

CHAPTER 6

Community Archaeology at Tell Balata, Palestine

Hamdan Taha

Independent scholar, Palestine

Gerrit van der Kooij

Leiden University

Abstract

This chapter introduces the community archaeology experience at Tell Balata, Palestine. It contextualises the aims, objectives and activities of a four-year joint project of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, the Faculty of Archaeology of the University of Leiden, and UNESCO's Ramallah office, in cooperation with the local community. The site is identified with ancient Shechem and had been excavated in the last century by a series of archaeological expeditions, using a typical colonial archaeology, in which the involvement of the local community has been limited to physical work and dirt removal. The project's main concern was the rehabilitation of the neglected archaeological site, and its development into a modern archaeological park for the benefit of the local community.

How to cite this book chapter:

Taha, H. and G. van der Kooij. 2023. 'Community Archaeology at Tell Balata, Palestine'. In *Living Communities and Their Archaeologies in the Middle East*, edited by R. Bonnie, M. Lorenzon and S. Thomas, 121–51. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/HUP-19-6>.

The Tell Balata Archaeological Park was guided by a management plan based on UNESCO and ICOMOS principles and the management guidelines for World Cultural Heritage sites, in line with provisions of international charters and conventions. The plan determined the level and nature of community involvement. Community outreach activities included clearance work, excavations at certain spots to build capacity in the heritage sector in marginalised areas, involving workers in excavation and restoration work, and connecting the people with the place. Other outreach activities included promotion work, such as signposting outside the site, a site map and trail signage on site, leaflets, education and awareness programmes, the oral history survey, site staff training, and the interpretation centre. Complementary activities included excavation reports, a teacher's handbook, a guidebook, a documentary film, and additional visitor-friendly provisions on site to facilitate and promote domestic and international tourism.

Keywords: community archaeology, Palestine, Tell Balata, Shechem

Introduction to the Tell Balata Archaeological Park Project

Community Archaeology: The Palestinian Context

The interest in community archaeology in Palestine has grown in the last two decades with the transformation from a colonial paradigm of archaeological work based on foreign domination to a new post-colonial paradigm based on direct involvement of the local community in archaeology (Taha and Saca 2023). One of the best illustrative examples of community engagement in archaeology in Palestine is the Tell Balata Archaeological Park project in Palestine, 2010–2014, which has been transformed from a playground to a modern archaeological park. It was a joint project of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, the Faculty of Archaeology of the University of Leiden, and UNESCO's Ramallah office in cooperation with the local community.

The project's main concern was the rehabilitation of the neglected archaeological site, and to develop it into a modern archaeological park for the benefit of the local community. This was to include bringing it to the attention of the local community, thus contributing to a sense of heritage value and responsibility for the site, as well as of external visitors, thus potentially contributing to economic growth, as a tourist attraction.

The activities of site management and public awareness were undertaken under a management plan that was largely composed according to a heritage management model. The plan aimed to guide sustainable management of the site for the following years. A series of activities were carried out within the management framework. The project also traced the changing landscape, building encroachment around the site and demographic growth in the last century.

Much focus was given to public interest in the site. This related to the values the site might represent for the local community, diffusing archaeological knowledge and interpretations to the public, and in general promoting public awareness of the value of this archaeological heritage. It included a set of heritage management issues such as outside signage, information leaflets, site panels and internal trail signage. In addition, an interpretation centre was established, with parking and entrance constructions and designed to inform visitors about the archaeology of the site through exhibitions, leaflets, digital facilities, and an audience and education room. In practice, these activities were combined with the study of local oral history concerning the site and teaching about its archaeology (both taking place within the setting of local events), as well as tourism.

Historical Background

During the great upheaval in Palestine in the events of 1948, the Department of Antiquities of Palestine ceased to exist. The Palestinian Department of Antiquities was re-established in 1994 as a result of the Oslo Agreements, within the Ministry of Tourism and

Antiquities (MoTA). An enormous task lay ahead at that point, because a complete organisation with its equipment, facilities and qualified personnel had to be built up from scratch within a few years in order to deal with the daily tasks of building permissions, combating looting and rescue excavations. Officially the Jordanian Antiquities Law was valid again, but a new law had to be prepared, since Palestine was to be taken as a separate state with all of the responsibilities connected with that. Furthermore, new worldwide issues of archaeological heritage management (including the Valletta Convention of 1992 concerning the Archaeological Heritage of Europe) and local responsibilities had to be included, as well as the need to move beyond the conventional concept of antiquities to the wider concept of cultural heritage, following UNESCO and ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) rules. For UNESCO, all archaeological and historical objects and materials are public property to be dealt with by a Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (DACH) that has to take care of them and develop public interest in and responsibility for them.

Considering this last aspect, even before the Oslo Agreement of 1993 a campaign had been launched to promote public awareness of the importance and value of archaeology, and of archaeological and cultural heritage among the Palestinian people. This was initiated and undertaken by scholars from different Palestinian universities, led by Hamdan Taha, via radio broadcasting, lectures, leaflets and posters, etc. It was essential to change a rather general negative public attitude towards archaeological remains – archaeology being ‘viewed as part of the occupation system’ (Taha 2010, 18) – to a positive one. The positive attitude of the people would be that of discovering the past of their land and their own roots and thus strengthening their identity. It would also mean an attitude of responsibility towards archaeological remains – in general, and more specifically when actual remains are found – and so a sense of opposition to looting and illegal trade. In the first years of the Department of Antiquities much rescue work was done, evenly spread over the country, as part of the ‘Emergency clearance campaign of 100 sites in Palestine’ project, funded by

the Dutch government (see Taha 2010, 21). In that context, the department took some urgent protective measures at Tell Balata in 1996, mainly cleaning and fencing. This agenda of independent archaeological and heritage tasks also needed fieldwork and the training of staff and students. It was to include archaeological excavation, with all of its material results, and reporting about them, in addition to object inventory and study and museology. Furthermore, the department, under its focused directorship, also regarded scientific research as an obligation, including methods of excavation, data collecting and interpretation, independent from foreign agendas. This would imply a reinterpretation of data, and eventually a rewriting of the history of the country, wherever necessary, from a post-colonial point of view. 'For the first time in history the Palestinian society became responsible for its past, to study it and to teach it' (Taha and van der Kooij 2020, 68). The realisation of this task in Palestine is a problem not only of time but also of space, considering for example the continuing zonation of degrees of occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in Areas A, B and C, long after the Oslo Agreement (see, e.g., Dodd and Boytner 2010).

For the purpose of building human and logistical capacity, some foreign institutions were approached to contribute indirectly to these tasks of the department and cooperate with it. This resulted in the development of a new model of joint projects, based on respect and mutual interests. One of the first projects following this post-colonial model of cooperation was undertaken with the Dutch, specifically the Faculty of Archaeology of the University of Leiden, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation (Foreign Affairs). It began in 1996 with a rescue operation at Khirbet Bal'ama, near Jenin (Taha and van der Kooij 2007), followed by excavations and surveys at the same site from 1998 to 2000, and a joint publication programme.

The Theoretical Background of Community and Public Archaeology

Within heritage management, a basic issue is the significance or 'value' of a heritage item (in this case Tell Balata as a whole and each of its many specific spots, features and objects), because the level of value suggests or dictates the level or kind of preservation and accessibility. The significance of the site, as listed in the project proposal, is historical, scientific, religious, socio-cultural, economic and educational (for value significance, see ICOMOS 2013, the Burra Charter; see also Chapter 8 in this volume). However, the problem here is that different stakeholders may value the same item differently.

Many people or institutions that are or feel connected with a heritage item (the stakeholders) may be identified. In the case of Tell Balata, three stakeholders are basic to heritage management (see also Taha and van der Kooij 2020):

- The archaeologists. In principle an academic scholar is attempting to get to a view of the reality of the people that left the heritage behind (by trying to let the people speak about what is left behind and found). This may be called the intrinsic value of the heritage. In practice, however, the view depends on research quality and biases.
- The local community. The local people are dealing with a site and its contents as part of its landscape and context. However, this community does not have only one voice with respect to values. People may want to know about the past, especially if they feel connected with it, about the people behind the material (as far as this is understood from the archaeologists, but also with a specific agenda). Others may focus on the value of the site for tourism, because of the potential economic spin-off and job opportunities.
- The pilgrim/religious visitor. In this context, the value of a site or a specific part of it may be high and a strong reason to pay it a visit, based on a suggested historical or legendary event or person. Since such pilgrimage is generally undertaken for reli-

gious reasons, the attributed value is taken very seriously, and often also appreciated by the local community because of the potential economic benefit from it. (For a history of identification of the site see Taha and van der Kooij, eds, 2014b, 12–14.)

Thus, within heritage management activities it is quite relevant to consider differing and even opposing values in all sorts of presentations. These include values connected with colonial and post-colonial paradigms, and those connected with biblical narratives, interpreted as maximally or minimally representing historical realities (see Taha and van der Kooij 2020). This issue is highly specific for the ‘Holy Land’. Tell Balata being identified with historical Shechem is a clear example of biblical-archaeological interest. Indeed, nearly all periods of its existence have been connected with biblical-historical values and related claims to the site’s heritage. Because of the high percentage of religious visitors to the site (see below), and because of the high valuation of the site by these stakeholders, we have to understand and discuss their views a little further here. These views largely date from the nineteenth century, an age of challenges resulting from rapid scientific and technological developments and critical thought regarding traditional knowledge, in particular biblical knowledge.

The contexts of early exploration and archaeology in Palestine have been well described in Silberman’s pioneering study (1982), and later by, for example, Yahya (2005) and Taha (2019). However, we need to specify the issue a little further, with reference to Sherrard (2011). In her PhD thesis, Brooke Sherrard (2011) wrote a transparent and fundamental study of American ‘biblical archaeologists’, from Albright to Lapp and Glock, and their connection with Zionism:

Very little work has been done to understand these scholars’ positions in the history of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, thus allowing the aura of scholarly objectivity, neutrality, and commitment to value-free science that has long surrounded them to continue ... The defining difference in their arguments was their understanding of culture. I argue that those archaeologists who

envisioned the ancient world as replete with cultural change and hybridity opposed the establishment of a Jewish state, while those who envisioned the ancient world's ethnic boundaries as rigid and impermeable favoured it. (Sherrard 2011, viii)

We agree with Sherrard that different concepts of culture trigger the dividing choice, but we argue that personal religious feelings and convictions contribute to, or even cause, the preferred concept of culture – more so when they are rigidised in a defensive mood. It is noticeable that the personal religion of explorers and archaeologists, and also that of their followers, played (and plays) a major part in their often populist mono-vocality. This has to be especially taken into account when dealing with traditional or conservative Christian Protestant denominations with a colonialist attitude towards non-Western societies, in this case the Arab world. Sherrard (2011, 27–30) refers to some famous mid-nineteenth-century American scholar-travellers to the 'Holy Land', like Edward Robinson and William Thomson, and to the influence of their paradigm of ethnic boundaries on politicians nowadays in connection with Palestine.

This means, in practice, that all Tell Balata Archaeological Park (TBAP) project publications, including park guides and the Interpretation Centre at Tell Balata, present an inclusive, multifaceted story about the site, including historical, archaeological and religious views. The community includes the local population as well as international tourists, including Christians who visit the site. Notably, a significant proportion of the international tourists are evangelicals who are motivated by the religious biblical and Islamic traditions of the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his journey from Harran to Canaan, with the first stop at Tell Balata (Shechem).

The Tell Balata Archaeological Park Project

The Site

Tell Balata is located in the central part of Palestine, around 65 km north of Jerusalem and 1.5 km east of the centre of Nablus, at a spot guarding the historical pass between the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal and overlooking the plain of Askar, with perennial springs around. The archaeological record of the site has been studied through some large-scale excavations (see below) showing the existence of villages and cities during several periods (Taha and van der Kooij 2014b, 16–20; Taha and van der Kooij, eds, 2014b, 11–26, 34–102; Wright 1965). The place was inhabited in the Late Chalcolithic period, 6,000 years ago, and reached its zenith in the Middle Bronze Age, when its cyclopean wall, monumental gates, fortress temple, and domestic quarters were built. This period ended c. 1550 BCE, by destruction; during the Late Bronze Age the city was rebuilt, but it was again destroyed c. 1150 BCE. During the Iron Age II (mainly eighth and seventh century BCE) the ruined surface was inhabited again, and remains of a Hellenistic town have been revealed. The city was abandoned in the first century BCE, and the new city, Nablus (Neapolis), was erected in the Roman period. The village of Balata was built on the southern edge of the ancient tell in the medieval period and continues to the present time, inheriting the legacy of the ancient tell. After the political upheaval of the *Nakbah* in 1948, thousands of displaced Palestinian refugees from cities and villages inside the Green Line found shelter in the refugee camp adjacent to Balata village.

The ancient historical record of the region strongly suggests that the ancient site has to be identified with Shikmou (Shechem), mentioned in Egyptian historical texts from the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries BCE, indicated as a city-state. The city-state character of Shikmou during the Late Bronze period is also clear, based on mid-fourteenth century BCE Akkadian texts from el-Amarna, partly dealing with Labaya as the main rebellious Canaanite king in the Egyptian Empire (Wright 1965, 16–19).



Figure 6.1: Tell Balata under urban pressure in 2010, viewing towards south-east, with Jacob's Well and Balata Camp.
(Photo: Gerrit van der Kooij.)

Consequently, the Iron Age town has been identified with Shechem of the biblical narrative.

After the excavations and consolidations up to 1973 (see below) the archaeological site was left unattended during the Israeli occupation period, until the first protective measures, mentioned above, were implemented in 1996, followed by the TBAP project in 2010.

In 2005 the Palestinian Ministry and Department (MoTA-DACH) published, together with UNESCO, the *Inventory of Cultural and Natural Heritage Sites* (Taha 2009, first published in 2005). In this inventory of 20 sites, the 'Old Town of Nablus and its environs' (listed as no. 12) includes Tell Balata for the older periods because of the values of the site and its being endangered by long-term neglect and current population pressure (Figure 6.1).

The Project Proposal

The proposal for the TBAP project had the title: ‘Tell Balata Archaeological Park project. Scientific research, conservation and site management; A joint Palestinian–Dutch expedition in cooperation with UNESCO’. This clearly indicated the sponsorship and the responsible and connected institutions: MoTA-DACH and Leiden University were implementing partners, UNESCO Ramallah Office the executing agency, and the local public institutions, Al-Najah University and the Balata communities were other stakeholders. After the proposal was commonly approved, and funding by the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation secured, the implementing activities took place from 2010 through 2014. Co-funding is done by MoTA-DACH and UNESCO through in-kind contributions. Additional funds came from the Dutch government (through UNESCO) and from a European research project through Leiden University to the added project activities.

The project followed the UNESCO model for world heritage. Thus, its proposal included a description of the site and previous research on it, its diverse significance (Section II), current archaeological research and site management activity (Section IV), and aspects of sustainability and work planning. The two components of the project, scientific study and management planning, are described in a log frame matrix (Section III). An example of such a matrix is provided in Table 6.1. The items listed in the matrix made it easier to stay focused, also when adaptations became necessary.

Table 6.1. Example of a log frame matrix in use

	Develop- ment objectives	Imme- diate objectives or project goals	Expected results	Activities
What has to be done? (intervention logic)				
What are the objectively verifiable indicators of achievement/benchmarks?				
What are the sources and means of verification? (organisational and tangible results)				
What are the (context-) assumptions and the risks of no or partial implementation?				

The Practice of Community Archaeology at Tell Balata and Its Sustainability

In the context of this volume, the focus of this chapter is on the practicalities of heritage management and community archaeology at Tell Balata. Following the modern heritage management policy and practice set out by UNESCO and ICOMOS (see van den Dries and van der Linde 2014b, 128f) the Palestinian DACH has the task of hearing the voices of all stakeholders about the site. This means ‘multivocality’ of interpretation and use of the heritage item and its value, as opposed to ‘mono-vocality’, by which one stakeholder (group) decides about the heritage item, enabling self-centred use (see ICOMOS 2008, 2011).

To be sure, archaeological activities have not only the scientific function of reconstructing societies of the past but also the social role of giving a current society historical roots as part of its iden-

tity, in order to be able to move forward and attempt to survive (see van der Linde and van den Dries 2015, 52f). This dual function was observed during fieldwork for the TBAP project. Comprehensive clearance work was carried out in 2010 (Taha and van der Kooij, eds, 2014b, 159). After the site was cleared of garbage in 2010, hardly any rubbish settled on it due to the measure of employing new guards but apparently also due to a new understanding of the site among the local people. In 2011, excavations were carried out in four main areas, namely Areas 2, 11, 14 and 23, which all yielded considerable archaeological results with respect to the history of the site and of previous excavations (Taha and van der Kooij, eds, 2014b, 103–26). Excavation and clearance work was done by students and workers from the neighbouring villages. Fieldwork in such a densely populated area was not possible without the cooperative attitude of the nearby community. The first step was to understand local community views of the site and what local people's expectations were (see below).

Assessment of Previous Excavations and Development of a Database

These two functions of archaeology – to serve a historical reality and a current and future social reality – made it necessary to deal with two aspects of the previous excavations by German and American teams between 1913 and 1973, within a general assessment of those excavations. The first aspect was an assessment of how the excavations and interpretations were done. For this, the publications and field archives were studied, but fieldwork was also necessary – namely, the clearance of nearly all excavated parts and study of what was left of the remains excavated. After clearance (in 2010), some additional digging (in 2011) was necessary to answer specific questions.

The second aspect (see below) was concerned with how local people were involved with the projects and how interpretive knowledge was distributed among them, as well as how the site was managed, including protective and visitor-friendly measures.

The official Austrian and German excavations under Ernst Sellin (with some Dutch participation) started in 1913 and continued, with breaks, till 1934. Trenching and an architectural approach were used, with almost continuous dump problems. They worked with a very small staff and a large workforce of male and female villagers on the site, and uncovered most of the architectural remains currently visible on the site (Figure 6.2). The American excavations were conducted by a joint team from different US universities, initiated and directed by G. Ernest Wright, and started in 1956 as a follow-up to the German work. The aim was to solve chronological and interpretive problems, but also to add some large-scale excavations to obtain more data about the different periods. The team worked mainly till 1968, with some additions till 1973, gradually using more advanced methods. They had a large staff, and also large numbers of male local workers, including foremen, bringing wage labour to the village. The

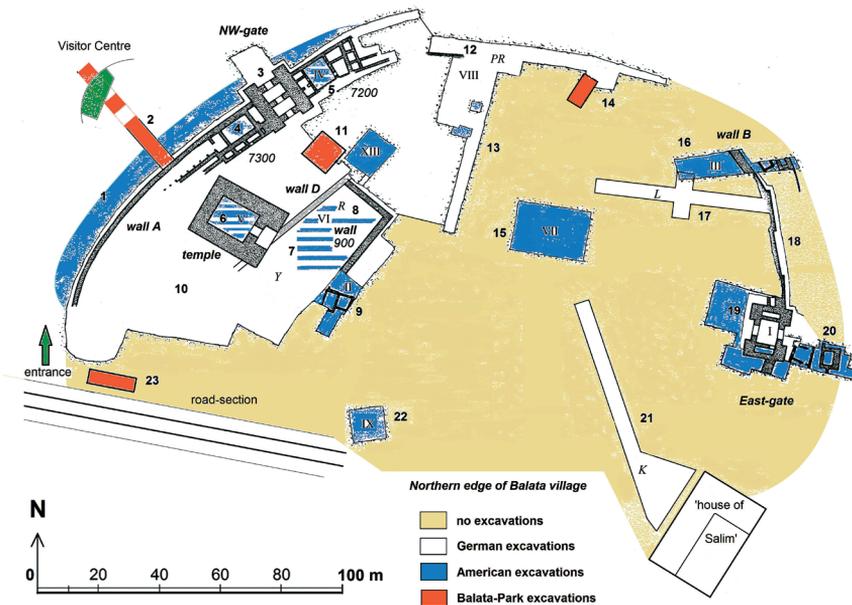


Figure 6.2: Tell Balata site plan with excavated areas (1913–2011).
(Image: Gerrit van der Kooij.)

Americans did much consolidation work at erosive places, as well as also to prepare the site (especially the fortress temple, area 6; see Figure 6.2) for groups of visitors.

As part of the study of archives, much archival material, housed at several institutions (mainly in Jerusalem, in Leiden and at Harvard University), was digitally copied to be made available at the national DACH. The archives were also studied to discover the whereabouts of all of the registered objects, again in connection with DACH's responsibility for its heritage, including cases where objects may have to be returned to Palestine. The German expedition had retrieved more than 3,000 registered objects from the site and the US one around 4,000. Most of these are in museums in Vienna, Leiden, and Jerusalem, and at Harvard University.

Preservation Measures

The assessment of the state of preservation of the archaeological remains was aimed at a better understanding or interpretation of them and possibly even their restoration and reconstruction. At Tell Balata, 23 areas were chosen for this assessment (see Figure 6.2). Additional excavation was limited to four of these, as mentioned above, with specific reasons connected to these spots but also general reasons, such as capacity-building through training, adding carbon-14 dating samples for chronological assessment, and retrieving a selection of objects from different periods to display to visitors in the museum room in the site's visitor's centre, in lieu of objects from previous excavations being returned to the site.

This assessment of the state of preservation made clear that many remains were quite stable. However, many others had changed, some greatly, as a result of erosion or deliberate action. An impressive example is the north-west gate (Area 3), which changed very much after 1914 due to 'stone quarrying' during wartime, but then hardly at all since 1926 (for details see Taha and van der Kooij, eds, 2014b, 34–102).

Community Involvement

As indicated above, the TBAP project was essentially a heritage management project. For implementation, a theoretical introduction was put together to justify and make the right choices based on the principles of UNESCO and ICOMOS and discussions by modern authors. Thus, the 2010 project team, including experienced MoTA-DACH members, discussed the degree of community involvement for this purpose. This discussion was led by two Leiden specialists who subsequently wrote the internal note 'Promotion, Awareness and Education Proposal', as an action plan. This was worked up into the implementation of activities that were largely realised during the 2011 field season through the joint work of Palestinian and Dutch staff and trainees.

As van den Dries and van der Linde note, the four degrees of participation of the community in an archaeological and heritage project may be described as:

- Providing outreach and education activities for dissemination purposes;
- Consultation for purposes of identifying the interests of stakeholders;
- Participation for creating an influential dialogue on goals and decisions; and
- The full empowerment of local communities, characterised by community-led decision-making and research design. (van den Dries and van der Linde 2014b, 130)

The first two degrees are not sustainable because they are limited to the field seasons. For the Tell Balata Archaeological Park project the first three degrees were chosen and applied. This 'Involvement in the sense of participation ... aims to stimulate active partaking by community members and other stakeholders, preferably in all stages of the research and preservation process and decision taking' (van den Dries and van der Linde 2014b, 130).

The direct reasons for actual involvement of the community had to do with the role the Tell has played in the lives of the local

community for several generations, through the sense of it as an oasis in a highly built-up area and also as a source of history and identity. It was seen as important that this role should continue, because community connection with the site is important both for the local people and for the public obligation to take care of this heritage. However, the ‘community’ turned out to consist of some 43 groups of people and organisations, including neighbours, former and current workers on site, local authorities, schoolchildren, refugees from Balata Camp, and tourism police. In order to address these target groups, intermediaries had to be chosen, such as teachers, tour guides and journalists. It turned out that for many public activities the Multipurpose Community Resource Centre (MCRC) in Nablus was very helpful.

For practical reasons (considering constraints of personnel, budget and time), of the many possible activities in this respect, those considered most efficient in reaching target groups were chosen to be realised (van den Dries and van der Linde 2014b, 130–32). Examples include site promotion such as signposting outside the site, site map and trail signage on site, leaflets, an education and awareness programme, the oral history project, site staff training, and the Interpretation Centre. Fortunately, additional funding made other activities possible that were considered important by the implementing and funding parties, namely the teacher’s handbook, the guidebook, the documentary movie and the preliminary website, as well as additional visitor-friendly provisions on site.

Oral History Project

Local traditional knowledge about the site and about the current use and valuation of it by people from the village of Balata, from nearby Balata Camp and from neighbouring villages had to be studied in order to prepare a continuation or improvement of positive attitudes of local people towards the site.

The German expedition did not account for these aspects, apart from in relation to landownership and related rights. Yet

its remarkable wage labour system for male and female villagers working on the site must have had an interesting background and effect: 'Both casual wage labor and money rents served to introduce money into what was essentially a barter economy, and began to create subtle changes' (Ammons 1978, 108). On the other hand, during the US expedition, Linda Ammons did fieldwork in the village as a social anthropologist, also collecting data in the form of 'oral history' about the past, 'as villagers experienced, understood, remembered and finally related it to me' (Ammons 1978, 11). Again, during those excavation seasons (counted till 1966) cash money was important for the villagers, less from rent but more from work by men and boys on site. For a few experienced archaeological workers this economic connection with the site was a reason to continue work on other excavations, and three of these 'came to consider archaeology their profession' (Ammons 1978, 122–23).

So, as a sub-project, the TBAP project collected oral histories concerning the site, as voiced individually by local people, including opinions about what the project should do with it. It should be noted here that 'oral history' writing about villages is something undertaken a lot by people from Palestine, partly because of the very large number of villages destroyed or deserted since 1948, meaning that preserving memories in such a way is the only way to know about them and their histories (see Davis 2011, showing the value of these histories for a Palestinian identity).

The sub-project was implemented during the 2011 field season, when a large team and many villagers were active at the site. As an essential element of community archaeology, the specialists from Leiden University had two students included in the research, to which a local student from Al-Najah University was added, as well as Mr Eyad Thouqan of the Nablus Office, to undertake preparations and implementation (van den Dries and van der Linde 2014a).

The tangible results were a set of taped interviews and reports with details that were partly included right away in the ongoing TBAP project and also in the new Heritage Management Plan.



Figure 6.3: *Stories about Tell Balata*, resulting from the Oral History sub-project. The cover shows Abu Issa on site.
(Photo: Gerrit van der Kooij.)

Not originally scheduled was the Arabic and English publication of a collection of quotes from and photographs of the interviewees, in a booklet distributed among the village families, called *Stories about Tell Balata* (Gazal, Nogarede and Rhebergen 2011), which was subsequently made publicly available with the interviewees' consent.

One of the local excavation foremen of the US expedition was Nasr Dhiab Dweikat (Abu Issa), who continued to work as 'chief technical excavator', as Paul Lapp described his qualifications (letter, 23 July 1969). He was very pleased about the new level of care being taken of the site (see Figure 6.3). He had told imparted a lot of information about the Tell to villagers, including young men, and had lent out to them his copy of Wright's book about 'Shechem' (1965), adding to the villagers' sense of value of (parts of) the site, the author being in the 'school' of Albright, mentioned above.

Public Outreach

Several public events were organised, including opening ceremonies, an 'open day', the inauguration of the Interpretation Centre and a meeting closing the project. In 2010 the opening field activities made local people aware of the new attention being received by the site. A meeting was organised in order to present an accurate picture of this work to them and to representatives of the wider local communities, among them the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, the mayor of Nablus municipality, the district's head, and representatives of the UNESCO office and the Dutch Representation in Ramallah. Short introductions were given, as well as a tour, but of great value were the more personal individual talks and discussions, especially those with local authorities and local inhabitants about how they viewed the site's functioning in the future.

In 2011 the fieldwork season was opened with short speeches by the MoTA minister, the mayor of Nablus, and the two co-directors, in the presence of representatives of a variety of public institutions and stakeholders. A hand-out about the project's activities for the year with a site map, was distributed and the architectural competition for the Interpretation Centre and facilities was presented through large posters. A site tour, introducing the new excavations, was also conducted.

Towards the end of fieldwork in 2011, the TBAP project organised a special day for the local public to inform the community about what had been done and was to be done on site, and to get their feedback. Officially called the Community Day, it turned out to be a real family event with many activities for and by children and adults during the afternoon of 17 July and some 600 people attending. The whole project team, in collaboration with the MCRC in Nablus, prepared this event for the communities of Balata, Nablus and the surrounding areas. It was publicly announced digitally and by paper invitations handed out in the connected villages.

Activities for children were organised, of which pottery mending and a drawing contest (also incorporating flora and fauna on



Figure 6.4: School kids during a visit to the site on the Open Day.
(Photo: Gerrit van der Kooij)

the site) were very popular (Figure 6.4). Children who had participated in the pilot lessons of the summer school (see below) gave explanations to their relatives. Guided tours around the site, prepared using the fixed large site map, took visitors to the places where excavations were ongoing. This made it possible to learn about methods of excavation and the processing and interpretation of the remains of the many buildings and small objects found, leading also to discussions about relations between these buildings and objects and known historical events. Small exhibitions showed photographs of earlier excavations, which turned out to be highly interesting especially for the villagers who ‘were there’ at the time and for their children. The results of a contest to design the park were also exhibited, as well as artists’ impressions of how the new visitors’ centre would look. In addition, the 30-page bilingual booklet *Stories about Tell Balata* was handed out. The event was highly appreciated by the participants, and the day was covered extensively by local and international radio and television.

Education and Public Awareness: The Key Strategies of Public Archaeology at Tell Balata

Another approach to connecting the local and national public with the site and the history it represents is education, in the senses both of developing public awareness and of school education (Lorenzon and Zermani 2016; see also Chapters 8 and 9 in this volume). Public awareness was promoted through special public events, such as public opening and closing events, in particular the open day. Another way in which this was practised was through informing the people who worked on the site alongside the excavation teams about the goals and results of this fieldwork.

School Education

This started because it became clear that local children were highly interested in the site and what it might tell us (van den Dries, van der Kooij and van der Linde 2014). A teaching programme, with on- and off-site lessons, was designed mainly by a Dutch primary school teacher to bring the archaeological history of Palestine, and in particular that of Tell Balata and surroundings, to the attention of schoolchildren. The method of doing so was to involve the children in the subject in different ways, based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983), using instruction cards and field activities. A teacher's manual with a box for lesson materials was prepared and used, and was further adapted during the pilot lessons. One adaptation was the 'biology' lesson, since flora and fauna were well represented in the TBAP and some children had needless fears about some of the specimens. During two summer seasons, these lessons were given in English and Arabic at the annual summer school organised by the MCRC in Nablus, jointly with volunteers of that school and with students of Al-Najah University, as well staff members of the project. The children came mainly from the centre of Nablus and Balata Camp and participated in groups of more than 20 children.

A short description of the lessons as conducted (quoted from the teacher's report) follows:

Children (9–12 years old)

Lesson 1: Site visit: the children ask questions about the site.

Lesson 2: School activity: circuit lessons about artefacts and historical context.

- Pot fixing
- Timeline
- Historical site maps
- Historical texts
- Objects

Lesson 3: Site visit: becoming a young archaeologist.

- Archaeological drawings
- Buildings and monuments
- Reconstructing the past

Youth (13–19 years old)

Lesson 1: School activity: lecture about archaeology.

Lesson 2: Site visit: experiencing archaeology.

- Excavation
- Technical drawing (stratigraphy and plans)
- Pot fixing
- Cleaning and management

This programme worked out well; the children were ready for the lessons to an unexpected degree. Consequently, and with the encouragement of other institutions working in Palestine, a teachers' handbook about the archaeology of Palestine, and Tell Balata in particular, was produced in order to enable follow-up

teaching after the project had ended. This was meant for teachers of children in two age groups, 6–9 and 10–12 years old, and was produced in English and Arabic versions (Taha and van der Kooij, eds, 2014a), with additional subsidy from the Archaeology in Contemporary Europe (ACE) network at Leiden University in 2012. It contained introductory texts (mainly adapted from the TBAP guidebook; Taha and van der Kooij 2014), about the archaeology, heritage, and flora and fauna of the site. This was followed by fully prepared lessons with activity sheets, instruction cards and timeline cards, with drawings and design by Martin Hense. Apart from school excursions to sites, heritage and cultural education is not yet a well-developed element in school curricula. For that reason the teaching programme was given a wider scope to potentially become a regular element of the curriculum. In order to achieve that purpose, contacts with the education authorities were established through the MCRC and the related ministries.

Logo Contest

Through the project team's contacts with Al-Najah University, a logo competition was held by the project team and Al-Najah teachers among students of the Department of Architecture and Fine Arts. An information sheet explaining the requirements was distributed, giving the students an opportunity to get to know the heritage site and to visit it in order to design an appropriate logo. The proposed designs of nine students were exhibited at the open day, and a professional jury from among the project team and university teachers chose the winning entry.

Tourism and Site Promotion

Together with community awareness, site promotion is an essential element of heritage management (including promotional material; see van den Dries and van der Linde 2014c). Promotional activities and tangible results (all produced locally) included:

- leaflet/brochure (others were started: entrance ticket design, colourful posters and postcards);
- website (note the increase of Google hits on ‘Tell Balata’ or ‘Shechem’);
- external road signage;
- site map/plan, with information/timeline, placed on site;
- trail signage with trail guiding ‘fences’;
- an Interpretation Centre with multiple ways of informing visitors (see below); and
- site staff training.

Tourism

An important goal of the TBAP project was to promote visits, especially by tourists, with the potential to provide economic benefit for the management of the site and for the surrounding villages. It would also have a social benefit, especially in the Nablus region, since this had been closed until 2008 following the 2000 intifada.

In the current situation, foreign visitors may be distinguished into two groups: group tourists (around 90%), mainly interested in the temple area for religious reasons; and individual visitors or small groups (around 10%), generally interested in the site as a whole and the excavations and their results. A strategy to attract more visitors was discussed, and several promotional activities were implemented (partly by students) in 2011, as listed above.

Measures for sustainability at the TBAP were also recommended, such as keeping the website updated; maintaining relations with stakeholders via newsletters etc.; organising special activities on site (with the help of local public relations professionals from the municipality, or Project Hope and Al-Najah University); and selling merchandise (food and beverages, *kanafeh* pastry, souvenirs, soap). Furthermore, it was felt that the site and its park should be mentioned in travel guides, as well as on tourist websites, and among tour operators. It was also indicated that it is worthwhile to attract individual or small-group tourism because

such visitors have more freedom when travelling, rather than large-group tourism, especially of a religious nature, because the latter tends to be tightly scheduled and ‘already covered and managed by the existing (Israeli) tourism sector’ (van den Dries and van der Linde 2014c, 158).

Social Media

In 2011, several steps were taken to implement a limited social media strategy. An English version of a project website was made available online on 30 June 2011 to inform about the project, although this is no longer available. It hosted general information, a site description, visitor information and a news section. General updates on the project implementation were provided. The site leaflets (Arabic and English), maps and oral history booklet could be downloaded, as well as academic literature and a site visit explanation. MoTA-DACH worked on an Arabic translation to be incorporated. Some project information was also available on the former website of the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, also with Arabic text, and on the UNESCO and Leiden University websites. After the conclusion of the project, the site continued to be promoted on the website of the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.¹

The Interpretation Centre: the Hub of Public Archaeology

This centre was proposed to include ‘on-site display of artefacts, ticket office, gift shop, cafeteria, restrooms, etc. A separate small building will house the security personnel.’ It was a major sub-project to implement the design and construction of the Interpretation Centre. Local companies were contracted for it after contest and bidding procedures. As demanded, it includes the basic necessities for visitors, an office for the park staff, and two rooms for interpretive goals, namely a museum and an audience hall for all sorts of meetings, including digital presentation of the



Figure 6.5: The Interpretation Centre, just after its inauguration, 24 June 2013.

(Photo: Gerrit van der Kooij)

documentary film. It was officially inaugurated on 24 June 2013 (Figure 6.5), together with the visitors' trail and the accompanying signposts and guiding arrows. The beautiful building is located in the north-west corner of the fenced part of the site, as a test trench (Area 2, excavated in 2011; see Figure 6.2) had shown that the ancient site did not extend there. Here, the Interpretation Centre is connected with the newly made main entrance to the site from the road that enters the village from the west. As 'additional activities', the outside parking lot and sidewalk (alongside the stratigraphic section) are well constructed, as are the gate to the site and the bordering fence parts. Also, the access path to the Centre was made accessible, for example for visitors with mobility difficulties.

A major attraction of this visitors' centre is the documentary film (*Tell Balata: Uncrowned Queen of Palestine*) introducing the site, the archaeological work and the historical results. It was produced by an external studio, supervised by the implementing parties, and includes excellent 3D animations.

The inside walls of the centre are decorated with large photo-prints of the previous excavations that establish the historical-archaeological connection between villagers and the site. Another tool to help familiarise visitors with the site is the guidebook (Taha and van der Kooij 2014), in English and Arabic versions. It provides information about the results of archaeological research not focusing on religiously oriented interpretations but rather stressing the very visible remains of the flourishing city during the Bronze Age and taking seriously all societies that have left some remains of their presence here through time. Also, the on-site flora and fauna are dealt with, partly as a link to past natural conditions.

The name 'Interpretation Centre' is programmatic for its purpose and activities: providing varieties of interpretation and explaining choices based on academic research (including the quality of research) and public interest/value attribution. The Interpretation Centre is the place in which to stage this variation and discuss diverging valuations as a result of its principle of multivocality. An example, as given above, is the finalising of the theoretical background. Two other examples concern, first, an Iron Age II complex. Archaeological research does not support any biblical identification with the remains of the large Middle Bronze Age IIB temple, but for large groups of visitors that identification is the value of those remains, together with the standing stone in front. For these groups, coming by bus, the large artificial platform already prepared by the US expedition was restored and consolidated. The third example concerns the Park's guidebook (Taha and van der Kooij 2014, 20, 27ff), which describes Iron Age II results from Area 15 (US Field VII) with attention given to the cultural and political complexity of that period, and not converging to biblical-historical constructions.

The Interpretation Centre is a sign of the sustainability of the Archaeological Park, which is open, well managed and staffed, guarded, and ready to receive visitors, local and international, almost daily. The complex is also ready for the future. After the implementation of the project, the new Management Plan was

produced in 2014 as an internal handbook for short- and longer-term activities of heritage management and social archaeology. It is a living document, dealing with eventual possibilities and needs and intended to ensure actions on the site in accordance with international standards.

Notes

- 1 <https://www.travelpalestine.ps>.

References

- Ammons, L. 1978. 'West Bank Arab Villagers: The Influence of National and International Politics on Village Peasant Life'. PhD thesis, Harvard University.
- Davis, R.A. 2011. *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Dodd, L. and R. Boytner. 2010. 'The Future of Palestinian Cultural Heritage'. *Present Pasts* 2 (1): 2–15. <https://doi.org/10.5334/pp.18>.
- Dries, M.H. van den and S.J. van der Linde. 2014a. 'Community Involvement'. In *Tell Balata: Changing Landscape*, edited by H. Taha and G. van der Kooij, 133–41. Ramallah: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities – Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage.
- Dries, M.H. van den and S.J. van der Linde. 2014b. 'Introduction to the Promotion, Awareness Raising and Education Strategy'. In *Tell Balata: Changing Landscape*, edited by H. Taha and G. van der Kooij, 127–32. Ramallah: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities – Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage.
- Dries, M.H. van den and S.J. van der Linde. 2014c. 'Tourism and Site Promotion'. In *Tell Balata: Changing Landscape*, edited by H. Taha and G. van der Kooij, 149–59. Ramallah: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities – Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage.
- Dries, M.H. van den, H.L. van der Kooij and S.J. van der Linde. 2014. Education. In *Tell Balata: Changing Landscape*, edited by H. Taha and G. van der Kooij, 141–49. Ramallah: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities – Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage.
- Gardner, H. 1983. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.

- Gazal, W.A., S.-J. Nogarede and A. Rhebergen. 2011. *Stories about Tell Balata*. Ramallah: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities – Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage.
- ICOMOS. 2013. *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*. Burwood, Victoria: ICOMOS. Accessed 28 August 2022. <https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/2145>.
- ICOMOS. 2011. *The Paris Declaration on Heritage as a Driver of Development*. Paris: ICOMOS. Accessed 6 January 2022. www.icomos.org/Paris2011/GA2011_Declaration_de_Paris_EN_20120109.pdf.
- ICOMOS. 2008. *The ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites*. Paris: ICOMOS. Accessed 6 January 2022. http://icip.icomos.org/downloads/ICOMOS_Interpretation_Charter_ENG_04_10_08.pdf.
- Linde, S.J. van der and M.H. van den Dries. 2015. 'Creative Archaeology'. In *Fernweh: Crossing Borders and Connecting People in Archaeological Heritage Management. Essays in Honour of Prof. Willem J.H. Willems*, edited by M.H. van den Dries, S.J. van der Linde and A. Strecker, 51–55. Leiden: Sidestone Press.
- Lorenzon, M. and I. Zermani. 2016. 'Common Ground: Community Archaeology in Egypt, Interaction between Population and Cultural Heritage'. *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage* 3 (3): 183–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20518196.2016.1207833>.
- Sherrard, B. 2011. 'American Biblical Archaeologists and Zionism: The Politics of Historical Ethnography'. PhD thesis, Florida State University.
- Silberman, N.A. 1982. *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archaeology, and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1799–1917*. New York: Knopf.
- Taha, H. 2019. 'Palestinian Historical Narrative'. In *A New Critical Approach to the History of Palestine*, edited by I. Hjelm, H. Taha, I. Pappé and T. Thompson, 17–42. London and New York: Routledge.
- Taha, H. 2010. 'The Current State of Archaeology in Palestine'. *Present Pasts* 2 (1): 16–25. <https://doi.org/10.5334/pp.17>.
- Taha, H., ed. 2009. *Inventory of Cultural and Natural Heritage Sites of Potential Outstanding Universal Value in Palestine*, 2nd edition. Ramallah: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.
- Taha, H. and G. van der Kooij. 2020. 'Tell Balata (Shechem): An Archaeological and Historical Reassessment'. In *Biblical Narratives, Archaeology and Historicity: Essays in Honour of Thomas L. Thompson*, edited by L. Niesiolowski-Spanò and E. Pfoh, 62–75. London: T & T Clark.
- Taha, H. and G. van der Kooij. 2014. *Tell Balata Archaeological Park. Guidebook*. Ramallah: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities – Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage.
- Taha, H. and G. van der Kooij. 2007. *The Water Tunnel System at Khirbet Bal'ama*. Khirbet Bal'ama Archaeological Project. Report of the

- 1996–2000 excavations and surveys, Vol. II. Ramallah: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities – Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage.
- Taha, H. and G. van der Kooij, eds. 2014a. *Teacher's Handbook for Archaeological Heritage in Palestine*. Ramallah: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities – Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage.
- Taha, H. and G. van der Kooij., eds. 2014b. *Tell Balata, Changing Landscape*. Ramallah: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities – Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage.
- Taha, H. and I. Saca. 2023. 'Invoking Awneh: Community Heritage in Palestine'. In *Community Heritage in the Arab Region: Values and Practices*, edited by A. Badran, S. Abu-Khafajah and S. Elliott, 235–60. Cham: Springer Nature.
- Wright, G.E. 1965. *Shechem: The Biography of a Biblical City*. London: Duckworth.
- Yahya, A.H. 2005. 'Archaeology and Nationalism in the Holy Land'. In *Archaeologies of the Middle East: Critical Perspectives*, edited by S. Pollock and R. Bernbeck, 66–77. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.