

---

# The Necropolis of Bet She'arim (Israel) No 1471

---

## Official name as proposed by the State Party

The Necropolis of Bet She'arim – A Landmark of Jewish Renewal

## Location

The Northern District  
Emek Yizreal Regional Council  
Qiryat Tiv'on Local Council  
Israel

## Brief description

The necropolis of Bet She'arim, a series of man-made catacombs was developed from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE as the primary Jewish burial place outside Jerusalem following the failure of the second Jewish revolt against Roman rule. Located in the hilly region south-east of Haifa, overlooking the Vale of Jezre'el, the catacombs are a treasury of eclectic art works and inscriptions in Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew. Bet She'arim is associated with Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, the spiritual and political leader of the Jewish people who compiled the *Mishna* and is credited with Jewish renewal after 135 CE.

## Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

## 1 Basic data

### Included in the Tentative List

31 January 2002

### International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

### Date received by the World Heritage Centre

24 January 2014

## Background

This is a new nomination.

## Consultations

ICOMOS consulted its International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management and several independent experts.

## Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 7 to 10 September 2014.

## Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 21 August 2014 requesting a map showing the relationship of the nominated property boundary to the identified features of the property and a timetable for finalisation of legislation of the property as a National Park. A response was received on 24 September 2014. A second letter was sent to the State Party following the ICOMOS Panel in December 2014 regarding possible acceleration of finalisation of legislative protection of the buffer zone and a response was received on 28 February 2015. The information has been incorporated below.

## Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

12 March 2015

## 2 The property

### Description

The nominated property comprises 33 subterranean complexes dug out of soft limestone and dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. These cover a wide range of architectural and decorative burial types, from small family caves to large public complexes with several rooms. Burials were in *loculi*, *arcosolia*, *kokhim*, pit graves, simple and double-trough tombs with sarcophagi and coffins made out of wood, lead, pottery, local stone and marble and sometimes bodies were buried without a coffin. There is also evidence of secondary burial of bones in a clay ossuary and of reburial without an ossuary. The property area of 12.2ha covers the excavated complexes, the areas between them and the estimated extent of the necropolis.

### Northern section (Section I)

This includes Catacombs 12-31, the most notable of which are Catacombs 14 and 20. Both have courtyards and triple-arched facades carved in the rock face. It is thought that the tomb of Rabbi Judah may be the one in the rear room of Catacomb 14 but there is no direct evidence. Catacomb 20, the largest tomb in the necropolis contains over 130 limestone sarcophagi decorated with Hellenistic and Roman motifs including wreaths, heraldic eagles, schematic bulls' heads, the menorah, lions, gazelle, and bearded human figures and bearing inscriptions of family names in Hebrew. To the west is a group of square cist graves containing lead coffins with Roman period reliefs, two with Jewish symbols. It is thought that these were brought here from one of the Phoenician cities.

### Western section (Section II)

This comprises 7 catacombs including Catacombs 1-4, Hell's Cave, Sih Cave and Catacomb 11 with an adjacent mausoleum. Catacombs 1-4 known as the Menorah Caves contain reliefs and paintings of Jewish motifs including the menorah and the Torah Ark. These are executed in the style typical of Jewish popular art of the Roman period showing both eastern and Hellenistic influences. Other motifs in these and the other caves

include geometric designs, men, horses and lions, boats, shells and architectural elements. The ruins of the mausoleum dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, comprise four ashlar facades, one decorated with an animal frieze, and contained a marble sarcophagus carved with a relief of Leda and the Swan, which was removed to the Rockefeller Museum. The Sih cave was used as a water cistern during the British mandate period (1918-1940) and then as a store room and rifle-range for the Jewish Ha-Haganah resistance organisation.

#### North-western section (Section III)

This section contains Catacombs 5-10 which have been only partly excavated. The arched entrance to Catacomb 6 led to a mosaic-paved court opening into halls. Catacombs 7 and 8 contain engraved menorah and inscriptions. ICOMOS notes that a further unexcavated cave opening off Catacomb 6 was exposed by looters. Cave 33 located further to the north-west was excavated in a salvage operation in 1982 but has not been conserved.

#### History and development

Following the unsuccessful second Jewish Revolt known as the Bar-Kokhba Revolt against Roman control of Jerusalem (132-5 CE), the Jewish leadership (*Sanhedrin*) moved to the town of Bet She'arim in Lower Galilee, where Rabbi Judah the Patriarch became its head in 165 CE. As the spiritual and political leader of the Jewish people he subsequently repaired relations with the Roman governors and is credited with Jewish renewal following the devastation of 132-5 CE. The compilation and editing of Jewish oral law into a written codex covering religious and social behaviour, known as the *Mishna* and still used today, is attributed to the work of Rabbi Judah and the *Sanhedrin* while they were based at Bet She'arim.

The town of Bet She'arim for which the necropolis developed is identified with the adjacent hill known as Sheikh Abreik, whose settlement history as derived from surface pottery goes back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Only a small part of the hill has been investigated and the earliest architectural fragments date from the Herodian period (first century BCE to first century CE). The town is not included in the nominated property boundary but the excavated part on the northern slope of the hill is within the buffer zone. Excavations have exposed a synagogue dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE and an earlier domestic building, which is thought by some scholars to possibly have been the house of Rabbi Judah. A Basilica with remains of geometric mosaics was excavated further to the west. The excavations indicated that the settlement declined at the end of the Byzantine period, suggesting that the use of the cemetery ceased following the Gallus rebellion in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century CE, however subsequent studies suggest that its use continued into the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries.

According to Talmudic tradition Rabbi Judah had prepared his tomb in the cemetery at Bet She'arim and was buried

there c 220 CE. The nomination dossier proposes that his burial there led to its becoming the favoured place of burial for other Rabbis of the Patriarchate and their extended families, as well as for Jews from all the neighbouring regions. ICOMOS notes that Rabbi Judah lived his last 17 years at Sepphoris after the *Sanhedrin* moved there and according to one source (*Gelilot Eretz Yisrael*) he was buried there.

The archaeological remains on the ancient mound were first noticed by French traveller Victor Guérin in 1865. Two catacombs were mapped by Conder and Kitchener of the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1872, but the site was not excavated until 1929 on behalf of the Israel Exploration Society and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The excavations were instigated by Jewish pioneer Alexander Zayd who built his home on the mound in the 1920s and noticed the archaeological remains. Excavation continued with interruption during WWII until 1958. The site was established unofficially as a National Park from the late 1950s and designated as "Bet She'arim Antiquities" (Plan G/325). The current layout and planting of the park derives from the landscape plan of the 1960s. At that time Catacombs 14 and 20 (the façade of the latter was partially reconstructed), a small visitors' centre and a small museum in the Cistern/Glass Workshop 28 were opened to the public.

During the 1990s interpretation panels were provided in a small central piazza. From 2006-2010 conservation works in Section II enabled these catacombs to be opened to the public but by controlled, guided visitation only.

### 3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity

#### Comparative analysis

Within Israel, the State Party has compared the nominated property with the first century CE monumental tombs in Jerusalem; burial caves of the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine period at Maresha-Bet Guvrin (2014, criterion (v)) where there are Jewish *hypogea* of similar period to those at Bet She'arim with direct parallels in the case of the menorah caves, and the Roman period necropolis at Zippori (Sepphoris). This last has not been fully excavated but contains some burial caves similar to the small catacombs and inscriptions similar to those found at Bet She'arim. Comparative properties outside Israel include the Shatby necropolis at Alexandria, Egypt; the catacombs in Rome; Petra, Jordan (1985, criteria (i), (iii) & (iv)) and Mdina, Malta (Tentative List).

The State Party argues that despite certain similarities in date, design, artwork and function with these other necropoli, Bet She'arim is an exceptional case of great interest because it reflects the character of the Jewish people through the personality of its great leader Rabbi Judah the Patriarch and the association with his *opus magnum* the *Mishna*, the first redacted Jewish codex. It is argued that the assemblage of artworks and

inscriptions attest to Jewish integration into the surrounding culture resulting in religious tolerance as promoted by Rabbi Judah. ICOMOS considers that the attribution of the adoption of Roman-style tombs to Rabbi Judah's ideas of tolerance is not supported by any directly connecting evidence. It is noted that evidence at Jewish cemeteries in the Diaspora such as Egypt, Cyrene, Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus, Arabia, Greece, Eastern and Western Europe, North Africa and Asia Minor indicates that diasporic burial practices were often locally determined and commonly reflected the behaviours and attitudes of surrounding Jewish, pagan, and Christian populations as much as, if not more than, biblical or Levantine antecedents.

Rabbi Judah's burial at Bet She'arim is said to have drawn those of the Jewish elite from far and wide, just as the burial of Christian saints attracted others to be buried near them in other places. Regarding Rome, the State Party argues that just as the Christian catacombs in Rome contain a treasury of early Christian art including pagan and Jewish influences important for the understanding of early Christianity, so the Jewish necropolis at Bet She'arim contains artwork of supreme importance for the history of Judaism in the post-Second Temple period.

ICOMOS notes that with the exception of some studies covering funerary customs, religious and historical aspects, the great glass slab and the two mosaics discovered on the site, no updated overall studies have been carried out at Bet She'arim since the 1970s. By comparison considerable research of ancient Jewish catacombs has been undertaken over the last 20 years in Italy which has not been taken into account by the comparative analysis. Nevertheless ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis shows that the necropolis contains a remarkable collection of artwork representative of a particular time, place and ancient people and testifies to an important period of ancient Judaism.

---

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

---

#### **Justification of Outstanding Universal Value**

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- It represents Jewish culture at an important period of its history.
- It is the largest necropolis in Israel and one of the largest of its type worldwide.
- The exceptionally large collection of artwork and its great variety including engravings and paintings previously uncommon among Jews.
- The exceptionally large cluster of stone sarcophagi.
- The largest collection of burials of Rabbinical leaders and other high ranked Jews.

ICOMOS considers this justification is appropriate as the basis of the argument for Outstanding Universal Value because the necropolis and its collection of funerary art express the nature of a major world religious culture at a key period of its history.

#### **Integrity and authenticity**

##### **Integrity**

ICOMOS notes that while all excavated catacombs are within the nominated property boundary except for Cave 33 which is in the buffer zone, to date no geophysical investigation of the necropolis area has been carried out in order to establish its full extent. ICOMOS considers however that the nominated property includes all elements necessary to convey the nominated value and is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey the property's significance. The nominated property does not suffer from adverse effects of development or neglect.

##### **Authenticity**

ICOMOS notes that inscriptions in the catacombs are written in Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Palmyrean and indicate that Bet She'arim was a central burial place for the Jews of Palestine (Etsyon Gaver, Sepphoris, Arav, Caesarea) and of the Diaspora - Tadmor (Palmyra) and Yahmur in Syria; Antiochia and Pamphilia in Turkey; Byblos, Tyre, Sidon and Beirut in Lebanon; Neharda and Meishan in northern Mesopotamia and Himyar in Yemen, confirming the status of the necropolis as described in the nomination. ICOMOS considers that interventions made in order to open the necropolis to visitors are not an issue overall, except for the concrete access stairway constructed in the corridor of Catacomb 13 in the 1960s. ICOMOS considers that the catacombs themselves, preserved in-situ, retain authenticity in terms of location, setting, form and materials. In terms of use and function, the catacombs had ceased to be used for burial purposes by the 6<sup>th</sup> century, were abandoned and subsequently neglected. Today they are part of a national park with some open to the public; Cave 28 is used as a museum and the Sih cave is in the process of adaptation to similar use. Both these caves had previously been re-used for functions other than burial including as cisterns.

---

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met.

---

#### **Criteria under which inscription is proposed**

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi).

Criterion (ii): *exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the oriental folk art of the necropolis reflects the influence of classical Roman art and included human images which were prohibited in the Jewish religion, thus expressing Jewish pluralism and tolerance during this period. The iconographic motifs and multi-language inscriptions exhibit the exchange of human and cultural values between the Jews and the Roman world.

ICOMOS considers that as well as adopting the classical art forms of its time the catacombs show influences from pluralism and cross cultural interaction with Edomites, Phoenicians, Greeks, Egyptians and Judeans, evidenced by a variety of inscriptions and other decorative details. The exhibited assimilation of burial types and artistic expression together with inscriptions indicating the origins of those buried in the cemetery are important in that they demonstrate wide dispersal of the Jewish people following expulsion from Jerusalem and the incorporation into Jewish religious culture of influences from the surrounding populations.

---

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been demonstrated.

---

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the necropolis constitutes unique and exceptional testimony to ancient Judaism, directly associated with one of the pinnacles in Judaism's development, Rabbi Judah the Patriarch. It comprises one of the largest cemeteries in the Land of Israel; oriental folk-art style of reliefs and frescos on walls and sarcophagi are of exceptional value and are evidence of the Jewish culture that once flourished here, disappeared and no longer exists. It thus constitutes a unique and exceptional testimony to ancient Judaism.

ICOMOS considers that the necropolis represents a society with considerable resources and is an exceptional testimony to the resilience and revival of ancient Judaism following the destruction of the Second Temple in 132-5 CE.

---

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been demonstrated.

---

Criterion (vi): *be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the necropolis is directly associated with the *Mishna*, the first written redaction of Jewish codex, which became a guide for everyday life for the Jewish people until the modern era. This was composed by Rabbi Judah the Patriarch with the *Sanhedrin*, the religious-social authority and informal national leadership

of the Jewish people in the 2nd-4th centuries CE. The necropolis where Rabbi Judah the Patriarch was buried, including the artwork decorating the burials, is a tangible testimony to his ideas and beliefs of pluralistic and tolerant Judaism as they were practiced here. The property is a testimony to the historical sources concerning the intellectual work of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch and the *Sanhedrin*.

ICOMOS notes that Rabbi Judah is recorded as having lived at Bet She'arim and returned there for burial but considers that there is no direct or tangible evidence to justify this criterion.

---

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

---

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (ii) and (iii) and the conditions of authenticity and integrity.

---

#### **Description of the attributes**

The attributes are the 34 excavated catacomb complexes with artwork, sarcophagi and associated objects and archaeological finds; the relationship of the necropolis to the ancient town of Bet She'arim and its setting.

#### **4 Factors affecting the property**

The buffer zone and nominated property boundary almost coincide at the edge of the Bet Zayd settlement to the east which encroaches on the mound of the ancient town of Bet She'arim. However, according to the State Party, there are no development plans for this settlement or in the immediate surrounds of the property in general and the site is visually separated from the settlement by tree planting. There are no inhabitants within the property or buffer zone.

The catacombs are affected by water runoff during rainfall; this has been countered by drainage ditches to divert the flow. ICOMOS noted the growth of microorganisms inside some Section I caves and thin roots penetrating cracks in catacomb ceilings and considers that the microclimate inside the caves needs to be monitored for moisture content and humidity. The impact of lighting installed to display the decoration may be a factor. The ceiling of Hell's Cave, partially collapsed in the past, displays evidence of severe insect infestation which is a threat to the structure of the catacombs.

Forests in the vicinity heighten the potential for fire. This is countered by provision of 8 fire hydrants within the property connected to the local Fire Department which is also provided with fire trucks, and the maintenance of fire tracks by the two relevant municipal authorities. It is considered that there is no risk from flooding, earthquake, volcanic eruption or extreme climate change. ICOMOS notes that seismic activity is not

mentioned and considers that it should be considered as part of risk preparedness because Israel is in a high risk zone and the town of Bet She'arim was destroyed by the earthquake of 363 CE.

Visitor numbers average 50,000 annually. The property can officially accommodate 1500 visitors per day without difficulties or special arrangements, which allows for a large increase overall. At present this number is only achieved at major public events. Visitors are mostly controlled by guided tours and well-marked trails; not all catacombs are open to the public and some can be visited only by pre-registration. Visitor numbers at any one time are restricted in Catacombs 20, 14 (which are always open to the public) and the Menorah Caves, of which caves 1, 3, 4 and 11 can be visited only by pre-registration and with park guides. An additional 20,000 visit (free of charge) the statue of Jewish pioneer Alexander Zayd, located on top of the mound of the ancient town of Bet She'arim in the buffer zone. Visitor-related problems such as graffiti and litter are said to be minor due to supervision by tour guides and Park personnel.

---

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are water run-off, moisture within the caves and insect infestation. Seismic risk needs to be assessed and a risk preparedness strategy is required.

---

## **5 Protection, conservation and management**

### **Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone**

The boundaries of the nominated property enclose the rock formation containing the catacombs and have been defined to include the excavated sections of the necropolis and the areas between them to cover the estimated extent of the necropolis. However ICOMOS notes that no geophysical investigation has been undertaken to establish this. Also there is a need for a comprehensive map of the site which accurately records all underground features of the site in relation to the property boundary.

The boundaries of the buffer zone coincide with the boundaries of the National Park and include forested areas between the property and the settlements of Qiryat Tiv'on and Moshav Bet Zayd to the north-west, north and east. However where Moshav Bet Zayd wraps around the nominated property on the north-east slope of the ancient mound, the property and buffer zone boundaries coincide in two places, with the buffer zone being extended up the slope to enclose the excavated areas including the synagogue and basilica but excluding the Zayd and Yoffe residences built on the mound before the National Park was unofficially established in the 1950s. ICOMOS notes that the north-western and south-eastern boundaries of the nominated property and its buffer zone are very close to the built-up areas of Qiryat Tiv'on and Moshav Bet Zayd but considers that these do not have an adverse impact on the site.

---

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property and of its buffer zone are adequate, but recommends that geophysical investigations be undertaken and mapping could be improved.

---

### **Ownership**

The nominated property and its buffer zone are owned by the State of Israel.

### **Protection**

The nominated property is protected as an Antiquities Site under the Antiquities Law 1978. No changes can be made without the approval of the Israel Antiquity Authority (IAA). The property and buffer zone will also be protected under the National Parks, Nature Reserves, Heritage and National Sites Law, 1998. The northern part of the property and the buffer zone within the jurisdiction of Qiryat Tiv'on Local Council is expected to be declared officially as a National Park in a few months. The southern part of the buffer zone within the jurisdiction of Emek Yizreal Regional Council is expected to be officially declared as a National Park in 1-2 years. In response to ICOMOS' second letter, the State Party provided a declaration of intent from the Head of Emek Yizreal Regional Council to complete the legislation as soon as possible. The letter also pointed out that part of the southern section is protected under the Antiquities Law (it is the site of the ancient town of Bet She'arim) and the whole area is an agricultural area and protected from development under land use legislation. Meanwhile the property and buffer zone are protected and managed as Bet She'arim National Park in accordance with this legislation by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA).

The Park is partly fenced and the vulnerable areas such as the Menorah Caves are separately fenced. The majority of the caves are secured with locked doors out of working hours. A security alarm system connects most of the caves and facilities to an external security company. The caves are checked three times a day by Park staff.

---

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection process currently underway is satisfactory. ICOMOS considers that the protective measures for the property are adequate.

---

### **Conservation**

A general inventory of the catacombs is provided in the nomination dossier. Archaeological research carried out in 1929-40 and 1953-58 was published by the excavators in 1973 (B. Mazar), in 1937 (B. Maisler) and in 1976 (N. Avigad). ICOMOS notes that investigations at caves 5-10 and 25-31 have not yet been published and neither have those of salvage excavations. Some finds are displayed on site in the museum in Cave 28; others are stored by the Israel Antiquities Authority. Some finds including Leda and the Swan are displayed in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem and a lead coffin is in the Israel Museum. The database of 282

inscriptions recorded in the *Inscriptions from the Land of Israel* project is housed at Brown University, USA.

The nomination dossier notes that interventions in Section I in the early periods involved limited conservation methods and techniques and records are difficult to trace. ICOMOS noted some excessive repainting of images and inscriptions in red and black pigment. Conservation works were subsequently undertaken in Sections I & II from 2001 to 2010 with input from the Atra Kadisha orthodox religious organisation which protects against desecration of Jewish burial caves. The project focused particularly on the Menorah Caves in Section II of the necropolis. A visitor trail was constructed, the catacombs were cleaned and the artworks were conserved and restored jointly by the INPA and the IAA with the involvement of expert conservators. Detailed reports of studies and condition surveys of individual artworks are available together with detailed plans of the catacombs. Following archaeological excavation in 2014 of the floor of the Sih Cave it is planned to convert it to become the interpretation centre for the Menorah Caves. A sound and light show will be installed there in 2015.

Conservation works following standards set in Section II are now underway in Section III and are expected to be completed in 2014/15. Ongoing maintenance is carried out by Park staff. ICOMOS considers that active and planned conservation is adequate but special attention is needed for the insect infestation in Hell's Cave.

---

ICOMOS considers that the microclimate of the catacombs should be monitored and the insect infestation of Hell's Cave should be dealt with as a priority.

---

## Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The site has been managed by the National Parks Authority and its successor the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) since 1957. An agreement between the Antiquities Authority and the INPA was signed in 2005 which outlines the effective protocol necessary to facilitate cooperation, conservation and management of Antiquities in Israel's Nature Reserves and National Parks. A World Heritage Forum within INPA headed by the INPA director general and the director of the Archaeology and Heritage department includes directors of the various divisions of INPA, directors of district offices of INPA and of nature reserves and national parks containing World Heritage sites. This Forum convenes every six months to discuss issues pertaining to these sites. The buffer zone is managed by INPA subject to the regulations of the Israel Antiquities Authority for preserving archaeological sites.

Funding is provided through the annual government allocation to INPA supplemented by entrance fees, revenue from the shop, special project funding,

sponsorship of activities at the Park and private donations. There are seven permanent staff members including the director, cashier and maintenance workers/rangers. These are assisted by 48 volunteer guides from Qiryat Tiv'on who run three tours daily and have developed their own education kit including documentation of the inscriptions. ICOMOS considers that if the property is inscribed on the World Heritage List tourism numbers will grow and both staff and funding resources will need to be increased.

Expertise is provided by INPA including the chief scientist, chief archaeologist, and the director of conservation and development who is an architect. Other specialists including IAA personnel are available when required. New park staff members receive one week of advanced study followed by two years of on the job training before being made permanent. They then participate in relevant courses and continuing education programs as required. Risk preparedness and emergency protocols relating to visitor safety and fire-fighting, together with site landscaping and maintenance are all managed by Park staff.

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

Bet She'arim is designated as a national park in National and Regional Master Plans and the Town Planning Scheme of Qiryat Tiv'on. The Park is managed under the Bet She'arim Regional Management and Conservation Portfolio 2005 (available in Hebrew), which is the equivalent of a Property Management Plan and is currently being updated. Planned future developments include a new access road and entrance facility; enlarging the visitor centre and upgrading parking, picnic areas and trails. Currently visitors arrive at the cashier's kiosk via a narrow access route through Qiryat Tiv'on neighbourhoods, then proceed to the car park, visitor facilities and piazza with interpretation panels leading to the access trails guided by signage and pamphlets. Further interpretation is provided in the Cave of the Museum (Cave 28) in Section I. Artworks within the caves open to the public are illuminated and signposted.

Involvement of the local communities

Volunteer tour guides have worked at the Park under the Park-Community project since 1997. This is considered a very successful program. Local community events and festivals related to Jewish holidays are hosted at the Park, which is also used recreationally by nearby residents.

ICOMOS considers that current management is effective.

---

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that special attention is needed for treatment and control of insect infestation. The management system for the property is adequate but staff resources and funding will need to be increased if the property is inscribed on the World Heritage List. The management plan should be extended to include

assessment of seismic risk and a risk preparedness strategy.

---

## 6 Monitoring

A monitoring system is in place which includes daily checks by Park staff for cracks, debris, water overflow and erosion. INPA and IAA experts undertake technical assessments and advice. A table of indicators, periodicity and location of records is provided. Administrative arrangements are set out in the Regional Management and Conservation Portfolio.

---

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring system should be extended to include monitoring of the microclimate and insect infestation within the caves.

---

## 7 Conclusions

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List; that the nominated property meets criteria (ii) and (iii) and conditions of authenticity and integrity. The main threat to the property is water run-off, moisture within the caves and insect infestation. Seismic risk needs to be assessed and a risk preparedness strategy is required. The boundaries of the nominated property and of its buffer zone are adequate, but geophysical investigations need to be undertaken and mapping should be improved to show underground features in relation to the property boundary. ICOMOS considers that the legal protection process currently underway is satisfactory. Protective measures for the property are adequate. ICOMOS considers that the microclimate of the catacombs should be monitored and the insect infestation of Hell's Cave should be dealt with as a priority.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers the management system for the property is adequate but that staff resources and funding will need to be increased if the property is inscribed on the World Heritage List. The management plan should be extended to include assessment of seismic risk and a risk preparedness strategy. The monitoring system should be extended to include monitoring of the microclimate and insect infestation within the caves.

## 8 Recommendations

### Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that The Necropolis of Bet She'arim: A Landmark of Jewish Renewal, Israel, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (ii) and (iii)**.

## Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

### Brief synthesis

Hewed into the limestone slopes of hills bordering the Vale of Jezre'el, a series of man-made catacombs was developed from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE as the necropolis of Bet She'arim. It became the primary Jewish burial place outside Jerusalem following the failure of the second Jewish revolt against Roman rule and the catacombs are a treasury of eclectic art works and inscriptions in Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew. Bet She'arim is associated with Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, the spiritual and political leader of the Jewish people who composed the *Mishna* and is credited with Jewish renewal after 135 CE.

**Criterion (ii):** The catacombs of Bet She'arim show the influence of classical Roman art including human images, inscriptions and decorative details and include iconographic motifs and multi-language inscriptions testifying to cross-cultural interaction with Edomites, Phoenicians, Greeks, Egyptians and Judeans. The assimilation of burial types and artistic expression together with inscriptions indicating the origins of those buried in the cemetery testify to the wide dispersal of the Jewish people at that time and the incorporation into Jewish religious culture of influences from the surrounding populations.

**Criterion (iii):** The necropolis of Bet She'arim constitutes exceptional testimony to ancient Judaism in its period of revival and survival under the leadership of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch. The extensive catacombs containing artwork showing classical and oriental influences illustrate the resilient Jewish culture that flourished here in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

### Integrity

The property includes all elements necessary to convey the outstanding universal value and is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey its significance. The nominated property does not suffer from adverse effects of development or neglect.

### Authenticity

The catacombs themselves, preserved in-situ, retain authenticity in terms of location, setting, form and materials. In terms of use and function, the catacombs had ceased to be used for burial purposes by the 6<sup>th</sup> century, were abandoned and subsequently neglected. Today they are preserved as part of a national park with some open to the public.

### Management and protection requirements

The nominated property is protected as an Antiquities Site under the *Antiquities Law 1978*. No changes can be made without the approval of the Israel Antiquity Authority (IAA). The property and buffer zone will also be protected under the *National Parks, Nature Reserves,*

*Heritage and National Sites Law, 1998*. The northern part of the property and the buffer zone within the jurisdiction of Qiryat Tiv'on Local Council will shortly be declared officially as a National Park. The southern part within the jurisdiction of Emek Yizreal Regional Council is currently designated as "approved national park at detailed planning" and will be officially declared as a National Park as soon as possible. Meanwhile the buffer zone is protected by Land Use planning and the property and buffer zone are protected and managed as Bet She'arim National Park in accordance with this legislation by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA).

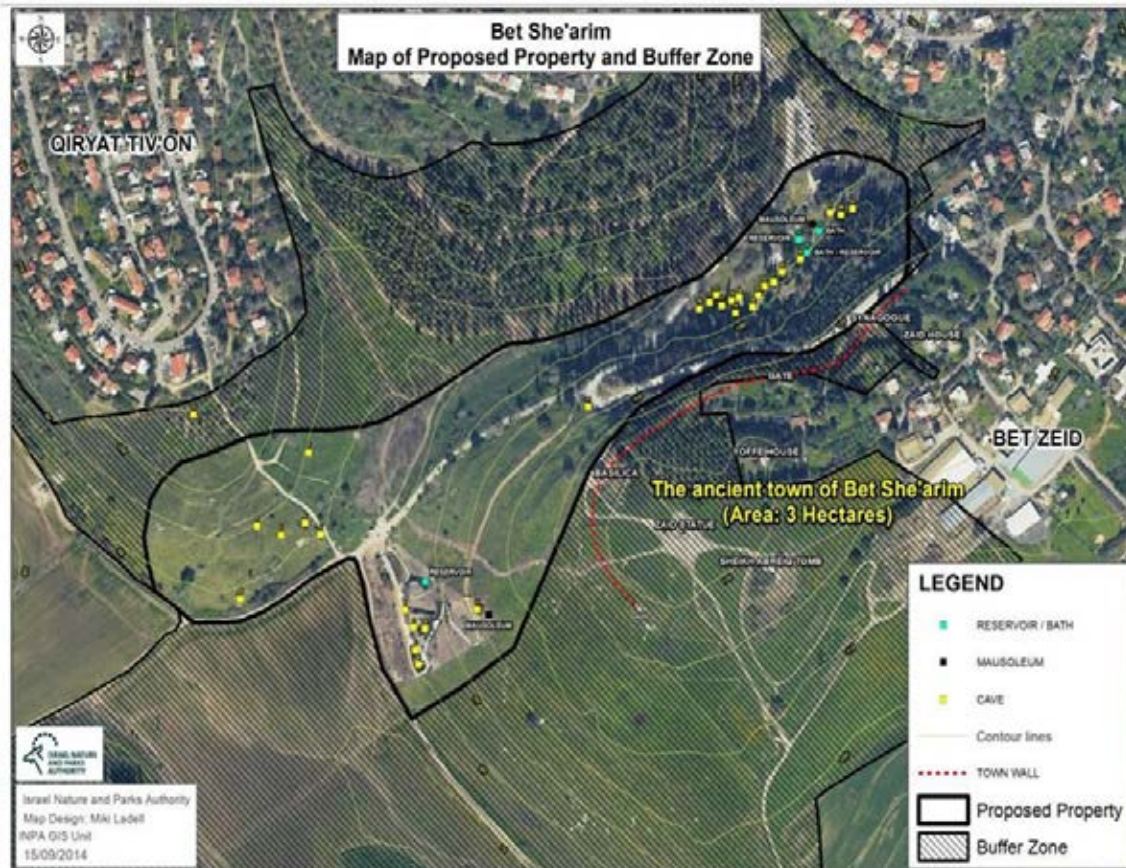
A World Heritage Forum within INPA headed by INPA director general and the director of the Archaeology and Heritage department includes directors of the various divisions of INPA, directors of district offices of INPA and of nature reserves and national parks containing World Heritage sites. This Forum convenes every six months to discuss issues pertaining to these sites.

#### **Additional recommendations**

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- Completing the legislative protection of the property and buffer zone by declaring them officially as a National Park as soon as possible;
- Undertaking geophysical investigations of the site and buffer zone;
- Improving mapping to show underground features in relation to the property boundary;
- Assessing seismic risk;
- Extending the management plan to include a risk preparedness strategy and implementation of treatment for insect infestation.
- Submitting, by 1 December 2016, a report to the World Heritage Centre on progress made in the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations for examination by the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS.





Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property



The triple arched facade of Catacomb 20

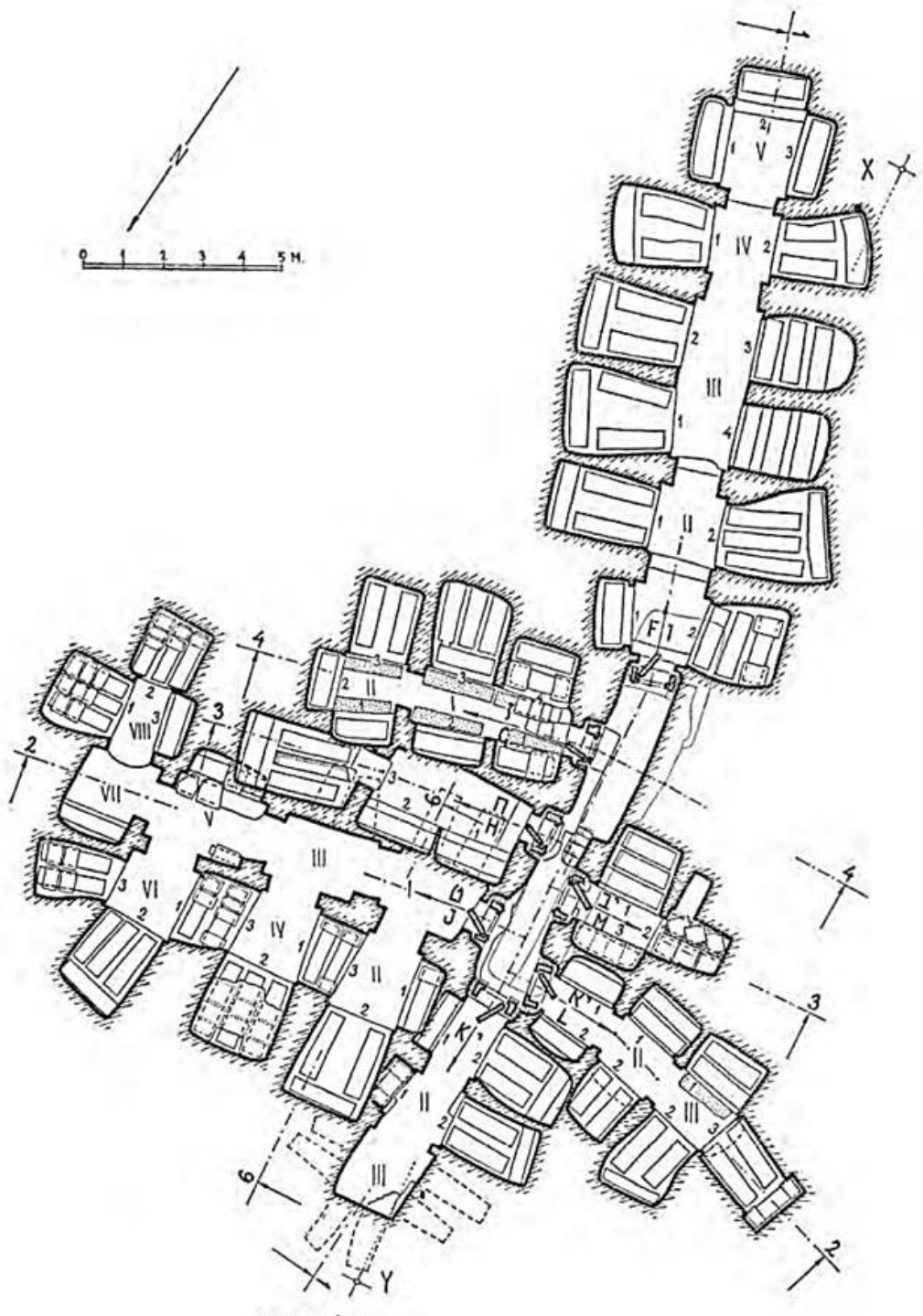


Sarcophagus





Entrance to Catacomb 13



Section I Catacomb 13 Plan