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Beautiful, Good, Important, and Special: Cultural Heritage, Archaeology, Tourism and the Miniature in the Holy Land

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Beautiful, Good, Important and Special

Cultural Heritage, Archaeology, Tourism and the Miniature in the Holy Land

Morag M. Kersel and Yorke M. Rowan

Abstract Through an examination of representations of cultural heritage in miniature this paper tackles the recurrent question of how are culture, a nation, and the past presented to the public. Exploring how this is achieved at the microcosm of Mini Israel, an outdoor park midway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv where you can “see it all small” (Shapira 2003: 1), we conclude that Mini Israel offers visitors (foreign or local) what they want; an unthreatening version of the Holy Land, where differences in ethnicities, religions, and political groups are abridged in a pristine environment free from conflict and strife. At Mini Israel displays include the commercial, the contemporary, and the ancient, depicting what is “beautiful, good, important, and special” (Shapira 2003: 2). We argue that the selection of sites in miniature is a reflection of tourism trends, financial motives, and visitor preference, rather than a reflection of facts on the ground.

Resumen Mediante un análisis de representaciones del patrimonio cultural en miniatura, este artículo aborda la pregunta recurrente de cómo una cultura, una nación y el pasado se presentan al público. Investigando cómo se logra esto en el microcosmo de Mini Israel, un parque al aire libre a mitad de camino entre Jerusalén y Tel Aviv donde se puede “ver todo pequeño” (Shapira 2003: 1), llegamos a la conclusión de que Mini Israel ofrece a los visitantes (extranjeros o locales) lo que ellos desean: una versión inofensiva de la Tierra Santa, donde las diferencias étnicas, religiosas y políticas están reducidas en un entorno inmaculado libre de conflictos y disputas. En Mini Israel las muestras abarcan lo comercial, lo contemporáneo y lo antiguo, representando lo que es “hermoso, bueno, importante y especial” (Shapira 2003: 2). Sostenemos que la elección de los sitios en miniatura es un reflejo de las tendencias del turismo, los motivos económicos y la preferencia de los visitantes, y no un reflejo de los hechos sobre el terreno.

Résumé À travers un examen des représentations d'héritage culturel dans le contexte d'un site miniature, cet essai pose la question récurrente de comment sont représentés une culture, une nation, et le passé au grand public. En explorant ces représentations dans le contexte microcosmique de Mini Israël, un parc d'attractions à mi-chemin entre Jérusalem et Tel Aviv où les visiteurs peuvent tout voir «en miniature» (Shapira 2003: 1), nous concluons que Mini Israël offre aux visiteurs (étrangers et locaux) ce qu'ils recherchent : une description non menaçante de la Terre Sainte, où les différences ethniques, religieuses, et politiques sont minimisées dans la présentation d'un environnement dénué de conflit et de discord. Les expositions dans Mini Israël mettent en valeur à travers les univers économiques, contemporains et antiques ce qui est «beau, bon, important, et précieux» (Shapira 2003: 2). Nous soutenons que la sélection de ces sites miniatures est un miroir des tendances touristiques contemporaines, de motivations financières et de préférences du public, plutôt qu'une représentation de la réalité des faits sur le terrain.

Welcome to Mini Israel the largest miniature city in the world. Mini Israel is a vision come true. We wanted to create a unique stage that will express everything *beautiful, good, important and special* that we have in this wonderful country of ours. We aspire to create a kind of living picture album that will reflect the reality of life in this small strip of land. [Shapira 2003:6; emphasis added].

At Mini Israel, an outdoor tourist venue midway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, a sightseer is encouraged to “see it all small.” Opened in 2002, this theme park presents visitors with a curious introduction to Israel; a microcosm of everything “beautiful, good, important and special” (Shapira 2003:6). Why do visitors choose to “see it all small” when a mere five minutes away you can see the real thing?

Miniature theme parks often present culture as frozen in time and space (Hoffstaeder 2008). Mini Israel cannot be accused of presenting a fixed historical vision of Israel because a variety of cultures and times are depicted, but notable sites are omitted from the miniaturized version. Stewart (1984) proposes that the role of these parks is to bring historical events to life. At Mini Israel, historical places are pivotal, but conflated with the contemporary. Through the gaze of the tourist we attempt to unpack the motives and concepts of the creators of the site. We are particularly interested in the ways the park appeals to different publics, foreign and local, religious and secular, and attempts to draw in people who prefer a miniature park to the harsh facts on the ground. We view Mini Israel as a case study in archaeological tourism, investigating which sites and landscapes are depicted and which are not. Cultural geographer David Lowenthal (2002) proposes that people crave imagined locales more than actual ones, which we would argue is the case at Mini Israel.

Places and buildings represented at the miniature park shape the behaviors and consciousness of the visitors. According to Eran Gazit, the creator of the park, what sightseers should experience at Mini Israel is that which is “beautiful, good, important and special” about Israel (Oestermann 2006:124). The official imprimatur of the Ministry of Tourism in Israel at the entrance reinforces visitor understanding that miniature forms in the park represent the best of Israel. Product placement throughout the park supports the notion of what is “commercially best,” a point reinforced by Ren (2007) in his analysis of Chinese theme parks. At Mini Israel, not only is the significance of Masada emphasized, but Coca-Cola is showcased as an important product. Economics and national identity go hand in hand at Mini Israel similar to many other themed parks (see Lukas 2007). How

should we approach a site that claims to convey all that is “beautiful, good, important and special?” More specifically, what is the allure of a microcosm of Israel, when entire elements are not depicted in miniature? Who visits and why? What factors influenced park designers on what to include and what to omit? More specifically, as archaeologists we wondered about the selection of some sites over others. The following discussion attempts to respond to these questions through an exploration of the site of Mini Israel.

The Lure of the Miniature

At last estimate there are approximately 50 miniature parks open to the public around the world, ranging from the hundreds of landmark buildings of “Mini Europe” in Belgium and “Madurodam” in Holland, to the oldest in original form at Bekonscot, UK (see International Association of Miniature Parks 2011). Theme and leisure parks have always been associated with the promotion of images and ideas of nations or regions. The earliest miniature parks were fashioned during the late nineteenth century coinciding with the popularity of World’s Fairs where visitors were treated to the concepts of the nation-state and notions of progress. The concept of the miniature exploded during the 1930s to 1950s (International Association of Miniature Parks 2011).

Opened in 2002, Mini Israel is a member of the International Association of Miniature Parks (IAMP). The park is situated approximately halfway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in the geographical center of the country in the Ayalon Valley, an area where for millennia, pilgrims, armies, and merchants have traveled on their way to and from Jerusalem. Mini Israel includes more than 350 exact replica miniatures, most at 1:25 scale, built on approximately 7.5 acres of land owned by one of the originators of the park and former managing director Eran Gazit in partnership with Kibbutz (collective farm) Nachshon. The impetus for the creation of Mini Israel is the unique vision of Gazit, who hoped to capitalize on the phenomenon and popularity of miniature theme parks.

Inspired by a visit to the miniature town of Madurodam (Netherlands), Gazit and his partner Yoni Shapira employed 17 model makers from the former Soviet Union to create over 30,000 human figures amid the miniatures. The initial \$20 million USD price tag was funded primarily by two large investment groups, Granite HaCarmel and Secom, with an additional 15% provided by the Israel Tourism Office and sponsors ranging from Egged (the national bus company) and Tnuva dairies to Coca-Cola (Bender 2003; Oestermann 2006; Veeder 2003). Coinciding with the early stages of the second

Intifada (uprising) when heightened security, tensions, and fears made travel within Israel daunting, Mini Israel was among the most visited tourism sites in Israel when it first opened. In 2006, Mini Israel was seventh on the list of most popular tourist destinations in Israel, with some 406,000 paying visitors (Rosenblum 2007). This initial popularity waned in recent years, however, and it no longer appears on the top ten list compiled by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2011). The most recent statistics on visitors to Mini Israel indicated that 95% of visitors to the park are Israelis (Oestermann 2006:126).

In a 2010 *Jerusalem Post* article on Mini Israel and tourism, visitors provided a wide array of reasons why they liked the site, but were uniform in their response to the question of why they visited. Reinforcing many of the general tropes of tourism, visitors cited nostalgia, artistry, and the lure of the miniature as rationales for a visit. Each interviewee stated that the main impetus was “a journey through Mini Israel is the easiest, fastest and most pleasurable way to see *every* historic and *important* site in the country in a single blow” (Mini Israel 2010; emphasis added). A quick, single visit provided people with the opportunity to experience every important site in Israel—although on closer inspection some sites deemed important by various national and international heritage agencies are missing (see below for a discussion of World Heritage Sites). In his study of Israeli visitors to Mini Israel, sociologist and anthropologist Michael Feige (2008) suggests that Mini Israel is a meta-place, which attempts to include representations of everything that is worthy within its borders—money and space permitting. Do money and space dictate what is worthy of representation in miniature, or are there other powers at work? The inclusion of *everything* is impossible, but there are interesting exclusions at Mini Israel.

Cohen-Hattab and Kerber (2004:59) propose that miniature parks are “contemporary compromises in the pressured relationship between geographical space, cultural experience and the might of mass tourism;” places where tourists who might be interested in identifying with a particular site, religion, or historical representation are willing to suspend belief surrounding issues of authenticity in favor of experiencing it “all” small and in the same place. The success of tourist sites can often depend on their perceived historical accuracy. The well-crafted tourist site provides a kind of imaginative access to a particular time and space that incorporates a range of senses, from sight and sound, to even smell and taste (Taylor 2001).

At Splendid China in Shenzhen, unveiled in 1988, the aim is to introduce foreign and local tourists to over 5000 years of the rich cultural history of China. The 30 hectare park hosts miniatures of renowned Chinese build-

ings and landscapes and was an instant success, recouping the initial financial investment in its first year of business (Ren 2007). Typically, miniature theme parks feature scale replicas of buildings, landscapes, and infrastructure, ranging from facsimiles of entire towns to landscapes and historical events. Similar to models (such as airplanes), which attempt to replicate as much detail as possible, miniature buildings attempt to approximate the life-size original. At the same time, the reduced building loses details and is an abstracted form that represents the idea, an ethnicity, gender, or age (Bailey 2005). Miniatures can have certain physical properties that enable them to carry meaning in an exaggerated manner (Knappett 2012). Miniatures also have the ability to obscure or confuse meaning; a highly desirable trait for those wishing to present a romanticized version of real life.

Individuals have long been intrigued by the miniature; towering over the monumental allows scrutiny, rather than emphasizing the diminutive human. Unlike the gigantic or life-size, the miniature does not instill trepidation; instead visitors conquer fears and insecurities, empowered by their domination. More importantly, at Mini Israel visitors can examine sites in the West Bank without fear of physical attack, recrimination, or criminal penalty (it is currently illegal for Israelis to travel to the West Bank without special permission of the Israeli government). Making the inaccessible accessible in miniature allows for visitors to conquer barriers in real life. Inclusion of these sites in the suite of the “beautiful, good, important and special” reinforces the idea that they are valuable to Israel tourism narratives. By implication, if the site, period, or city is on display at Mini Israel, it must be important.

“See It All . . . Small”—History Condensed, Geography Confused

One of the most striking characteristics of Mini Israel is that, rather than a representative geographical configuration or a chronological romp through time, such as that of the “historical passageway” at the al Hussein Park in Amman, Jordan (see Corbett 2011), the park is shaped in the Star of David (emblematic of both Israel and Judaism) (Figure 1). In the center of the Star are a miniature airport and kibbutz rather than Jerusalem, the geopolitical/religious center of the modern state. One might expect that, similar to miniature sites like Splendid China, the nation would be defined in terms of the physical and cultural landscapes. The Star of David pattern reinforces the paradigm of the importance of the state of Israel—to the exclusion of all



Figure 1. Map of Mini-Israel. Photograph by authors.

other claimants to the land. Moreover, this configuration allows the planners to avoid the unresolved nature of modern state boundaries and occupied territory. A vague sense of north vs. south and east vs. west is maintained (the southern Negev Desert and Timna Valley are at the opposite end of Tel Dan, on the northern border with Lebanon).

The exhibition of contested terrain is unlikely to be consensual when it comes to the representation of a region's cultural heritage, of course, and there is no expectation that the tourist experience at Mini Israel would be a likely venue to confront the complex issues revolving around who owns this past. The decision not to follow a natural geographic layout may be an attempt to depoliticize the park and avoid the thorny issue of occupied Palestine, and at the same time overcome a curatorial nightmare of vast stretches of under-populated areas (like the Negev desert), which may not evoke the “beautiful, good, important and special.”

Visitors make their way around the site on the red path forming the Star of David pattern. Start and end points are not dictated by geography, architecture, or chronology. There is no structured program for visiting the site; whether you go left, right or straight ahead, you make your way along the Star of David—perhaps driven by a quest for shade, water, or a place to

sit rather than a quest to “see it all small.” Each building or feature depicted in miniature has a sign providing the name of the site or building, most in Hebrew, Arabic, and English (some signs, such as those for the Presidential Residence in Jerusalem or the Baniyas Waterfall located in the Golan Heights, are only in Hebrew and English), but without description. Directional signs for navigating the park, on the other hand, are in Hebrew and English only. For description of the miniatures, visitors must either purchase an audio tour or a guide book (which until recently were only in Hebrew). During our two visits (2004 and 2010) to the site we witnessed no one with guidebooks or audio guides. Generally visitors wandered around looking for the familiar in miniature.

Sociologist John Urry (1990) describes the general state of tourism as an ingestion of familiar signs and symbols on the part of the tourist. At Mini Israel visitors are treated to the familiar in both its ancient and contemporary forms. In articulating his vision for the site, Gazit explained, “We have a very emotional park to show. And we are very sensitive towards our visitors. We have invested a lot of work to make sure that no one will feel insulted” (Oestermann 2006). In order not to insult day-trippers, many sites of contestation or unrest or dispute are not represented. In this respect Mini Israel as a heritage site is not unique; Splendid China does not present aspects of Tibetan heritage, and it is only lately that Colonial Williamsburg began to address issues of slavery at the site (Handler and Gable 1997). Recent studies of cultural representations at heritage sites critique the creation of exclusionary pasts and presents through display. In his work on Malaysian theme parks, Hoffstaedter (2008:153) suggests that the process of essentializing knowledge and identity by producing cultural representations of certain sites and excluding others “creates an image removed from reality, thus displaying a revisionist image of a Malay Malaysia.”

The impetus and importance of Mini Israel is also predicated on our fascination with the small, clean, and pristine. Baram and Rowan (2004) argue that visiting aspects of Israel in miniature provides the visitor with the opportunity to experience and gaze upon the Holy Land without having to encounter the actual physicality of the space, the people, the emotions, the danger, and the historic and modern tensions. There are no depictions of the hard edges of life in Israel, no uncomfortable questions, no sites of contestation. Instead, the technical and exacting in detail are highlighted. At Mini Israel, the only miniatures from Palestine—Rachel’s Tomb (near Bethlehem) and the Cave of the Machpela (Ibrahimi Mosque, near Hebron)—are not portrayed in their present form as disputed sites with security barriers, blast walls, and limited access, but appear in an idealized state. These sites are

cleansed of their Palestinian/West Bank geography by being placed in the biblical Judea, not in Occupied Palestine—decontextualized, historical particularism at odds with the multiculturalist narrative of inclusion. There are no oppositional narratives at Mini Israel; only those places conforming to the “beautiful, good, important and special” appear to suit the vision for Mini Israel. Omitting the questionable spaces and difficult realities from the miniature is unsurprising; tourism studies make it abundantly clear that people want to escape the daily grind—they want to be transported back in time and/or to experience a clean, safe environment where everything is “beautiful, good, important and special.”

Why Visit the Holy Land in Miniature?

Examining Mini Israel brings to mind Tony Bennett’s (1995) model of the “exhibitionary complex,” which presents the birth of the public museum as a means of organizing an unruly populace through technologies of discipline, surveillance, and spectacle; at Mini Israel emphasis is on the spectacle. With so many venues to choose from in a small country, why would someone visit Mini Israel? Is it the spectacle, the miniature, or the content that draws in visitors? Feige (2008:340) suggests that at Mini Israel the *Israeli* visitor finds the beautiful, eternal, unthreatening face of the Promised Land, where religious groups live harmoniously together all under the canopy of the Star of David. The question of audience and expectations is worthy of consideration. This first encounter with a portrayal of heritage leaves the impression of a decontextualized, depoliticized, and geographically neutral space, where the historical and modern tensions of the region are suppressed by the “feel-good” narrative of the miniature.

Based on the representation of ancient, historic, and modern heritage, we recognize that Mini Israel gains meaning through its geographic placement, the design, and the choice of content. Replicas of the “Holy Land” are nothing new, both inside Israel (i.e., the model of Jerusalem during the Second Temple Period at the Israel Museum) and outside the region (e.g., the Holy Land Experience in Orlando, Florida, and Chautauqua Park in New York; see Davis 1992; Rowan 2004; and Rubin 2000). Indeed, Conrad Schick—Swiss clockmaker, missionary and schoolmaster—was commissioned by the Ottoman authorities to create a miniature model of the Haram esh-Sharif for the 1873 World Exhibition in Vienna (van der Meer 2010:132). These representations typically focus exclusively on biblical periods, narratives, and places, unlike Mini Israel.

The concept of curatorial authority is integral to the visitor experience

at Mini Israel—someone has consciously made a decision to include or exclude various aspects of the Israeli landscape. Like visitors to museums, those visiting the miniature park must place their trust in the decision-makers in order to exhibit what is of paramount importance, dictating what they should esteem. Feige (2008:331) suggests that visitors come to learn about a present state rather than things in the past. Whether attracted by the lure of the miniature, as a gateway to a tour of Israel, or as a result of safety concerns, people continue to visit Mini Israel, although in far fewer numbers than during its heyday. Wildly popular in its early days, site attendance has dropped off, prompting a new marketing strategy aimed at foreign tourists entering and leaving Ben Gurion Airport, 15 minutes from Mini Israel. In this scheme, the site is pitched as perfect for the beginning or end of a visit to Israel, where the tourist can obtain a sense of the state in its entirety. Mini Israel is a convenient stop to “see it all small” before experiencing the sites in life size, or just before departing, reminding the visitor of what they experienced in reality.

Is Mini Israel for local citizens or for foreigners? There is desperation in the Ben Gurion Airport scheme, for Mini Israel speaks more strongly to Israelis, reflecting what Feige (2008:330) terms the Israeli transformation toward a “post-ideological” phase. Israelis seem less concerned with seeking out the authentic. Visiting Rachel’s Tomb or Jerusalem is safer at Mini Israel than in reality. Embodying what Goldstein (2007:173) refers to as the multicultural fantastic—where tensions, conflicts and troublesome histories are subsumed by a feel-good pluralism—Mini Israel attempts to display the best of a sterile Israel. “We could not show the entire country. We wanted to give expression to the diverse population of our country, from every community and faith, together with the buildings that serve them” (Shapira 2003:5). And while churches, synagogues, and mosques are all represented, completely absent from the heritage discourse is evidence of erasure, dispossession, debate, and occupation, either in the past or the present. Glossed over geography extends beyond the anticipated absence in miniature of the troublesome geopolitical realities of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Mini Israel exhibits a multiculturalism that “forgets” the physical conditions that belie notions of equal representation. Not only are the messy consequences of occupation ignored or dodged, but the status quo of Israeli attitudes are embodied in the representation of the Golan and east Jerusalem as uncontested parts of the country. The diverse population relegated to this “backstage” (MacCannell 1973) includes not only the Palestinian and Israeli Arab citizens, but also the development cities filled with recent immigrants, Bedouin villages, and Arab towns.

Representing the Ancient

As archaeologists we first visited Mini Israel to experience how archaeology was depicted in miniature. In examining archaeology and heritage at Mini Israel, we wondered about the representation of the past in miniature and whether this portrayal tells us anything about contemporary Israeli society or that society's attitude toward archaeology. Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996:10–11) propose that heritage derives from the experience of the consumer and specifically from the extent that the product satisfies whatever expectation the consumer has of the past. Is archaeology underrepresented at Mini Israel because visitors are indifferent to the past? Is the park driven by consumer taste, ideology, nationalism, current tourist trends, or a combination of all of these forces? Visitors to the site leave with a particular impression of which archaeological sites represent Israel and which sites they should esteem and visit in life-size (Figure 2). Although Israel is arguably the most intensively excavated region of the Middle East, there is scant representation of archaeology at the Mini Israel miniature theme park. There are no depictions of prehistoric archaeological sites and very few large tell sites. Even though the majority of archaeological projects carried out in Israel today are salvage work, this is also unrepresented at Mini Israel. Recent Ministry of Tourism statistics indicate that almost one-third of foreign visitors and one-fourth of Israelis visit archaeological sites in Israel (Romano and Ostrovsky 2011). Perhaps it is this reality of tourism that dictated the number and scope of archaeological sites represented at Mini Israel? In the early stages of the nation, archaeology and internal tourism to archaeological sites played an important role in creating a national identity with ties to the ancient past (Baram 2007; Silberman 1995). In the mid- to late twentieth century Israelis flocked to sites to witness their ancient ancestry and the origins of their nascent state. In her essay on presenting Israel's archaeological sites to the public Ann Killebrew (2010:123) suggests that at the dawn of the twenty-first century nationalism is no longer the major impetus for archaeological investigations. "Potential economic value rather than political significance is often the deciding factor in the decision to excavate, preserve, develop and present an archaeological site to the public" (Killebrew 2010:123). Is this true of decision-making at Mini Israel? The nation has moved beyond national narratives in research and interpretation, and it is no longer beholden to heritage sites that confirm a biblical past. Is the nationalist myth intrinsic to Mini Israel, or has tourism trumped nationalism as Baram (2007) and Killebrew (2010) posit for real life sites?

The selection of ancient sites at Mini Israel confounds expectations if working from the assumption of a nationalist agenda for the park. Baram



Figure 2. Miniaturized representation of the Roman baths at Hamat Gader. Photograph by authors.

(2007) argues that the impact of tourism in Israel has overtaken nationalism as a factor that guides the discourse of archaeology. As he notes, Masada (depicted in exacting detail at Mini Israel) remains an important tourist destination, both for Israelis and foreigners (some 36% of all tourists visit Masada each year—see Romano and Ostrovsky 2011:5), but its role in reinforcing a nationalistic tie to the land through inductions of soldiers and new immigrants or official visits to the site declined dramatically in recent years. The miniature representation of Masada is a television production set situated at the site—a depiction of the filming of the television miniseries *Masada*. The focus is not the archaeological, but the intersection of popular culture and an ancient site (Figure 3).

This echoes a point made over a decade earlier. In her discussion of site conservation in Israel, Killebrew (1999, 2010) notes the minimal effort placed in the presentation of Israel's biblical past, especially the Old Testament, paradoxically once of paramount importance in the nation-building labors of the nascent state. A pamphlet published by Mini Israel confirms this observation by noting that the park's time line begins at 200 BCE, post-dating most Old Testament biblical sites. (This is not entirely accurate because a few features, such as the Tel Dan gate, predate 200 BCE.)



Figure 3. Film crew at miniature Masada. Photograph by authors.

Representations at Mini Israel are not explicitly about ideas of Israeli nationalism, but highlight invocations of a pluralistic society that embrace all faiths and people. The historical narrative advocated by Zionism and buttressed by nationalistic archaeology no longer holds the hegemonic power it once did. Archaeology is an important resource for tourism, but tourism is political, and this drives the themes selected by competing forces, whether focused on religion, environment, or the peace industry. As packaging, marketing, and consuming the past is increasingly tied to tourism, the multiple themes available are selected for their economic potential—this is played out in miniature at Mini Israel. Although nationalism is not entirely absent in the choices made by the designers and investors in Mini Israel, tourist dollars are sought through depiction of the least controversial sites, reinforcing the notion that tourism is about escapism to a milieu where everything is “beautiful, good, important and special.”

World Heritage Sites in the Holy Land

It comes as no surprise that miniaturized renderings of archaeological square holes in the earth would hold little appeal in contrast to that of monumental

architecture, but in a region famous for evidence of Neanderthal and *Homo sapiens* found in caves in the Carmel, the enigmatic Neolithic tower in Jericho, or the Solomonic city of Megiddo, the lack of interest of the park in ancient sites seems significant. The interplay of cultural heritage, identity formation, and tourism would suggest that the expectation of miniaturized depictions of Israeli World Heritage Sites is not misplaced. Yet of the six sites in Israel inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list, the Biblical Tells—which includes the large sites of Beersheva, Hazor, and Megiddo—are absent. Once hailed as the national pastime (Feige 2007:277), such sites formed the core of biblical archaeology and were considered the cornerstone of Israel's heritage. If Mini Israel had been constructed during the 1960s and 1970s, the park would be filled with archaeological sites and tells that represent the biblical narrative, reinforcing the trope of a national tie to the land. Iron Age mound/tell sites abound in Israel, yet none inscribed on the World Heritage List are represented.

Meskell (2002, 2005) notes that World Heritage sites are compendia of places that governments believe best represent their national character. At the commercial enterprise of Mini Israel it is unclear that the government was involved in the decision-making process, but if there was government input one might expect that all of the Israeli World Heritage Sites would be portrayed. World Heritage sites are depicted but none expressly so—there are very few didactic materials that explain or highlight the World Heritage status of some of the sites. Considering the integral role that these sites once played as ancient narratives and central pillars of national identity formation for Israel, their absence is somewhat unexpected. However, highlighting the World Heritage status of sites would entail a discussion of Jerusalem, which was nominated for World Heritage status not by Israel, but by Jordan, another thorny issue of heritage and site representation in the region. The depoliticized, unacknowledged World Heritage status of Jerusalem erases the East-West divide, rendering it manageable and palatable for all visitors.

Idealized Pluralism?

Perhaps the most interesting part of visiting the miniature Jerusalem is the Dome of the Rock, a contested space embroiled in some of the fiercest “who owns the past” battles, none of which is evident in the miniature. Jew and Muslim are depicted praying at their respective holy sites—the Western Wall and the Haram esh-Sharif—pluralism in practice. But on closer examination this miniature demonstrates that the tensions (the competing claims of Judaism and Islam) cannot be suppressed fully by the “feel-good” narrative



Figure 4. Miniature Muslim worshippers on the Haram esh-Sharif, protected by plexiglass box. Note small pebbles around the figurines and atop the protective cover. Photograph by authors.

of Mini Israel; those tensions are visible in the plexiglass box placed over the Muslim worshippers in order to protect them from the small stones and pebbles resting below and on top of the plastic (Figure 4). Previous visitors, dissatisfied with Mini Israel's depiction of "their" heritage, threw stones at the mechanical Muslims who pray when you push the button, causing damage and destruction. In a nod to the harsh realities of the multicultural fantastic, Mini Israel modified the miniature with plexiglass. Feige (2008:329), in his assessment of the site, is struck by the "sacred" status apparently conferred to the miniature Dome of the Rock and Haram esh-Sharif by their originals: "the blurred lines between the macro and the micro—there is a transparent plastic cover protecting the miniature Muslim prayers from the vengeance of full-sized, very real Jewish extremists." In defense, a stone thrower asserted "They throw rocks at us, I'm going to throw rocks at them" (Yogis 2005) as the miniature and the real elide through the political. Visitors and locals may value multiple ethnic identities and religions in the abstract, but being confronted with diversity—even in an idealized, miniature form—is an entirely different matter.

The idealized also appears in the miniature rendering of the ancient site of Qasrin, a Jewish village in the Golan Heights. Archaeological excavations at the site were supported with funding from the Israeli government in the aftermath of the annexation of the Golan and as part of an “ideologically driven policy of development” in the region (Killebrew 2010:131). Ann Killebrew, the original excavator of the site, bemoans the erasure of the Islamic periods unearthed during systemic excavation of the site. “My most serious misgiving is that the later Islamic periods—Mamluk and modern Syrian periods—are not presented to the public. For all intents and purposes these periods have been erased from the contemporary landscape” (Killebrew 2010:131). At Mini Israel only the Talmudic (Jewish) village is depicted, as “art” is enlisted to imitate real life.

An examination of statistics from the Ministry of Tourism in Israel provides valuable clues to the selection of sites of archaeological heritage at Mini Israel—a strong correlation is apparent. In 2005 there were three archaeological sites among the top ten tourism destinations in Israel (statistics include only sites which charge admission, and exclude Jerusalem)—Hamat Gader, Masada, and Caesarea (Romano and Ostrovsky 2011). In 2010 there were five, two more in addition to those previously mentioned—Banias and Qumran. The only site not depicted in miniature is Qumran, a problematic aspect of archaeological heritage due to its location in occupied territory. Hamat Gader (see Figure 2) is one of the most visited sites in the region, not because of its importance as a site of heritage but for the restorative healing qualities of the hot springs. The only top ten tourism sites not included at Mini Israel are the two water fun parks, which given other commercial interests represented at the park, suggests that Luna Gal and Balagan Yagur are not sponsors and may be viewed as commercial competitors. This brings us to our final point in depicting heritage at Mini Israel.

Financial Considerations—What Constitutes the Heritage of Israel?

Countries seek World Heritage Site status for various sites and cities because it they believe it will mean more tourism dollars; fewer funds are given to interpretation and conservation at prehistoric sites because no one visits. Most cultural heritage initiatives can be reduced to the potential tourism money generated. As many have pointed out, heritage tourism is typically viewed as a positive development, serving modern economic interests (Baram 2007; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). By using heritage to convert locations into

destinations, and making them economically viable through tourism, sites exhibit themselves (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:151). Yet at the same time, representation of multiple stakeholders' claims for a single site are avoided in favor of the single marketing segment that is Israeli, or views the idealized state of Israel as timeless, firmly defined, and both rooted in the ancient world yet a modern industrial state.

The guide to Mini Israel states: "A miniature city cannot be built without a dramatic encounter between vision and financing," (Shapira 2003:3), and this meeting of vision and money is evidenced by product placement throughout the park. Southwest airlines does not fly to Israel, which may make visitors to Mini Israel wonder why a scale model of a Southwest plane is represented in miniature at the mini Ben Gurion Airport. Perhaps the Southwest Corporation is a silent financial backer of the park, but we could find no confirmation or denial of this; this product placement is a mystery. The center of the Star of David places a kibbutz—the quintessential element to a narrative of socialist Zionism in the early state formation of Israel—alongside the development of an unnamed frontier town in Israel—the latter depicting progress and showcasing some of the financial backers of the site. Building something from nothing highlights the tenacity and continued perseverance of the Jewish State, a heritage of which to be proud.

The use of a history enterprise for commercial reasons is nothing new in the tourism industry, and the aim of Mini Israel as other heritage sites is to make money. At Colonial Williamsburg, Handler and Gable (1997) demonstrate that museums and historical sites, as private corporations, will always work towards profit first and historical accuracy later. But is this turn to the commercial (our two visits—six years apart—can attest to an increase in the depiction of commercial interests) a solution to the downturn in visitors to the site? Or are less people visiting Mini Israel due to changing perceptions of increased security and improved travel to the Old City of Jerusalem and other sites, once avoided out of fear? Perhaps those who would visit have already done so and once is enough? Israelis can see it all (well most of "all") in life-size, so they no longer need the miniature version?

The American version of Splendid China, near Orlando, Florida, and in operation between 1993 and 2003 was a failure. The joint US-China venture, funded by a major Chinese tourism firm, was intended to be an educational "representation" of China through miniatures of well-known Chinese landmarks such as the Great Wall and a promotional venue encouraging tourist travel to China. A variety of problems plagued the park. Political protests objected to the park as a form of Communist propaganda creating a focal point for Free Tibet demonstrations; financial, marketing,

and labor relations mismanagement; and even charges of corruption negatively impacted attendance and profits. According to Zhang (2006) Florida Splendid China ultimately failed due to a basic misunderstanding of American expectations regarding theme park entertainment—visitors wanted rides and amusements, not just miniatures. And indeed, we noticed that on our second visit, Mini Israel added a ride (the Time Machine) prominently displayed just inside the entrance. Will Mini Israel fail if they fail to recognize and respond to what visitors (foreign and local) want?

Conclusions

Mini Israel offers what many people prefer: whether Israeli or foreign visitors, all encounter the opportunity to find an unthreatening version of the Promised Land where different ethnicities, political groups, and religions co-exist with fixed, essentialized identities and without conflict. All of that in an afternoon's visit to a single, manageable space. Archaeological heritage at Mini Israel is intended to be presented in an agreeable, amiable, pleasing state, largely represented by monumental structures; all should offend no one and appeal to everyone. Yet even in miniature, iconic structures such as the Dome of the Rock and Haram esh-Sharif are evocative, inspiring visitors to bring "reality" into the idealized miniature world. You really can "see it all small," or at least create a version of "all" as a sanitized, decontextualized, depoliticized version of Israel, where the sticky issues of Palestine, orthodoxy vs. secularism, and the past and present conflict are missing. Yet even here, modern identity politics intrude upon representations of heritage to upset the simulacrum.

The continuing legacy of colonialism extends beyond political and economic domination to the creation and recreation of myths and stereotypes, shaping the West's view of the Other (Said 1978; Taylor 2001). In the contemporary global economy, commodification processes are characterized by the construction of identities through strategic relationships with material things. Although the inclusion of modern industrial factories, ports, and the airport at Mini Israel might seem incongruous with the project for creating or identifying authenticity inherent in modern tourism, the creation and reinforcement of a new national identity is strengthened through linkages to both the evocative, ancient past and the viable modern industrial state. Placed in the context of the contemporary cultural economy, tourism that recognizes and engages certain consumption preferences and lifestyle practices enlists the archaeological narrative as backdrop, as deep time background lending credence to the construction of an identity that has moved

beyond just nationalism to embrace the financial. At Mini Israel depicting the “beautiful, good, important and special” includes the commercial, the current, and the ancient, although the choice of what is miniaturized appears to be inspired by trends in tourism, financial motives and visitor preference presenting a microcosm of Israel where you can “see it all small”—selectively.

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