

## Mediation with the Past: Khan al-Hilu in Lod

### A community-based archaeological project

### גישור מהעבר – חפירות חאן חילו אשר בלוד جسر من وإلى الماضي: الآثار والجماهير في مدينة اللد التاريخية

Anyone passing the ancient ruins of in recent weeks would have encountered a surprisingly lively picture. This old urban inn, abandoned and deserted for decades, was bustling with activity. Dozens of high school students, community leaders, social activists and archaeologists stretched fences, cleared wild vegetation, and hung flags to inaugurate a community based archaeological excavation of renewal and hope.



From ancient times until 1948, Khan al-Hilu provided accommodation for visiting merchants trading in the city of Lod. In recent years, the building and grounds surrounding the khan turned into the "social backyard" of Lod. Frequented by drug addicts and homeless people, this once unique and beautiful site has become unattractive and off-putting to tourists as well as local residents. The excavation of the khan is part of a larger project designed to change the reality that has besieged this community for too many years. The archaeological excavation will endeavor to uncover and research the rich and glorious heritage of Lod, a city with historical ties to Muslims, Christians and Jews. Furthermore, and not less



**important, the excavation will serve to ignite a social process aimed towards integrating Lod's multi-cultural community.**

**Five high schools, representing all factions of the local population, secular and orthodox Jews and Muslim Arabs, have committed to participate in the project. Teenagers coming to dig are taught about the rich history of their city and instructed in archaeological excavation methods and strategy before their hands-on experience in exposing the past. Adults are also encouraged to participate in the excavation. The "Forum for Cultural Mediation and Dialogue" run by the Lod municipality, representing fifty cultural groups and social organization in the city, as well as the headquarters of the community-based police force, has promised their support.**

**The first season of the excavation, during the month of May, exposed the khan's inner courtyard and remains of a residential house which were buried under two meters of modern trash. Among the finds collected by the young excavators are shards of water jugs, bowls, tobacco-pipes and glazed wares from the Ottoman period and before.**

**Of special interest is the finding of a gold coin of Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839). The coin bears his *tughra* (official signature of an Ottoman sultan) on one side, as well as the date (30<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, i.e., 1837) and mint (Constantinople) on the other.**



**The excavations at Khan al-Hilu are part of a larger project to conserve and preserve the ancient city of Lod, an attempt to vitalize the area and attract tourists from Israel and abroad. The overall project, headed by Dr. Alon Shavit of "Genesis - The Israel Institute of Archaeology," is financed by the Israel Ministry of Tourism and the Government Tourist Corporation. The excavations at the khan are directed by Dr. Yuval Gadot and Dr. Katia Cytryn-Silverman on behalf of The Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology at the Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem**

***On the afternoon of May 24<sup>th</sup> between 16.00-19.00 we invite all the residents of Lod to celebrate the end of our first archaeological season. It will be an opportunity to join the excavation and enjoy performances by local artists. All those concerned with the past and future of Lod are welcome to visit and participate in excavating the past, to help change the present and fulfill the dreams of a shared future.***

**For more details, please contact us: [Ygadot@gmail.com](mailto:Ygadot@gmail.com)**