



Other Studies

Silwan: A Long Palestinian History, Heritage, and Existence¹

Daoud Ghoul

PhD Candidate in Human Geography at Newcastle University



Plate 1 Kenyon's Excavations on Silwan in the 1960s. Photo by John Bartlett (PEF 2023)

-
- 1 **Acknowledgments:** The development of this paper has spanned several years and has passed through numerous stages. I wish to extend my sincere thanks to Nazmi al-Jubeih for his thoughtful comments on an early, unpublished Arabic version of the manuscript; to the Danish House in Palestine for their translation assistance during the initial stages of this research; and to Matthew Suriano, Issam Nassar, and Yusuf al-Natsheh for their valuable insights.

Introduction

Al-Quds (Jerusalem) is one of the most famous cities in the world — renowned for its history, religious sites, and tourism. It is also known for a long colonial struggle, during which the city acquired a unique position among its native people, visitors, and colonizers. It became targeted for Western and Israeli archaeological excavations as part of an effort to claim the history of the city and exterminate its Palestinian historical heritage. This colonial act is known in the literature as “the logic of elimination” (e.g., Wolfe 2006; Salamanca et al. 2012), or the elimination of memory ‘*damnatio memoriae*’ (Bodnaruk 2022). The settler colonial elimination in Silwan is carried out through various projects that use archaeology to erase the Palestinian history, memory, and existence, transforming the area into the ‘City of David’ (e.g., Hawari 2022). This reflects the Zionist notion that Palestine is ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’. In this paper, I examine the rich literature on Palestinian existence, heritage, and history in Silwan.

From the nineteenth century onward, colonial powers have developed a manipulative discourse about Palestine to justify colonizing its lands (e.g., Jubeh 2019). One of the primary methods used to achieve this goal is archaeological excavation, which led to confrontations during early excavations efforts under the British Mandate, especially in Jerusalem (e.g., Fishman 2009). Colonial archaeological excavation in Palestine started during the Ottoman period and continues to this day. The British government played an important role in establishing a Biblical narrative of Palestine; examples include Article 21 of the British Mandate concerning archaeology and archaeological excavation (Natsheh 2019, 18–19), as well as the establishment of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) in 1865. PEF’s first director, William Thomson, clearly announced that “this country of Palestine belongs to you and me, it is essentially ours. It was given to the Father of Israel...” (Raad 2014, 224). To this day, numerous works continue to produce a Biblical history of Palestine that serves the colonial power there.

The ancient history of Palestine remained the preserve of Western researchers and did not occupy a prominent place in Arabic historical writing until the second half of the eighteenth century (e.g., Al-Sharef 2014). Silwan is a Palestinian residential area with a long and continuous history, and its population is currently estimated at sixty thousand people (Jubeh 2023, 103). Silwan, as a name, place, and people, is mentioned in numerous works of literature. Ancient literature, alongside Palestinian living presence, oral history, and traditions, serves as an important source for the history of Jerusalem. Today, this presence faces a physical detachment from historical sites, which consequently impacts local knowledge of and relationships to these sites. This paper aims to contribute to the writing of Palestinian history through a micro-focus on Silwan. To do so, the paper highlights different perspectives and gaps that remain understudied by examining ancient and modern texts. It adopts the *longue-*



durée perspective on history that extends further into the past than both human memory and the archaeological record, as explained by Fernand Braudel (2009), while simultaneously serving as a counterpoint to the colonial narrative. As Fanon explained that “the colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope” (Fanon 1967, 187). Mahdi ‘Amel expanded on Fanon’s insight, writing:

“It is not correct to look at the past as if it were a corpse that we look back to with nostalgia. Rather, on the contrary, we should look at it through the eyes of the present, to clarify and understand it according to the goals of our current revolutionary project. This is because it is impossible to live except within the framework of an active relationship with the present. Uniting it with our present to deepen it into the future is the only way to make it alive” (Amel 2020, 51).

Accordingly, this paper proceeds in four sections. The first examines the history of the name Silwan and suggests an original interpretation of it. The second examines various religious texts, myths, and histories related to Silwan as documented in literature. The third examines histories related to ancient structures around the water spring. Finally, the fourth examines existing literature on the Silwan tunnel, the Silwan inscription, and other archaeological sites and findings to highlight gaps that remain unaddressed.

Silwan: The History Behind the Name

This section examines the history of the name Silwan and suggests an original interpretation of it. In Jerusalem, the ruins of the ancient city are located in Silwan village, which sits just outside the walls of the Old City. The village’s location has been described in many historical texts, including by the 12th century travelers John of Würzburg and Theodorich (Theodoric 2003, 58; Wurzburg 1997). Archaeological excavation in the area has turned it into one of the most excavated archaeological sites in the world. The principal motivation behind archaeological exploration and excavations in Silwan over the past 150 years has been to reveal physical traces of the Biblical narrative as part of the process of colonization and Judaization in Jerusalem (Hawari 2022, 90). This process causes the loss of Palestinian history, alters place names, and detaches Palestinians from these places. For example, during the British Mandate, when Mr. Ory asked to visit the ancient tomb in Silwan valley (Sittna Mariam), which is called “The Tomb of Pharaoh’s Daughter” in English, locals did not recognise what he was talking about (Governor 1923). The tomb at that time was called *Magharat el-Minshar*, translated into English as the «Grotto of the Saw». Similarly, most of the names of ancient sites in Silwan were changed by the Biblical narrative. However, the original names are documented extensively in the literature (e.g., Vincent 1912, 1:68). Simultaneously, Palestinians are forcibly detached from access to these places and their history. Nowadays, most of the residents of Silwan have little knowledge about the aforementioned sites.

Silwan's landscape, narrative, and archaeology are being redesigned to transform it into the 'City of David' (e.g., Yas 2000). This effort is carried out by several Israeli governmental and non-governmental bodies, especially the settler organization 'Elaad' (e.g., Hawari 2022; Amara 2022), which uses several strategies to expand settlements in Silwan's territory. The first strategy used in Silwan was gaining control over archaeological sites (Jube 2023, 107), concurrently with writing a history based on Biblical interpretation to impose a Jewish identity and narrative on the site - an approach known as the 'Biblical archaeology approach' (Abed Rabo 2019). These efforts are challenged by various historical facts. First, archaeological artifacts have not demonstrated any evidence of the 'King David' narrative at the site. Instead, they narrate a different, disregarded history which indicates, for example, that the inhabitants of the site in ancient time worshipped multiple gods and practiced ritual sacrifice. It was a society in which every house had a female icon, representing the Canaanite goddess of that period (Emek Shaveh 2013). This is one indicator of the ancient Palestinian history that is being ignored by the narrative of the 'City of David', and one that might be erased through the writing of a constructed colonial narrative that relies on silencing (Stokes 2022), as well as possession and dispossession (Amara 2023) of Silwan's history, heritage, and people.

Water is vital for human life, and has always been a primary factor driving ancient human settlement. The only natural water source in Jerusalem is the Silwan spring, and Silwan village was built on the slopes around the spring. No date is known for the establishment of Silwan, but it is mentioned by Arab historians and geographers as "a locality" in the city of Jerusalem in the tenth century, which confirms that Silwan was already a significant village at that time (Jube 2023, 101). The earliest traces of human settlement near the water source date back to the Chalcolithic period (4000-3200 BC). These archaeological traces are located near the spring at the bottom of the eastern slope of Talat al-Dahour (al-Dahour Hill), known today as Wadi Hilwah, on the side of the Kidron Valley, also called the St. Mary Valley (Jube 2009b, 18). This early community included a farming village as well as religious traditions; for example, historical accounts record that there were many houses carved in the rocks to the south of Ain Silwan where "men confined themselves to worship" (al-Idressi 2002, 10).

Silwan spring gradually gained a quasi-holy status in the Palestinian heritage, mythology, and religion. This status manifested in the Palestinian popular imagination and heritage, including for example beliefs in supernatural powers and demons haunting the spring (e.g., Canaan 1921). Traditionally, Ain Silwan was a spouting spring that people visited to seek blessings and healing (e.g., al-Hamawi 1995, 241 Vol: 3). For that reason, it became a popular destination frequented by travellers and tourists. Many of these visitors documented their experiences, observations, and local lore within early 'travel literature' (e.g., al-Assali 1992). All of this information is part of the Palestinian history and heritage.



Jerusalem is mentioned in a variety of ancient sources and texts. Places are frequently mentioned by different names, including those preserved by Palestinians through oral history. One example is the name of the city itself: Palestinians call it *al-Quds* in Arabic, which is different from the English name Jerusalem. A name similar in pronunciation to *al-Quds* appears in ancient sources, including the writings of the ‘first historian’ Herodotus (484/425- BC) (al-Qubaisi 2009, 531). The name *al-Quds*, which can be translated to ‘the holy’, demonstrates how a name can explain the history of a place. Building on this framework, I examine the history underlying the name Silwan.

Early literature that mentioning the name Silwan links it to the water sources, the pool, and the spring. The first-century writings of Josephus Flavius state that ‘Siloam’ is the name given to “that fountain of sweet and abundant water” (Flavius 1928, 241). In a different edition of his work, Siloam is described as “the name we gave to that sweet and never-failing spring” (Flavius 1981, 298). Using a similar pronunciation, the name is mentioned in the Bible. “Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?” (Luke 13:4). Both references are translated from ancient languages, namely Syriac/Aramaic and Greek. Syriac/Aramaic a primary spoken languages for many centuries in the Levant before Arabic became the dominant language. Consequently, there are instances where ancient words may have been mistranslated or misinterpreted, particularly when analysed without a deep understanding of historical linguistics.

It is known that many ancient names in Palestine have Aramaic roots. For example, the Aramaic/Syriac name for a water pool, “ܡܕܢܐ” — pronounced (Yardo) in the western dialect, and (Yarda) in the eastern dialect (Malaki 1999, 68)— is linguistically close to the word used locally to describe the act of going to the spring or the pool to fetch water (*Waridat* عارادات). This linguistic connection is frequently found in Palestinian folk songs and rhymes, reflecting the link between the Palestinian heritage and its long roots in Aramaic.

Locally, the name Silwan has often been interpreted as deriving from the Aramaic word (Silon), which means thorns or raspberries (e.g., Silwan Club 1992). This particularly interpretation appears repeatedly throughout the literature. I believe it was originally copied from the *Biladuna Falastine* encyclopaedia (al-Dabbagh 1991, 151 Vol: 8), which cites a reference translating the name of *Kfar Silwan*, a village/ municipality in the Baabda District in Lebanon. The source refers to the Lebanese village as a village of calmness and quiet — offering another meaning of the word Silwan (e.g., Anis 1956, 289).

Flavius called the valley in Silwan the “Siloam Ravine”, and the “Valley of the Fountain”, and he described the spring as a fountain (Flavius 1928, 241, 243, 357). Other historical sources referred to it as ‘the fountain of the Virgin’ (e.g., plate 2, ILN

1869, 425). An interesting linguistic connection is that the word Silono “ܣܠܢܐ” in Aramaic Syriac means ‘the water fountain’ (Malaki 2010, 229). In Aramaic, the word ܣܠܢܐ can be transliterated as (Sylwn), which closely resembles - in both written form and pronunciation - the name used by Palestinians in Arabic, including the residents of the town itself (Silwan). Furthermore, the word “ܣܠܐ”, pronounced *Silo* in Western Aramaic, and *Sila* in Eastern Aramaic - has the root verb “Sayalan”, from which we get terms such as “Silon” and “Silos”, meaning a waterwheel (Malaki 1999, 78). This is cognate to the Arabic verb “sala” (سال – to flow), as in “sala al-ma” (سال الماء – the water flowed). The corresponding Arabic noun is saylan (سِلَان), sayalan (سِيلَان), or al-sayl (السيْل), which signifies a rush of water, with the plural form being soyol (سِيُول) (Ibn Manzur 1994, 350–51). A similar etymological interpretation is recorded by early travellers. For instance, a twelfth-century text notes that, “it is said that Silwan flows from “silo”, according to Syriac instructions, as Silwan brings its stream quietly because it flows underground” (Wurzburg 1997, 86).

In Arabic dictionaries, the noun “*Sulwan*” derives from the root verb (*sala* سَلَ), a verb whose meaning changes according to the preposition used. For instances, *salahu* سَلَاهُ means ‘to abandon him’, whereas *Sala anhu* سَلَ عَنْهُ means ‘to comfort him while in distress’. Additional derivatives – such as *salihi*, *salwan*, *sulwan*, *suliyān*, *siliyān* and *sulwana*, along with the verbs *aslahu* ‘anhu and *salahu*, and *tasalla* - all give the meaning of comforting a person in grief (Ibn Manzur 1994, 395). The translation of the name Silwan found in all Arabic dictionaries is ‘that which takes grief and distress away’, but it also means ‘to abandon’, and ‘to forget’. *Sulwan* means comfort, but used with the verb *saqa* (سَقَى – to irrigate) “you irrigated me with *sulwan*” means ‘you comforted me’. Thus, *Silwan* is also water, and according to myth, if a lover drinks this water, they shall forget (*sala*) their love and their passion will be consigned to oblivion. Similarly, *suluwah* denotes ‘feeling relief after separation and grief’; *suluwah* is also a totem against the evil eye, and *Tasliyah* (relief) for the lover. Thus, *salahu* or *sala anhu*, means ‘to forget him’ and *sala habibahu*, ‘to forget his lover’, while *salah hammahu* means ‘to forget his grief’. The phrases all indicate the relief of the soul after separation, and the evaporation of memory. *Al-Sulwan* is a treatment given to a grieved person to be relieved and joyful. Dictionaries are also including anecdotes reflecting this folklore. For example, Muhammad ibn Hayyan narrated, saying: I was present in Rayy when Al-Asma‘i was being presented with poetry by Nusayr ibn Abi Nusayr. During the recitation, Nusayr recited this verse, and Al-Asma‘i asked him: «What is al-sulwān?» Nusayr replied: «It is said to be a certain stone that is crushed, and its water is drunk, causing the drinker to find consolation (*salwah*).» Al-Asma‘i said: «Be quiet, lest these people mock you. Al-sulwān is simply the verbal noun derived from your saying *salawtu aslū sulwānan* (I sought consolation, so I console, consolation).» Nusayr then responded: «Even if I were to drink al-sulwān — meaning consolation itself — as a drink, I would not find consolation.»



It is also said: «Such and such made me forget you» (aslānī <anka) and «made me forget» (sallānī).

Abu Zayd said: One says, «I have not forgotten (mā salītu an) to say that» — meaning I have not forgotten, but rather I deliberately left it. And salītu an is not used except in this negative sense of «I have not forgotten to say.»

Ibn al-A‘rābī said: Al-sulwānah is a stone [used] for inducing hatred after love.

Ibn Sīdah said: Al-salwah and al-sulwānah (with a ammah on the sīn) — both refer to a transparent stone. If you bury it in sand and then dig it up, you will see it turned black. It is given to a person to drink, and it brings him consolation.

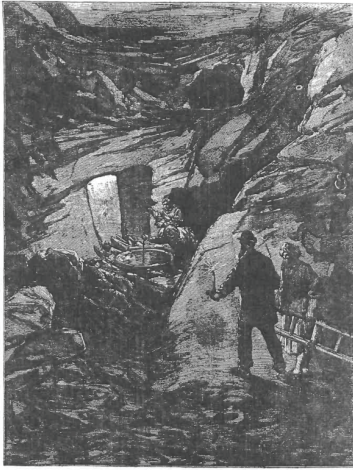
Al-Lihyānī said: Al-sulwānah and al-sulwān are a transparent stone. If you bury it in sand and then dig it up, women use it to enchant men.

Abu ‘Amr al-Sa‘dī said: Al-sulwānah is a stone that is crushed, and its water is drunk. The drinker of that water then finds consolation from the love of the one with whom he was afflicted.

Al-sulwān is that which is drunk and brings consolation.

Al-Lihyānī also said: Al-sulwān and al-sulwānah are something given to a lover to drink so that he may find consolation from [his love for] a woman. He said: Some say that it is taken from the soil of a grave of a deceased person, sprinkled upon water, and then given to the lover to drink so that he may find consolation from the woman, whereby his love dies. (e.g., Ibn Manzur 1994).

Based on this etymological framework, I argue that interpreting of the name Silwan as ‘fountain’ is far more logical than deriving it from ‘thorns and raspberries’. Notably, both Aramaic and Arabic inherently link the term Silwan to water. The village was named in literature from different periods as “the village of Ain Silwan – Silwan Spring Village”, including in the Muslim trust (al-Waqf al-Islami) document of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi regarding al-Salahiyya school (al-Assali 1983, 292). Consequently, I propose that the Aramaic name of the water fountain— ‘Silwan’—is the original toponym. It initially designated the spring itself, then came to encompass the surrounding area, and finally the name of the village.



ROCK-CUT TUNNEL NEAR THE FOUNTAIN OF THE VIRGIN.

Plate 2 'The fountain of the Virgin' illustration (ILN 1869, 425).

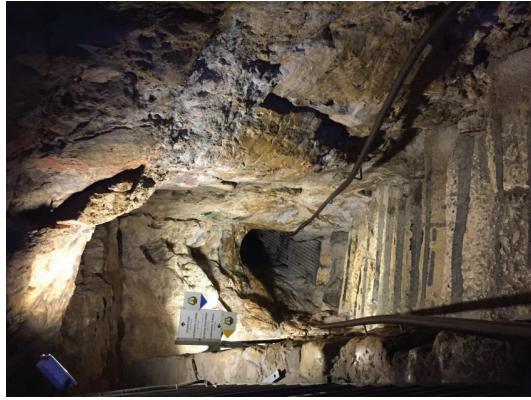


Plate 3 Um al-Daraj Spring – Entrance of Silwan Tunnel and beginning of the water spring.



Plate 4 The Mamluk construction and the "staircase entrance", which is currently closed.



Religion, Myths, and Palestinian heritage

This section examines various religious texts, myths, and histories related to Silwan as documented in literature. Some texts from all three monotheistic religions refer to Silwan sites. Other references are myths, or an interpretation of the religious texts. I assert that all texts of all religions and non-religious traditions are part of the Palestinian heritage, including the Old Testament, Bible, and Qur'an. In the Old Testament, the name 'Shiloah' is connected to flowing waters: "Because this people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah" (Isaiah 8:6). Another interpretation of the Old Testament links the name "Gihon" to the spring, as mentioned in (2 Chronicles 32:30), "It was Hezekiah who blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon spring and channelled the water down to the west side of the City of David. He succeeded in everything he undertook". Although the River Gihon in Genesis is defined in the Old Testament as a river—"The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush." (Genesis 2:13)—this does not refer to Silwan.

A further interpretation is based on comparing the pronunciation of Gihon to the Arabic word 'crazy' (*Junun* جنون) and the word for Jinn (الجن), suggesting that the name was given to the spring because of its irregular flow through the rocks. It is known as the Crazy Spring (العين المجنونة). Shams al-Din Ansarai al-Dimashqi (1326 AD), explained the flow of water in the spring as an ebb and flow of tidal waves, whereby the ebb takes place every three hours, during which the water level is three times higher than during the flow, and the tidal waves flow back for about six hours (Qarain 2005, 7; al-Dimashqi 1923, 119). In contrast, Tawfiq Canaan addressed this phenomenon by raising the question: "Are all periodical springs inhabited by good and bad spirits which cause their abnormal flow?" (Canaan 1921). He provided the following example and explanation: "Ain Silwan, also called, Ain Um al-Daraj, for example, was formerly guarded by a bad spirit appearing in the form of a camel. He used to drink a lot of water from time to time, thus stopping the flow for a short period... When this camel died, a hen with her chickens took its place" (Canaan 1921). It should be noted that the spring currently flows continually—probably because of changes in the subterranean rocks through which it flows. Furthermore, its water is no longer potable, and the water discharge rate stands at 1600 cubic meters per day (Zubi 2015, 58).

In the tenth century, al-Muqaddasi (Al-Muqaddasi 2003, 151) identified the spring as a key site in the Levant. He named it Ain Silwan. It is also called Ain Um al-Daraj (the well of the mother of stairs) because it can be reached through stairs. The following text from 1101 AD describes the site: "We passed through a valley at the skirts of Jerusalem from the southern side by Ain Silwan, which has sweet water. We found a spring accessible via stairs (about twenty) built with inscribed stones and solid vault, overlooked by a southern mosque. On top of the spring lies a lovely

mosque with a mihrab (niche). Around the spring extend the gardens of the village of Silwan with all types and colours of fruit (al-Nabulsi 1989, 116, 1990, 118). The water is reputed to be holy as it is thought that the Virgin Mary washed the clothes of Jesus Christ when he was an infant at Um al-Daraj Spring. As for the Silwan Pond, it is particularly important because of the miracle of Jesus in curing the man who was born blind, a story that magnified the holiness of the spring. It is narrated in the Bible, “Go, he told him, wash in the Pool of Siloam. So, the man went and washed and came home seeing”. (John 9:7). This story had an impact on the Palestinian heritage and is documented in some literatures, such as the following text from 1047 AD: “When the pedestrian walks half a league to the south of the city, and descends, he finds a spring that flows from the rocks, called Ain Silwan. Its water passes through a village whose residents have constructed many buildings and planted gardens. It is said that he who bathes in this spring shall be healed from any pain, illness, or chronic disease. They dedicated much funding for its maintenance and construction” (Khusraw 1993, 57).

Several historical sources mention the spring from the Crusaders period. For example, the writing of the historian William of Tyre states that its water is neither sweet nor continually flowing, but rather flows intermittently. Furthermore, Fulcher of Chartres mentioned that its water is available only sometimes because of the small volume of running water. The Spanish traveller Benjamin of Tudela likewise mentioned a spring with little water, while the German traveller Theoderich, who visited the Crusader Kingdom in the years between 1171-1173- AD wrote: “We declare it to be the truth, that the water bubbles up out of the earth like a fountain, and that after filling the pool and running down to another pool close by, it appears no more. One descends into the pool by thirteen steps, and round about it are piers bearing arches, under which a paved walk has been constructed all round it, made of large stones, upon which those who stand can drink the water as it runs down”. (Theodorich 1896, 33–34; Imter 2010, 20–21).

Some sources link the spring with the name “Shiloh”, which is mentioned in the Old Testament. It has been suggested that Shiloh means ‘the given’ —that is, that the water spring is a blessing sent by God. Accordingly, it is thought that the name “Silwan” or “Siloam” is an adaptation of the name “Shiloh” (e.g., Khouri 1997). Notably, the Old Testament features similar pronunciations for different names. For example, in the Arabic version of the Bible, the name “Shilon” appears in the prophecy of Jacob to Judah regarding the birth of Jesus Christ from his lineage (‘AVD Bible’, al-Takween 49:10). There, it symbolizes Christ, and means ‘savior—Messiah’ with a similar pronunciation between the name used in this verse “Shiloh” and the current name of the village and spring “Silwan”, and the Aramaic Syriac name “Silon”. In the English version the word is translated to “to whom it belongs”, with a note that the meaning of this phrase is uncertain. (Genesis 49:10). In different parts of the Old Testament, Shiloh is differentiated from Jerusalem as two different places (e.g., Kings I 11:29). According to the Old Testament (Judges 21:19), Shiloh lies “north of Bethel, east



of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah". According to Abdullah Mukhalis (1929, 16–18), Silon, believed to have been the dwelling place of Jacob, is the Hebrew town of Shiloh; it is a village in the Nablus district, known today as 'Silat al-Dhahr'.

Other texts refer to the spring as one of the springs of Heaven. For instance, Mujir al-Din Al-Hanbali narrated from Khaled Ibn Muaad that "Zamzam (the spring near the Kaaba in Makkah) and Ain Silwan in Jerusalem are springs of Heaven". Furthermore, he notes: "He who steps into Jerusalem shall come to the shrine of David to pray and swim in Silwan Spring because it is part of Heaven" (al-Hanbali 1999a, 296). The interpretations are based on two verses from the Quran, "In each will be two flowing springs", and "In each will be two gushing springs" (Ar-Rahman 50,65). Accordingly, the two springs are identified as Zamzam and Silwan. This connection between the two springs is reflected in much Arabic literature. Moreover, as a resident of Silwan, I used to hear related stories from teachers at schools and by others in the community, including a prominent story about a man who lost a water bucket in Zamzam only to find it in Silwan Spring. However, I found it a challenge to locate anything about the connection between Silwan and Zamzam in academic literature, as is the case with many other neglected elements of Palestinian heritage.

The literature connecting Silwan spring to Zamzam varies in the way it documents this relationship. Some texts document beliefs about a literal subterranean connection: "Silwan is a locality in the gardens of the city; underneath it runs a soft spring that irrigates gigantesque gardens... They claim that the water from Zamzam visits the water of this spring on the night before Eid Al-Adha" (the eve of Arafah) (Al-Muqaddasi 2003, 172). This connection is viewed as a periodic one, in that the waters of Zamzam mix once a year with those of Hammam Ashurah and of Siloam (Canaan 1921, 17). Other sources note a sensory similarity: "At Ain Silwan, which lies in Jerusalem, there is a taste that gives the illusion of being that of Zamzam" (al-Ma'ari 1961, 468), and, "You find in Jerusalem during your visits to Ain Silwan water like Zamzam's" (al-Harawi 2002, 33).

Other accounts make a different connection. For example, "Some scholars said that George (al-Khadir) was a prophet, while others said he was a saint. Some even said he was alive and performed the Friday prayers in five mosques: the Masjed al-Haram (Mecca), the Medina Mosque, the Jerusalem Mosque, the Qibaa Mosque, and al-Tur Mosque. He would pray in one of the mosques every Friday and would eat two times from its truffles and celery, and would drink once from the water of Zamzam and once from the Well of Suleiman, the one in Jerusalem, and bathe in Ain Silwan" (al-Hanbali 1999b, 69).

I argue that the narrated relation between the two springs is connected to other texts and ancient heritage. In general, Christian, and Islamic traditions feature texts that refer to a holy water flowing beneath a rock. In the Bible, the rock is directly linked

to Jesus, “and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). Although this is a direct and clear reference to Christ, it indicates the connection of Christians to Christ through his body and blood, symbolized by the bread and juice of the vines. In another text: “You find in Jerusalem during your visits Ain Silwan with water like Zamzam’s. It flows from underneath the Dome of the Rock and appears in the Valley to the south of the city. There is the Chapel of Ascension where it is said that Christ resurrected and ascended to Heaven...” (al-Harawi 2002, 33).

Other historical texts address the links mentioned above. For example, al-Hanbali repeats quotes from the Islamic Hadith, such as one where “Ibn Abbas reports after Prophet Mohammed, ‘any water man drinks must come from one of the four sources (the four rivers of Seyhan, Geyhan, Nile, and Euphrates) and flows from beneath a rock in Jerusalem’”. The same Hadith is reported by Abi Hureirah, in which he states that “any water a man drinks from these four flows from beneath the rock of Jerusalem” (al-Hanbali 1999a, 231–32). Another Hadith reported by Abi Hureirah states that God chose “...four springs...The flowing ones are Beisan and Silwan, and the spouting springs are Zamzam and Akka. He chose four rivers: Seyhan, Geyhan, the Nile and the Euphrates (al-Hanbali 1999b, 112). Anas Ibn Malik said, “Heaven craves for Jerusalem, and Jerusalem is part of the Gardens of Eden (Firdaws)”. Moreover, ‘Firdaws’ in Syriac means the garden or the vineyard” (al-Hanbali 1999a, 239).

It could be that these texts are influenced by what was narrated earlier in the Old Testament: “a river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates” (Genesis 2:1014-).

Ancient structures and History

This section examines histories related to ancient structures around the water spring. The Palestinian relationship to Silwan is not limited to narratives and texts; it is both past and present reality, forming an integral part of their *long-durée* existence at the site. Traditionally, the Christian site of the Silwan Pool comprised a pool and a church built by the Byzantine Empress Eudocia (441445- AD) to commemorate the miracle of Jesus healing the blind man. The church was demolished by the Persians in 614 AD. Many historical accounts document the repeated destruction and rebuilding of the church, including how the Mamluk Sultan al-Zaher Bibars built a mosque near the site of the church in 1262 (e.g., Murphy-O’Connor 1998). What remains of the pool structure is represented in the Byzantine pool, which can be seen at the entrance of the tunnel (on top of the pool to the North); it consists of Roman pillars reused in the Byzantine building



(4th-7th century AD), which included a pool, a church and a hospital (Zubi 2015, 77). This structure is nowadays part of a building that hosts a mosque, a kindergarten, a community art organization, and is part of the Islamic trust/Waqf property. At the community level, it is known as “Ain al-Tahta—the lower spring”.

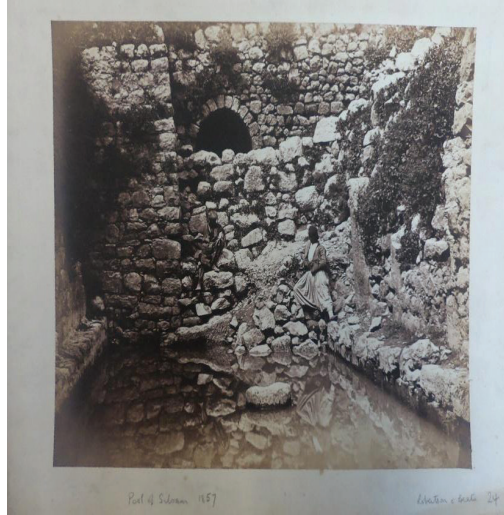


Plate 5 Silwan Pool Plate 6 Silwan Pool in 1857 (Beato 1857)

It is commonly known that Othman ibn Affan made Silwan Spring a Waqf (endowment) for the benefit of poor Muslims, and built a mosque on the site of the church demolished by the Persians. Later, Salah al-Din dedicated estates such as Ein Silwan to his great Salahiyya School, which he built after liberating Jerusalem from the hands of the Crusaders in 588 H/ 1187 AD. The Waqf title is dated 13 Rajab of that year. Other estates dedicated as an Islamic waqf include Silwan gardens, known as Gethsemane gardens and their annexes, as well as the village of Ain Silwan (al-Assali 1983, 292–94). The Silwan Pool and the entrance of the tunnel, which are part of the building, have remained an Islamic waqf from this date. In the mid-19th century, the Greek Orthodox Church managed to acquire part of the land surrounding the pool, mainly the land known as “Ard al-Hamra” (the red land).

Ard al-Hamra is another mystery in Silwan. While the people of Silwan believe that the upper pool is the ancient pool, archaeologists believe that the Roman pool is in Ard al-Hamra, which, they argue, is the one mentioned in the Bible. I used to hear versions of this theory told by tour guides and historians. In 2023, the Israeli authorities and settler organisations confiscated the land and began excavation there in search of the Roman pool, but the results remained negative. They have found almost nothing so far (e.g., Hasson 2023). In their excavation no one examined the meaning of the Arabic name al-Hamra.

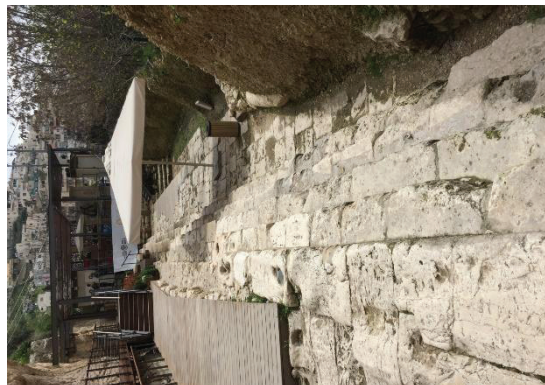


Plate 7 Ard al-Hamra Plate 8 Ard al-Hamra during the excavation



Mamluk Muslim governors continued to look after the spring and pool, dedicating special attention to providing drinking water to the cities in Greater Syria (Al-Sham), including Silwan Spring. Their contribution remain visible today: the building leading to Um al-Daraj spring is a Mamluk construction. Various sources narrate that al-Sultan al-Zaher Bibars built a pool that carried his name, which may be the first irrigation project constructed in the city during the Mamluk period. Furthermore, Amir Sayf Eddien Tankaz al-Hussami, the governor of Syria, inaugurated the water spring in the city of Jerusalem and had its water extracted after water became scarce and expensive in the city. This was part of the broader irrigation projects that represented a top priority for the Mamluk sultans—a number of projects that are not limited to the ones mentioned in this document (Athaminah 2006, 421).

Silwan's Tunnel, Inscription, and Interpretation



Plate 9 Banner at the entrance of the pool stating that the place is an Islamic waqf.

This section examines existing literature on the Silwan tunnel, the Silwan inscription, and other archaeological sites and findings, to highlight gaps remain understudied. The spring Ain Silwan is connected to the pool through a tunnel dug in the rocks, through which the water flows from Um al-Daraj Spring or the Upper Spring for 533 meters below the hill rocks. The water then pours into the rainwater catchment pond, known as the Silwan pool or the Upper Spring. It is used to irrigate agricultural land known as the village orchards. The tunnel entrance near Um al-Daraj Spring is one of the known historical entrances of the Ain Silwan Tunnel. It was shut by the Israeli occupation authorities and placed under the control of the settler organization “Elaad”, which prevents the Palestinian inhabitants’ access to the spring. Access to the entrance is limited to the tourist centre within the “City of David” tourist and

archaeological site, managed by the Elaad Settler organisation.

The tunnel was covered and closed for a long time. A vast body of historical literature mentioned the spring and the pool without mentioning the tunnel. For example, the German pilgrim Theodorich (1896, 33), writing in 1172AD, expressed doubt about the existence of the tunnel in this detailed description:

“...where also in ancient times the city itself stood, a little path leads to the bathing-pool of Siloe, which we are told is so called because the water of that fountain comes thither by an underground course from Mount Silo. This appears to me to be doubtful, because our mount, on which the city stands, and several other mountains, lie between them, and no valley leads directly from the mountain to the pool, nor is it possible that there can be an underground passage through such great mountains because of the distance; for Mount Silo is two miles distant from the city. Wherefore, without pronouncing any decision upon this point, let us tell our hearers that which we know to be true.”

The Silwan Tunnel is called by the Israelis ‘Hezekiah’s Tunnel’. It is believed that King Hezekiah ordered the digging of the tunnel in the 8th century BC. According to the Old Testament, “as for the other events of Hezekiah’s reign, all his achievements and how he made the pool and the tunnel by which he brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? (2 Kings 20:20). And again: “It was Hezekiah who blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon spring and channelled the water down to the west side of the City of David. He succeeded in everything he undertook” (Chronicles 32:30). However, in 1880, an inscription on the rocks inside the tunnel was found and named “Silwan Inscription”. It is now preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul. The common interpretation of the inscription is that it provides a description of the digging of the tunnel: “when the tunnel was driven through. And this was the way in which it was cut through: While with their axes, each man toward his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be cut through, the voice of a man was heard calling to his fellow, for there was an overlap in the rock on the right and on the left. And when the tunnel was driven through, the quarrymen hewed the rock, each man toward his fellow, axe against axe, and the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir for one thousand two hundred cubits, and the height of the rock above the heads of the quarry men was one hundred cubits” (Zubi 2015, 60).

The Silwan Inscription raises questions that challenge the connection between the tunnel and King Hezekiah. The inscription does not refer to the year in which the tunnel was dug nor the name of the king who ordered the digging. Furthermore, the writing was inscribed in the middle of the tunnel and not at the entrance. Some scholars tend to connect the inscription to the Hellenistic period, as demonstrated by the style/pattern of writing and calligraphy (Mizrahi 2016, 60–61). The common interpretation of the inscription suggests that the quarrymen who dug in two opposite



directions to meet in the middle were following a natural overlap in the rocks until they met in the middle. This explains the curve in the track of the tunnel. The inscription itself was taken to Istanbul (Abu Sbeih 2008, 22). However, the biblical archaeology approach and Zionist colonial interests have reframed the inscription as the 'Hezekiah Inscription', even though the Canaanites were famous for their water and irrigation tunnels and canals, which exist in many villages in Palestine. These structures could be different sizes but share the same idea and use, including, for example the tunnel in Lifta that facilitates the water flow from the spring to the pool, and the tunnel in Majeddo.

The water tunnel of Silwan is not the only one; in fact, there is a network of dug and constructed tunnels along with many Canaanite pools and tunnels. One old tunnel has its entrance a few meters away from the beginning of the famous Silwan Tunnel. It is known as the 'Canaanite Canal' and is also known as 'Canal 2'. According to Zubi (2015, 48, 53, 57), it was built by the Canaanites in 18th century BC and extends along 400 meters. Nowadays, only 120 meters of the Canal are accessible on foot. The Canal used to refurbish the old Canaanite Pool as well as the vertical well, referred to by the name of Charles Warren, the British researcher who "discovered it" in 1876 AD. The Warren Well is part of a remarkable network of Canaanite towers and walls that protected the spring and enabled city residents to obtain water without having to go outside the city walls. The towers and walls provided special protection during times of siege.

While conducting this research, I came across an interesting alternative interpretation of the inscription that significantly suggests a different meaning. This interpretation was proposed by Mohamed Bahjat al-Qubaisi (al-Qubaisi 2009, 527). He reads the word ^{٢٥٩} pronounced *El Ra/Raw*, as the god Ra, suggesting that the digging of the tunnel was done by the god Ra, or through his will, as in the following text:

This is the tunnel, and here it was made by the diggers, and with this cut, the god Ra flowed, and at a depth of three fathoms to him, he heard the saying: Isq (to irrigate or to water). This is what the god Ra (El Ra) irrigated and made, so that good deeds would increase with a green hand... On this day, the diggers arrived at a window all of which were stones (because of the digging); a stream of water that was cut under the patronage of the god Ra as it was dug after dig, and so on. This water, part of it, serves as a place for ablution for that pool with two hundred and a thousand fathoms (on one side) and a hundred fathoms (on the other side), and these tunnels that was dug had piles of stones on top of them (al-Qubaisi 2009, 527).

This interpretation is not well-known, I found no critiques of it, and none of the archaeologists, specialists, and experts I asked were aware of the existence of this interpretation. Therefore, I have no confirmation of its validity. But what raised my attention was the evidence of Egyptian existence in the area, which includes the god *Ra* in this interpretation. As well as the name of the Pharaoh '*Tantour Faraon*' in



example: it is mentioned in numerous works of literature from different periods. These literatures confirm the name Silwan for the spring and the area—in stark contrast to the narrative of the ‘City of David’, which is challenged by the archaeological findings from Silwan. In this paper, I examined literature that demonstrates the long Palestinian existence and history of Silwan—a history of a long process and not just an event. My analysis includes a linguistic interpretation of the name Silwan in Arabic and Aramaic. Therefore, I have suggested that the name Silwan originated from the Aramaic name for the water spring and then became the name of the area, and finally the village. It is a name that has continued for more than two thousand years, much like the very Palestinian existence in Silwan.

This paper presented various literatures traditions and stories as part of Silwan’s history. All these narratives are part of the long continuum of Palestinian history. Religious texts, myths, thoughts, and more—without exception—are part of the history of Palestine and the Palestinians. Simultaneously, these people are being forced to become detached from their ancient sites and its history, a fact which marks the significance of this study. Such detachment could erase the traditions connected to the sites, the relation to them, and the memories associated with them. Palestinian oral history is rich with undiscovered history. In Silwan, several places and names become mythical, with no explanations remaining—such as the tunnel, Tantour Faraon, Ras al-Amoud, Magharit al-Minshar, Ard al-Hamra, and other sites/names. Thus, this paper has highlighted gaps that remain understudied, and underscores the importance of further research that considers Palestinian oral history and alternative literature that challenges the dominant colonial narratives.

Bibliography

Arabic Sources

- عبد ربه، عمر. (2019). علم الآثار ودوره في تكريس المشهد التوراتي في القدس: “مدينة داود” نموذجًا. مجلة جامعة بيت لحم. 36. 34. 36. 36. [bethunivj/10.13169.0034.2019](https://doi.org/10.13169/bethunivj/10.13169.0034.2019)
- الشريف الإدريسي. (2002) [560هـ/1165م] - نزهة المشتاق في اختراق الآفاق. مكتبة الثقافة المصرية القاهرة 2002م.
- المقدس البشاري. (2003) [380 هـ / 990م] أحسن التقاسيم في معرفة الأقاليم. الطبعة الأولى: دار الكتب العلمية. (أمانة 2022)
- عامل، مهدي. فكر فرانز فانون الثوري. التقديم (2). ص 35-52.
- أنيس، فريحة. (1956). أسماء المدن والقرى اللبنانية وتفسير المعاني. الجامعة الأمريكية في بيروت.
- أبو علاء المعري. (1961). لزوم ما لا يلزم. دار السعادة ودار بيروت.
- كامل العسلي. (1983) وثائق مقدسية تاريخية. مجلد 1. جامعة الأردن.

- كامل العسلي. (1992) بيت المقدس في أدب الرحلات عند العرب والمسلمين. مصطفى الدباغ. (1991) بلادنا فلسطين. طبعة جديدة. مجلد 14. دار الهدى.
- شمس الدين الدمشقي. (1923) نخبة الدهر في عجائب البر والبحر. المثنى.
- لويس فيشمان. (2009) حادثة الحرم الشريف سنة 1911: أعيان فلسطين في مواجهة الإدارة العثمانية. حوليات القدس (8). ص 60-76.
- ياقوت الحموي. (1995) معجم البلدان. الطبعة الثانية. المجلد 7. دار الصادر.
- مجير الدين الحنبلي. (1999) الأنس الجليل بتاريخ القدس والخليل. مجلد 1. مكتبة دنديس.
- مجير الدين الحنبلي. (1999) الأنس الجليل بتاريخ القدس والخليل. مجلد 2. مكتبة دنديس.
- أبي حسن الهروي. (2002) الإشارات إلى معرفة الزيارات. الطبعة الأولى. مكتبة الثقافة الدينية.
- إبن منظور. (1994) لسان العرب. الطبعة الثالثة. المجلد 14. دار الصادر.
- نظمي الجعبة. (2009) القدس بين الاستيطان والحفريات. حوليات القدس (8). ص 5-20.
- نظمي الجعبة. (2009) دليل القدس: حضارة وتاريخ. القدس عاصمة الثقافة العربية.
- خوري، إبراهيم؟ (1997) دليل السياحس لتاريخ أهم الأماكن الدينية والأثرية في الأرض المقدسة. القدس.
- ناصر خسرو. (1993) سفرنامه. الطبعة الثانية. اللجنة المصرية العامة للكتب.
- جوزيف أسمر ملكي. (1999) النبراس في أسماء الناس. سوريا.
- جوزيف أسمر ملكي. (2010) اللآلئ السريانية. دار الينابيع.
- يوناثان مزراحي. (2016) علم الآثار في ظل الصراع. عيمث شافيه.
- عبد الغني النابلس. (1989) [1640] الحقيقة والمجاز في رحلة بلاد الشام ومصر والحجاز. الطبعة الأولى. دار المعرفة.
- عبد الغني النابلس. (1990) [1641] الحضرة الأنسية في الرحلة القدسية. المصادر.
- يوسف النتشة. (2019) الحفريات والأنفاق الاسرائيلية في القدس منذ 1967. الطبعة الأولى. وكالة بيت مال القدس الشريف.
- عوض قراعين. (2005) سلوان تاريخها وعينها. رسالة سلوان.
- محمد القبيسي. (2009) القدس في الآثار والكتابات المصرية والكنعانية والآرامية وتقنيد مزاعم الصهيونية. فصلية علماء الآثار العرب. مجلد 12 (12). ص 519-542. <https://doi.org/10.21608/CGUAA.2009.38757>
- باسم رعد. التاريخ الخفي: فلسطين، حوض المتوسط والمنطقة العربية. الطبعة الأولى. دار الآداب للنشر والتوزيع.
- نادي سلوان. (1992) نادي سلوان في يوبيله الفضي. نادي سلوان الرياضي.
- جوهانس فورتسبورج. (1997) وصف الأرض المقدسة في فلسطين. دار الشروق.
- عليا الزعبي. (2015) تلة سلوان نواة القدس. التجمع السياحي المقدسي.



Non Arabic sources

- Abu Sbeih, Ghanem. 2008. The Jebusite City (The City of David), and the Main Water Supply. Jerusalem.
- Al-Sharef, Maher. 2014. 'Tarikh Falastine al-Qadem fe al-Ketaba al-Arabia: Qira'a fe al-Ishkalyyat'. *Majallat al- Dirasat al-Filastiniyya*, no. 99: 68–96.
- Amara, Ahmad. 2023. 'The Possession of History and the Dispossession of Silwan's Palestinians'. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, June 13, 1–5. doi.org.
- Athaminah, Khalil. 2006. Palestine in the Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras (1187/1516-). Institute For Palestine Studies.
- Beato, Robertson. 1857. Pool of Siloam 1857. Palestine Exploration Fund, Mounted_Prints_BOX69.
- Bodnaruk, Mariana. 2022. 'Damnatio Memoriae of the High-Ranking Senatorial Office-Holders in the Later Roman Empire, 337–415'. In *Fragmented Memory*, edited by Nicoletta Bruno, Martina Filosa, and Giulia Marinelli. De Gruyter. doi.org.
- Braudel, Fernand, and Immanuel Wallerstein. 2009. 'History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée'. *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 32 (2): 171–203.
- Canaan, Tawfic. 1921. 'Hunted Springings and Water Demons in Palestine'. *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 1: 153–70.
- Emaes, Christopher. 2019. 'Analysis: The Hezekiah Bulla'. Institute of Biblical Archaeology. Armstrong, June 11. armstronginstitute.org.
- Emek Shaveh. 2013. 'From Shiloah to Silwan: A Visitor's Guide'. Emek Shaveh, September 10. emekshaveh.org.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Penguin books.
- Flavius, Josephus. 1928. *The Jewish War*. Harvard University Press.
- Flavius, Josephus. 1981. *The Jewish War*. Penguin Group.
- Governor, Jerusalem. 1923. 'Silwan: Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter - Maintenance Difficulties with Accessing the Tombs & Caves Owned by the Russian Community in Silwan'. Israeli Antiquity Authority, January 4. IAA Archives. iaa-archives.org.il.
- Hasson, Nir. 2023. 'Israel Razed the Last Orchard in Silwan in Search of Siloam Pool. It Still Can't Be Found'. *Israel News*. Haaretz, April 28. haaretz.com.
- Hawari, Mahmoud. 2022. 'Silwan: Biblical Archaeology, Cultural Appropriation, and Settler Colonialism'. *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 90: 75–97.
- ILN. 1869. 'The Exploration at Jerusalem'. *The Illustration London News* (London), April 24.
- Imter, Mohammad. 2010. 'al-Haya al-Iqtisadya fe Beit al-Maqdes w Jiwarha fe Fatret al-Horob al-Salibiyeh 1099/1187/AD - 492583/H'. Master Thesis, Al-Najjah.
- Jubeh, Nazmi. 2019. 'Patrick Geddes: Luminary or Prophet of Demonic Planning'. *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 80: 23–40.
- Jubeh, Nazmi. 2023. 'Jerusalem Neighbourhoods: Silwan, the Bleeding Wound'. *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 93: 100–122.
- Mazar, Eilat. 2015. 'A Seal Impression of King Hezekiah from the Ophel Excavations'. In *The Ophel Excavations to the South of the Temple Mount 2009/2013-, Final report volume I*. Shoham, Academic Research and Publication.

- Mukhalis, Abdallah. 1929. *Joseph the Righteous: His Pit and His Honorable Grave*. 1st edn. Al-Salafea.
- Murphy-O'Connor, J. 1998. *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide: From Earliest Times to 1700*. 4th ed., rev.Expanded. Oxford Archaeological Guides. Oxford University Press.
- PEF. 2023. 'Kathleen Kenyon'. Organisation. The Palestine Exploration Fund. pef.org.uk.
- Salamanca, Omar Jabary, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie, and Sobhi Samour. 2012. 'Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine'. *Settler Colonial Studies* 2 (1): 1–8. doi.org.
- Stokes, Joel. 2022. '“Silence,” Heritage, and Sumud in Silwan, East Jerusalem'. *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 91: 105–19.
- Theodoric. 2003. *Description of the Holy Places in Palestine*. 1st edn. Dar Al-Shorok.
- Theodorich. (1172) 1896. *Theoderich's Description of the Holy Places*. Translated by Aubrey Stewart. Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society.
- Vincent, Louis Hugues. 1912. *Jérusalem: recherches de topographie, d'archéologie et d'histoire*. With Robarts - University of Toronto. Vol. 1. Paris, Gabalda. archive.org.
- Wolfe, Patrick. 2006. 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native'. *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (4): 387–409. doi.org.
- Yas, Jeffrey. 2000. '(Re)Designing the City of David: Landscape, Narrative and Archaeology in Silwan'. *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 7: 17–23.
- Your Version - The Bible. 2024. 'AVD Bible'. bible.com.