

FIELDWORK: COMMUNITY SURVEY AT TELL BALATA, PALESTINE

July 29, 2016 Krijn Boom Bronze Age, Community Archaeology, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2016, Palestine, Public Archaeology, Survey Archaeology, community, Palestine, Public Archaeology, Social inclusion, survey, UNESCO, World Heritage

Hello again! As you might remember, for last year's Day of Archaeology I wrote a [blog](#) on my fieldwork in Southern Germany, as part of the European [NEARCH](#) project and as part of my PhD Research at the [Faculty of Archaeology at Leiden University](#). This year's blog entry comes from the same project and is included, partly, in my PhD Research as well. Therefore, I will not include the results of the fieldwork but instead focus on the practicalities of doing a community survey and, perhaps more importantly, the fun one can have when doing fieldwork in a foreign country.

During the summer of last year, in August, a party of four, including yours truly, departed from Schiphol Amsterdam. Their destination? An old town called [Balata](#), which is situated within one of the largest cities in the West Bank: Nablus. Within that old town, an even older town once stood proud between the mountains Gerizim and Ebal, functioning as a cultural hotspot and trade hub directing traffic from east to west. Identified as the ancient city of Shechem, archaeological remains date back as far as the 4th millennium BC: The Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze ages. During the decades that followed, the city collapsed multiple times and its remaining ruins formed a small hill: a so-called 'tell'. Some of those ruins are still visible today; the park is open for visitors and has [a website](#) as well. Together with the old town of Nablus, the park is listed on the [UNESCO tentative](#) list since 2012, in preparation for its inclusion as World Heritage.

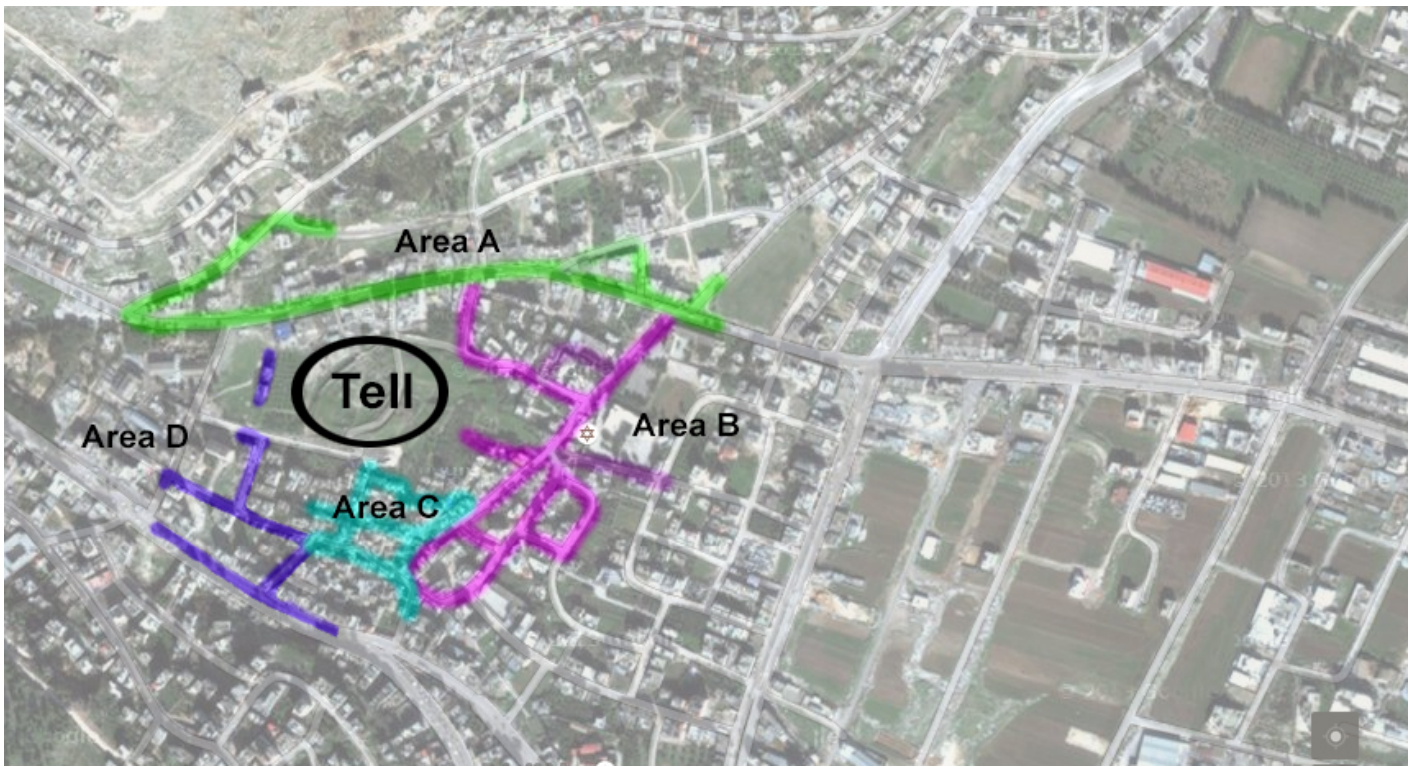


View on the East Gate at the Tell Balata Archaeological Park

Within the NEARCH project, a team of specialists from various European countries are investigating the effects of World Heritage inscription on the local communities living on, or near those inscribed sites. Because the Faculty of Archaeology has a long running relationship with the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities – MOTA-DACH, a plan was proposed to, together with the local authorities there, perform a pilot-study on the possible effects of World Heritage inscription. Both the specialists within the team as well as the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities agreed and a fieldwork project was prepared for August 2015 for Tell Balata.

This was the first research project within NEARCH to focus on those effects, so a new and commensurable survey needed to be created. This was done based on theories and methodologies from the field of social impact analysis within the cultural heritage sector. Inspiration for creating the list of questions came, for example, from *'Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participating in the Arts'*, a book written by [François Matarasso](#) in 1997. Within this study, Matarasso lists a large number of indicators, or topics which can be measured, under 6 different themes connected to social impact, such as *social cohesion*, *personal development* and *local image and identity*. However, for this survey questions about the impact of World Heritage inscription and specific questions about the daily use of the Tell needed to be included as well. For example, questions such as 'how often do you visit the site?', 'do you feel connected to the site?' and 'Do you experience positive effects from the park for the neighbourhood?' were included. The final questionnaire was translated into Arabic since the plan was to venture into the neighbourhood ourselves, with the help of a local volunteer acting as translator.

To perform the survey as best as we could – aiming at a high number of response but also at a high quality of those responses, we split into four groups of two – each researcher having his or her own translator hailing from Balata itself or from Nablus. We then ventured into the surrounding area of the tell and performed the surveys with the local community members, who were often very willing to help and offered us more Arabic coffee and tea than we could ever drink. The responses to the questions were very helpful to get an insight into the social and economic impact and often revealed interesting information on people's relation to the archaeological site. There were for instance multiple older people who still remembered helping to excavate at the site during the 70's and 80's. Younger interviewees mostly know the site as a place to relax, walk through or play football. Being in the Palestine for the first time in my life, the fieldwork made a huge impact on me. I vividly recall the first day of the fieldwork, when I was invited to a birthday celebration party of 2 siblings of a very large family. This resulted in me having pleasant talks with about a dozen family members – almost all at once – while eating delicious foods and drinking excellent coffee. They were overwhelmingly friendly and hospitable (and proved to be a rich source for survey responses as well); I had great fun, but was also terribly exhausted at the end of that day from all the impressions!



The four areas surveyed

By the end of the fieldwork, the four of us had gathered more than 200 survey responses from 4 different areas of the old town, an incredible result thanks in no small part to the translators who not only translated for us the responses to the questions, but also helped us to get accustomed to local traditions, culture and the surroundings. The results from these surveys are currently being researched by the Faculty of Archaeology and will be published next year, but a teaser will of course be published on the Day of Archaeology's 2017 edition, so keep an eye out for that!

Ma'a Salama!