

The Archaeology Council

(Under the Antiquities Act 5736- 1978, Article 34)

April 2, 2016

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Minister of Culture and Sports, Mrs. Miri Regev

Director General of the Israel Antiquities Authority, Mr. Israel Hasson

Dear Sirs and Madam,

I have the honor to convey to you this Opinion decided by the Archaeology Council at its last meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Ronny Reich, Chairman

The Archaeology Council's resolution at its meeting on March 17, 2016

The Archaeology Council calls on the Prime Minister, the Minister of Culture and the director general of the Israel Antiquities Authority

To prevent immediately the damage to the site of the Archaeological Park (Robinson's Arch) at the foot of the Western Wall.

The Archaeological Park at the foot of the southern end of the Western Wall extends today over less than 60 meters out of the total length of the Western Wall. Immediately after the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, the area south to the ramp rising to the Mughrabi Gate, also known as "Robinson's Arch", was designated for revealing and presentation of the remains of Jerusalem's past. All this was done in order to distinguish between this area and the area of the Western Wall which serves as a prayer area. And indeed, for decades Prof. Benjamin Mazar and others have dug here and unearthed multi-impressive remains from the Second Temple, stunning in their level of preservation. The highlight in this area is the cobblestone paved street running along the Western Wall, that was preserved in whole, flanked by shops on both its sides that served the pilgrims who came to the Temple Mount. On top of the ancient street and the shops were revealed huge fallen blocks of stone, which are the remains of the destruction of the Western Wall by the Romans in 70 AD. The street and the fallen blocks above it, as well as the pillar that was bearing the Robinson's Arch and above it the monumental staircase on which all the pilgrims were ascending towards the Temple Mount, express the unique glory of this city, especially in this central location at the foot of the Temple Mount, and give a tangible illustration to its destruction, which left its impression on the history of the Jewish people forever. There is nothing in the world that can be compared to this site, by the level of preservation found in similar archeological relics in Jerusalem and elsewhere in remains of the ancient world, that enable a better illustration of the events of that time. Especially noteworthy are the piles of fallen stones of the Western Wall on the ancient Street. It is the only place where one can see and touch the remains of the destruction that befell the people of Israel, after which the whole nation keeps a fast and mourning every year on Tisha B'Av. These remains of the destruction have an immense historical and educational value.

This is a Jewish – and global - heritage site of first importance. Preservation of the remains in their proper place is the highest archeological, public, educational and cultural necessity.

The Archaeological Park of Robinson's Arch has been severely damaged after the Supreme Court decision in 2003 ordering to allow prayer in this area, followed by closing of all the northern and western parts of the park to visitors (including part of the area where the fallen stones are) and the making of a separate entrance way to another prayer area adjacent to the Western Wall. Recently, another raised platform and area for events was established, on an additional area of 500 square meters. As one can see immediately when visiting the site, these platforms pose a severe damage to the appearance of the site, and to the route on which visitors are supposed to walk, hence diminishing by a great deal the ability to give explanation at the site. Therefore, all these additions have to be removed as soon as possible. The recently proposed plan doubles the area of prayer platforms and will only continue to add damage to the site.

The Archaeology Council appeals to the government and the governmental agencies to prevent the serious archaeological damage – the one that was already done, as well as the one planned to be done on this unique site.