground-leveling work had begun in preparation for the paving of a new road, adjacent to the wall of Joshua's Altar, within the demarcated Israeli archaeological site. On Mount Ebal. On 3 September 2023, a tractor was seen working at the site, extending the levelled path toward the wall of the "footprint" site that encompasses the Altar. The IDF interrupted the tractor's work and inspected the operator's documents, discovering Palestinian Authority development plans for the Mount Ebal site that include the immediate and complete destruction of the site of Joshua's Altar on Mount Ebal. The development is a joint initiative of the Palestinian Authority and the owner of the property, Ya'ish Yadli, a former mayor of Nablus and a member of Hamas who served time in Israeli prison for terror-related offenses. The development plan includes some 30 plots for multi-story structures located on the archaeological site itself, and is expected to cause irreparable damage to the archaeological finds and to the surrounding area. The deadline for submission of objections has expired and extensive ground-clearing and landscaping work is already underway. **In light of the unique historical importance of this site to Israel's heritage, and the unique single-tier nature of the archaeology on site, and as a result of the Israeli authorities' failure to take responsibility for protection of the site, Joshua's Altar is in acute and immediate danger of being irreparably harmed to the point of complete eradication** if emergency measures are not initiated without delay. The State of Israel should initiate immediate, urgent and permanent steps to protect the site by changing its official status from Area B to Area C, designating a widened archaeological polygon covering the site and its immediate environs, and declaring the area a National Park – a designation that would entail oversight and supervision of the site, research, restoration and preservation of antiquities and other finds, and protected access to the site.

### Details:

1. Joshua's Altar at Mount Ebal is a unique cultic site dated to the Early Iron Age, the period of the Israelites' entrance into the Land Of Israel. The Altar site is comprised of an outer wall encompassing a "footprint" area of approximately 14.5 dunams and an inner compound containing the cultic structure – the Altar. Professor Adam Zertal, who surveyed the area, identified the structure as the altar built by Joshua, described in the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy and Joshua) as the site of the forging of the covenant through which the Twelve Tribes of Israel were transformed from a nomadic confederation to The Nation of Israel.
2. On 12 January 2023, a Detailed Municipal Development Plan was published by the A-Sira a-Shamaliyeh Municipality for 30 plots of land located on the site of the Altar itself, which would result in massive harm to the site and to the archaeological remains it contains. In these plans, the precise spot of the altar is designated as "green space" in the heart of the new neighborhood. This plan poses a very imminent threat of destruction to the site, where any damage would be irreparable. Since January 2021, ongoing damage has been done to the site, beginning with the grinding of the stones of the outer wall to produce gravel for paving the road.<sup>1</sup> There was no response from the Israeli government to this outrage. Last week, work on the neighborhood itself began, and has continued this week at full pace.

<sup>1</sup> See [Prophet Joshua's Mount Ebal altar site harmed by Palestinian road work](#).



שומרים על הנצח  
קואליציית ארגונים  
להגנה על עתיקות ישראל

The erasure of Joshua's Altar after 3,300 years is fast approaching if the Israeli authorities continue their current policy of non-intervention.

3. The archaeological site at Mount Ebal is an open-air site, and the commanding views from the site are an important aspect of its function: The Children of Israel who crossed into the Promised Land were able to experience the vistas of the Land of Israel that unfolded below those who stood at this place of covenant and worship, and the view from that spot was an integral element in the powerful experience. The experience itself, and the ritual that was conducted to enshrine that experience, are an important part of our national narrative and national history. Massive, dense construction surrounding the archaeological site, even if does not stand on the Altar itself, is a deliberate and strategic destruction of the site as a whole, and will block access to the site while destroying important archaeological and environmental elements, and will pave the way, sooner or later, to the destruction of the Altar itself. In February 2021, the Civil Administration misled Minister of Defense Benny Gantz who, based on the Civil Administration's report, claimed that damage to the outer wall does not damage the site itself. Dozens of archaeologists responded to Gantz's statement, explaining that the outer wall is an integral and inseparable element of the site and calling on him to restore the damaged sections and to protect the site from further damage.<sup>2</sup>
4. In the past, the Civil Administration refused to take enforcement action at the site because it is designated as Area B, where the Palestinian Authority has jurisdiction regarding civilian affairs. This is in error: destruction of national and world heritage sites is not included in local "civilian affairs," it is a matter of national and international concern of the highest order. Destruction of heritage sites is considered war crimes according to numerous international treaties and conventions.<sup>3</sup> At this site in particular, which has tremendous importance to the Jewish People as well as to some 700 million believers worldwide, as well as at any and every other site under its jurisdiction for civilian matters, the Palestinian Authority was never granted the authority to decimate world heritage assets, and the State of Israel is not permitted to shirk its responsibility to protect these assets – even if it would like to do so – so long as Israel maintains military control of the area. Therefore, under Jordanian law, Israeli law and international law, under the Oslo Accords and by moral right and responsibility, the Israeli government must protect this site from harm.
5. In the months that have passed since Minister of Defense Gantz's non-response to the damage at Mount Ebal, the Civil Administration has, for the first time, carried out official enforcement activity at an archaeological site in Area B.<sup>4</sup> Immediate, decisive enforcement is no less necessary at the site of Joshua's Altar – action that must include long-term steps to halt future damage to the site. In our comprehensive survey of endangered heritage sites, published by Preserving the Eternal in 2021, the Mount Ebal site was classified as "Highest Level of Alert: Imminent Danger of Eradication." Unfortunately, our prognosis is being confirmed before our eyes, and sooner than we anticipated.
6. The immediate steps that are required: The Defense Ministry must halt the development plans immediately, and take immediate and urgent steps to protect the site, as per the professional standards established for archaeological preservation and with the involvement of the relevant authorities, including:
  - a. Aggressive enforcement, including arrest and other punitive measures, against the registered owners of the project: Ya'ish Yadli, Muhammad Alshonar, contractor Abu Rami Abbas Jabar. Issue warrants and indictments to all those involved, including members of the A-Sira a-

[Jewish heritage is being destroyed before our eyes ; Israel MUST protect its heritage ;As Joshua's Wall Tumbles Down](#)<sup>2</sup>

Including the Hague Convention, the UNESCO Treaty and other international instruments to which Israel is a <sup>3</sup> signatory.

[Illegal Palestinian construction on biblical site prompts rare Israeli action](#)<sup>4</sup>

מייסודו של: אבן ולב - המרכז להגנה ופיתוח מורשת התרבות בישראל. (ע"ר) ח.פ. 580680247

טלפון: 02-9400537 | כתובת: ת.ד. 642 9100601 ירושלים | אימייל: Israelheritagepc@gmail.com



שומרים על הנצח  
קואליציית ארגונים  
להגנה על עתיקות ישראל

Shamaliyeh Municipality; block the illegal Palestinian-built road; restore and enable access to Israeli visitors (which has been blocked); clarify - to political functionaries at the highest level on both the Israeli and Palestinian Authority sides - that Israeli municipal authorities will enforce a zero-tolerance policy toward any threats to the site.

- b. Immediate designation of the site as Area C.
- c. Initiate constant monitoring of the site by the relevant Israeli enforcement and security authorities, who will be instructed to treat the site as a top priority asset.
- d. Restore damaged sections of the site, remove hazards and trash, post warning signs and erect fences to demarcate the site as a religious, national and world heritage site.
- e. Designate the site as an Israeli National Park and open it to the public, securing access to the site and providing 24/7 security and supervision.

#### Appendices:

1. [Documentation of the site and known threats](#) (Hebrew)
2. [Status Report and Recommendations regarding Israel's responsibility to enforce the law in Area B \(Kohelet Policy Forum\)](#)
3. [The compound's outer wall is an integral element of the site: Letter signed by archaeologists, presented to Minister of Defense Gantz](#) 16 February 2021 (Hebrew)