

# Rocks of Ages: Developing Rock Art Tourism in Israel

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# Abbreviations

EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ES	Environmental Statement
FIT	Free Independent Travelers
GTC	Government Tourist Company
IAA	Israel Antiquities Authority
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
IFRAO	International Federation of Rock Art Organizations
IMPART	Integrative Multilateral Planning to Advance Rock Art Tourism
JNF	Jewish National Fund
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MUPRE	National Prehistory Museum of Valle Camonica
NDA	Negev Development Authority
INPA	Israel National Parks Authority
PAPI	Pen and Paper Personal Interviews
PRAT-CARP	Prehistoric Rock Art Trails - Cultural Route of the Council of Europe
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TARA	<i>Trust for African Rock Art</i>
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

# Foreword

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In considering this IMPART report, *Developing Rock Art Tourism in Israel*, and placing it in some greater discourse, a large set of ideas and concepts come to mind. I list them here because they reflect the impressive scope of this project: cultural resources, heritage, and its management; multidisciplinary research; applied science; humanities, development and tourism; multiple communities of consumers, service providers (e.g., tour guides, etc.), and constituents; public archaeology; and academic research or basic science. As obvious from the title, the intent of the IMPART project was to explore the developmental potentials for rock art tourism in the central Negev, but this report offers insights well beyond the final set of recommendations. Even beyond the basic research engendered during the course of the project, the project stimulated new thinking and new approaches to heritage and cultural resource management in the region, and new partnerships between the organizations responsible for that development.

Although rock art in the Negev has been known at least since the 1950s, in the work of Emmanuel Anati, it began to enter the popular imagination only in the 1980s, again in the work of Anati, especially at Har Karkom (*Har* means Mount in Hebrew). With access constrained by its location in a militarily restricted area, the threat to the art and archaeology was relatively small. The need for systematic management of these cultural treasures only became evident in the 2000s, with the discovery of additional large concentrations of rock art, far more accessible to the public at large. The IMPART project follows closely in the footsteps of this earlier research. More significantly, although incorporating a basic science aspect, the primary focus of the project was to address questions of heritage and management of cultural resources, that is, the rock art.

Thus, as a focus for development toward tourism, beyond the historical framework and basic knowledge, the larger contexts of the rock art needed to be explored, including the geographic and ecological background, as well as the social and political impacts that development might bring. Data were collected from different perspectives, including those of the indigenous Bedouin of the region, the inhabitants of the modern settlements, the tourism providers (tour guides, etc.), and the tourists themselves. Pilot rock art sites were opened and the sites were monitored for impact on the art, and on the general area. The substantive content, the information/knowledge presented to visitors about the rock art, was recorded and its impact assessed. Collaborations between different institutional shareholders, not to mention the international partners offering their own perspectives, were essential for evaluating the potentials of rock art sites, in essence open-air museums, for development and education.

Fittingly for such a complex set of factors, the project conclusions and recommendations are nuanced. For example, rock art-based tourism may result in damage to the rock art, and the desert environment. Local participation is essential to making the enterprise succeed, and if perceived as a disturbance or intrusion, the success of such development is threatened; and without a properly thought-out plan, development will undoubtedly proceed regardless, with even greater damage. The IMPART project is the first attempt at grappling with these issues with respect to Negev rock art. It is a great start.

One final point needs to be considered. In an age when the humanities are discounted, in a country where sophisticated technological industries and education are of the highest governmental priorities, the simple elegance of ancient rock art stands out. We see in the rock art the reflection of thoughts of ancient peoples, no less inspired than ourselves, and in fact, inspiring in their stark beauty even to our modern-day sensibilities. The proper stewardship of this part of our basic human heritage is fundamental.

# Preface

The Negev desert in southern Israel is a continuation of a much larger desert region that incorporates the Sinai desert to the west and the Arabian desert to the south. Each region has its own unique heritage and in the case of this publication, rock art. The rock art of the Negev contains an estimated 200,000 engraved images that span over four millennia and are organized into four generic groups: early, Tinnian/Bronze Age, Iron Age, classical period, and recent Bedouin (Eisenberg-Degen and Rosen, 2013). The earliest period dates to just before the Bronze Age, followed by the largest assemblage from the Byzantine period. The remaining groups include mainly textual engravings from the Islamic period and geometric symbols, known as *wusum* marks, from the semi-nomadic Bedouin tribal groups that currently reside in many parts of the Negev (Ben-David 1989; Ben-David and Orion 1998).

Over the relatively recent past, the various rock art assemblages and the archaeology associated with each has come under potential threat from social, political and economic activities such as militarization, settlement and tourism, not to mention environmental change. The following pages are based on the findings from a research project initiated in 2013 to address this matter. Carried out under the acronym IMPART (Integrative Multilateral Planning to Advance Rock Art Tourism), an interdisciplinary team of Israeli-Italian scholars collaborated to pursue two primary streams of investigation: archeo-ecological and socio-touristic. The goal of their study was to explore potential socio-economic, managerial, tourism and policy options for effectively valorizing Negev rock art while duly noting operational hindrances and imperative conservation and safety needs. The bi-national IMPART team included Joshua Schmidt (cultural anthropologist), Davida Eisenberg-Degen (archaeologist and expert in Negev rock art), Natan Uriely (professor of sociology of tourism and sustainable tourism development) and Sara Levi Sacerdotti (specialist in public policy evaluation and strategic territorial development). As well, during the different stages of IMPART research, numerous expert advisors and assistants supported the advancement of the study, the core of whom contributed to this volume. The synergy resulting from the multidisciplinary approach to their project enabled the researchers to formulate a 'best practices' benchmark for the future development of Negev rock art tourism together with a set of 'ground zero' eco-archaeological landscape indicators, that later can be monitored and compared with future reference points during expected forthcoming periods of increased tourism activity.

The volume is organized into 12 chapters that identify the cultural heritage, archaeology and tourism geographies that fill the multilayered landscape in which they sit. Our goal is to focus on finding ways to preserve this unique heritage for future generations by striking a balance between these fragile resources and the pressures for the development of the desert.

The IMPART team wishes to warmly acknowledge the generous funding received from the Israeli Ministry of Science and Technology and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project was likewise actualized via the ongoing critical physical support kindly provided to the team by a combination of bodies, chief among them: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, the Dead Sea and Arava Science Center, SiTI - Higher Institute on Territorial Systems for Innovation, the Politecnico di Torino, the Compagnia di San Paolo in Turin, Italy, the Embassy

of Italy in Israel, the Israel Antiquities Authority, the Israel National Parks Authority, the Authority for Development and Settlement of the Bedouin in the Negev, the Israel Ministry of Tourism, the Ramat Negev regional and Mitzpe Ramon local-area councils, the Negev Rock Art Center and the Maritime Alps Natural Park.

As a final note, the text for this book was written prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore some of the issues raised in the various chapters were and will be still relevant when various lockdown guidelines are relaxed or removed and tourism within this part of Israel is up and running.