

ARCHAEOLOGY

Team Unveils Mideast Archaeology Peace Plan

Last week in Jerusalem, a small team of Americans, Israelis, and Palestinians presented a peace plan for the Holy Land's archaeological riches. After secretly meeting in different countries over the past 5 years, the eight archaeologists offered their view on the fate of thousands of artifacts and sacred sites. Their aim is to remove the divisive issue from negotiations over Palestine's future as an independent state.

But whether their hard work will pay off is anyone's guess. "I am doubtful that an unofficial document drawn up by some well-meaning archaeologists will make any difference," says Patrick Daly, an archaeologist at the Asia Research Institute in Singapore who has been visiting faculty at An-Najah National University in Nablus in the West Bank.

At the heart of the controversy is the question of what should be done with material

So starting 5 years ago, Boytner and Lynn Swartz Dodd, an archaeologist at the University of Southern California (USC) in Los Angeles, quietly assembled a team of Israeli and Palestinian colleagues. "People who participated did so at great risk," says Boytner. Israeli academics collaborating with Palestinians, and vice versa, are often viewed as traitors, he says, and losing one's job—or life—is a real possibility. Most of the team made their names public last week. But one of the three Israelis and one of the three Palestinians remain anonymous.

The meetings were initially held in Vienna—"neutral" ground, says Dodd—then in Southampton, U.K., and finally in Jerusalem. Expenses were covered by a \$150,000 fund created by USC, UCLA, the Washington, D.C.-based United States Institute for Peace, and other donors. Despite

ber Raphael Greenberg of Tel Aviv University in Israel.

Records from West Bank excavations were hard to come by. After being rebuffed by IAA, Greenberg sued and won a court injunction to obtain the data. "This filled in many gaps," says Ilan. Boytner says all the data "will soon be made available to the public." (IAA declined to comment.)

The team's plan calls for a protective "Heritage Zone" around the oldest part of Jerusalem, extending to the city's 10th century boundaries. Archaeological sites in the zone would be accessible to anyone, and any research would have to be done with full transparency. The plan also recommends the repatriation of all artifacts found since 1967 to the state in which they were unearthed—essentially a one-way transfer from Israel to Palestine. To house all the material returned to the Palestinian side, new museums and conservation laboratories would be created. Exactly who would construct the facilities is not spelled out, but Katharina Galor, an archaeologist at Brown University who is "not very optimistic" for the plan's future, estimates the cost at "millions if not billions of dollars."

About 50 Israeli archaeologists, including IAA officials, showed up on 8 April in Jerusalem to hear the U.S. and Israeli part of the team make their case, says Boytner. (No Palestinians attended.) Ilan was prepared for the worst but says "surprisingly, the overwhelming response was positive and congratulatory. Not a single person spoke against the document." The consensus was that "this process should continue," says audience member Hanan Eshel of Bar-Ilan University in Ramat-Gan, Israel. The buzz at the meeting was that the team's anonymous Israeli member is an IAA archaeologist. "We will not comment," says Boytner.

A follow-up meeting is being planned for the Israeli side. Among Palestinians, there is broad support but also those who "do not want to involve Israel whatsoever in a future Palestinian state," says team member Ghattas Sayej, an archaeologist with the Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange in Ramallah, the West Bank. The effort to convince Palestinian archaeologists to formally ratify the plan is being led by team member Nazmi el-Jubej, co-director of RIWAQ, an architectural conservation organization in Ramallah.

And after that? "It's up to our politicians," says Sayej. "The plan is there."

—JOHN BOHANNON



Waiting for peace. The Temple Mount will be at the epicenter of a protective "Heritage Zone" in Jerusalem.

removed from the Palestinian West Bank territory since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. During decades of settlement building, the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) has uncovered and removed artifacts including coins from the Crusades and stone tools from the Paleolithic. When—and if—a Palestinian state is created, the question will become whether some or all of those objects, most now stored in Israeli museums and warehouses, will be repatriated. Another contentious issue is who will maintain and control access to religious sites on either side of the border, particularly in and around Jerusalem, a city claimed by both sides. These issues are a "major hurdle for peace," says Ran Boytner, an Israeli-born archaeologist at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

often tense negotiations—professional facilitators were brought in several times to keep the process going—the team grew intimate. "Our meetings usually included at least one recent-pictures-of-kids swap," Dodd says. "It's probably no accident that all participants are parents who are thinking toward their children's futures."

The first challenge was to account for "tens of thousands of artifacts" and nearly 6000 sites, says David Ilan, one of the Israeli participants who directs the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology in Jerusalem. "Given construction activities in the West Bank, including the building of the separation fence, new [archaeological] sites are discovered there almost daily," says team mem-