Basic information on Temple Mount Salvage Operation

Project Background

In October 1999, the Islamic Waqf, the Moslem trust, and the Islamic Movement conducted an illegal construction operation on the south-east corner of the Temple Mount. This operation included a dig which inflicted much irreparable archaeological damage. These actions are also part of a general trend by the Islamic Waqf to prevent any archaeological research on the mount that may reveal elements of its Jewish past. But the main goal of this construction was to create "facts on the ground" by turning every vacant point on the mount into a mosque. The Waqf also converted the underground chamber that they dug out and the entrance to it, known as "Solomon's Stables" into a Mosque for prayer, the third on the Temple Mount.

The earth from this shameful operation, bursting with archeological wealth relevant to Jewish, Christian and Moslem history, was removed by heavy machinery and unceremoniously dumped by trucks into the nearby Kidron Valley. Although the archeological finds in the earth are already not *in situ*, this soil still contains great archeological potential. No archeological excavation was ever conducted on the Temple Mount, and this soil is the only archeological information that has ever been available to anyone.

The first task of our project was moving the earth from the Kidron Valley to the Tzurim Valley National Park. Some of the soil was then sifted by a mechanical portable screener, in order to minimize the amount of sifting done by hand. We then began to manually sift the rest of the soil. We began a process of washing the material and scrutinizing it to identify all the archaeological artifacts.

The archaeological importance of the project

Our (and your) finds are unique because they are part of the first archaeological project that has ever examined artifacts from the Temple Mount. Therefore, every find is very important and exceptional. Even the smallest piece of pottery that you find can be dated to a certain period of history which, when processed statistically, will help us understand the amount and types of activities that took place on the Temple Mount throughout history.

The project's deeper meaning

Of course, we also consider our work with the earth from the Temple Mount to be an expression of our spiritual connection to this wonderful and holy place that was, and remains a vital part of our history and culture.

When we began the project we couldn't imagine that we would receive such an enormous amount of help. We thought that after a few months we would have seen the last volunteer and sifted through most of the debris, but in a short time, we realized that this was not the case. It is no coincidence that this type of project depends on volunteers' participation. This project is not a task for a small, clique of archaeologists, but rather a responsibility, duty and

privilege of the entire Jewish people and those who support them. Therefore, this undertaking cannot be a brief operation over within a few months, but a meaningful and sustained project lasting many years. This idea is movingly expressed in the Book of Psalms:

> *Thou wilt arise, and have compassion upon Zion; for it is time to be gracious unto her, for the appointed time is come: For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and love her dust* (psalms 102: 14-15).

אַתָּה תָקוּם, תְּרַחֵם צִיּוֹן: כִּי-עֵת לְחָנְנָהּ, כִּי-בָא מוֹעֵד: כִּי-רָצוּ עֲבָדֶיךָ, אֶת-אֲבָנֶיהָ; וְאֶת-עֲפָרָהּ, יְחֹנֵנוּ (תהלים קב, יד-טו)

So what do volunteers actually do?

Volunteers help us in the wet sifting phase of the work. Begin by choosing a bucket with material soaked in water, spill it onto a screen and spread the mud out evenly. Each screen has a hose for washing off the mud. Make sure you also wash out any mud that may still be inside the bucket.

Once you have thoroughly washed the material, scan it for any item that looks man-made. Generally, there are six common types of finds that you should be looking for: 1. Pottery 2. Glass shards 3. Bones 4. Metals 5. Mosaic stones 6. Worked stones. Rarer finds such as: coins, seals or jewelry, may also turn up and should be given to the archaeologist on site for registration.

After all relevant items are removed; a member of the staff will check the screen and approve the disposal of the remaining stones.

Volunteering information

Our work hours are Sunday-Thursday 8:00-16:00 and Fridays 8:00-12:00. There is a fee of 15 NIS for adults and 10 NIS for children to participate in the project and a minimum of 2 hours participation time. There is no fee for people who wish to volunteer for no less than one complete day.

There is no age limit, but children must be at least 3 feet high in order to reach the screens. Volunteers should come with comfortable work clothes and shoes that they won't mind dirtying, since the work is outdoors and involves both water and mud.

There is no accommodation for volunteers who wish to come for a long period, but we may be able to assist with finding them transportation to and from the sifting site. Volunteers should also bring their own lunch to work.

The work is done under a shelter during summer and inside a greenhouse during the rainy season.

Reaching the sifting site

The worksite is inside the Tzurim Valley National Park, which is on the southern slopes of Mt. Scopus, right below the Brigham Young University complex. There is direct access to the site by car through Atur Road – Ben Advayah Street, right above Ibrahamiah college.

People who intend to arrive by bus should take a bus that terminates at The Hebrew University on Mt. Scopus (Har Hazofim) and get off just before the

university tunnel (with the guard after he checks the bus). There is a 10-15 minute walk along the road (Mazar St.) adjacent to the southern fence of the university. At the end of the road, turn right towards Beit Orot and the Smithsonian University, cross the road and continue until you see a brown sign that says "Tzurim Valley". Go down the valley path until you see a large tent with the sign "Temple Mount Salvage Operation".

כי רצו עבדיך את אבניה ואת עפרה יחוננו (תהלים קב, ט"ו)

"For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and love her dust"

For further information and registration please call:
1-800-25-24-23 (groups) 054-2074976