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If I Forget Thee, O Jerusalem: Archaeology,  
Religious Commemoration, and Nationalism in a  
Disputed City, 1801-2001

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# If I forget thee, O Jerusalem: archaeology, religious commemoration and nationalism in a disputed city, 1801–2001

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**ABSTRACT.** The pace and agenda of archaeology in Jerusalem has always been influenced by unspoken ideological and political factors. This article attempts to trace the ideological and political contexts in which archaeological exploration and interpretation has been carried out during the last 200 years. Beginning with a brief description of the Solomonic obsessions of the late antique and medieval rulers of Jerusalem, the article describes how, over the centuries, the identification of certain monuments with the biblical events and personalities had far-reaching effects on the character of subsequent archaeological work. The article then traces the course of modern archaeological exploration in the city from the Late Ottoman Period through the end of the twentieth century. The article concludes with an examination and analysis of the politics of archaeology in Jerusalem in the current Israeli–Palestinian conflict over Jerusalem’s presumed final status in a peace settlement.

The explosion was waiting to happen, waiting to detonate almost a decade of delicate diplomatic manoeuvring and painstaking negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians over the future of Jerusalem. On the morning of 28 September 2000, despite warnings by Rajoub Jibril, the security chief of the Palestine Authority, that dangerous violence could be expected, Israeli Knesset member and opposition leader Ariel Sharon carried out an intentionally provocative political demonstration that would leave no one in Jerusalem, in Israel, or Palestine unchanged (Lefkovitz 2000). In protest against the possibility that Israel might negotiate away its exclusive control of Jerusalem in an effort to reach a final accord with the Palestinians, Sharon and his entourage arrived at the site of the ancient Jewish Temple, now occupied by important Muslim shrines, to declare – in the presence of journalists and video crews – that ‘the Temple Mount is under Israeli sovereignty and it is the right of every Jewish person to visit the site’. In anticipation of trouble, hundreds of Israeli security forces had been deployed throughout the

area to prevent or, if necessary, to quell violent disturbances at Jerusalem's most famous and most disputed religious and archaeological site.

Discord on the Temple Mount was hardly a new factor in the political life of Jerusalem. For almost 3,000 years, this hallowed sector of the city had again and again been a focus of zealotry, intolerance and xenophobic violence (among many general histories of Jerusalem, see Mazar 1975; Avigad 1983; Shanks 1996; and more critical works such as Benvenisti 1998 and Armstrong 1996). In the sixth century BCE, the Babylonians had plundered and thoroughly devastated the First Temple, putting an end to the rule of the Davidic dynasty. In the second century BCE, at the time of the Maccabean Revolt, the Temple Mount was the scene of a violent clash between Hellenisers and Jewish pietists. In the first century CE, while Herod's Temple still stood in all its splendour, ominous Greek inscriptions set up around its perimeter warned that any non-Jew who wandered into the sacred precinct would himself 'be responsible for the death that will follow in consequence.' In 70 CE, the battlements of the Temple became the scene of an unimaginably bloody encounter between Jewish rebels and Roman siege forces; the Romans soon vindictively levelled and replaced them with pagan monuments. Later, with the official recognition of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman empire in the fourth century CE, the site of the Temple was left as a dung heap to symbolise the triumph of the new faith over the old. And with the rise of Islam, the ruined Temple Mount became the foundation of two spectacular Islamic monuments: the gilded Dome of the Rock and the large al-Aqsa mosque, leaving the Jews to focus their veneration on a small segment of the outer wall of the ancient temple compound.

Now, at the start of the twenty-first century, Jerusalem's sacred landscape had once again become a battleground. Since its military conquest in 1967, all of East Jerusalem had been administered by the state of Israel and the balance of commemorative power had shifted sharply away from the centuries-long Muslim predominance. The enlarged and brilliantly illuminated Western Wall plaza, stretching out below and to the west of the Temple Mount compound, now vied with al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock as a centre-point of veneration. And despite the fact that the shrines in the Haram esh-Sharif (the 'sacred enclosure', as it was known to Muslims) were administered by the local Islamic religious council, it was explicitly done so under the approval of Israeli authorities, the *de facto* rulers of all of Jerusalem. Extremist Jewish groups such as the 'Temple Mount Faithful' openly spoke of a divine plan to build a Third Temple (Sprinzak 1991). And throughout the three decades that followed the 1967 war, the unquestioned public position of all Israeli governments had been that Jerusalem should always remain Israel's eternal and undivided capital.

Yet in the summer of 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, negotiating behind closed doors at Camp David for a 'final status agreement', had come forward with a number of complex proposals that broke the public taboo about discussing the re-partition of Jerusalem (Shragai 2000a). For Ariel

Sharon and his supporters, this was nothing less than a betrayal of Israel's most sacred birthright. Yet his much-publicised visit to the Temple Mount succeeded only in hardening the battle lines. Within only a few moments of Sharon's departure, the compound exploded into violence. Surging crowds of Palestinian protesters, determined to defend the Islamic character of the Haram esh-Sharif, hurled stones and insults at the Israeli security troops, who responded with tear gas and rubber bullets. Soon spreading to other parts of the city, and igniting the entire West Bank in violent protests, the 'al-Aqsa intifada' raged on and intensified, at a cost of many hundreds of casualties. At least for the time being, the peace process was suspended and Jerusalem became the scene of ethnic warfare reminiscent of the bloody 1947 conflict when two desperate peoples fought for one land.

### **What role does archaeology play?**

Jerusalem remains the symbolic heart of the Middle East conflict, in which archaeology has played an active and visible role. The political role played by archaeology in nation-building and national conflict is by no means unique in this context; studies of the social impact of archaeologically produced visions of society and identity in many nations and regions have been extensively studied in recent years (see, for example, Kohl and Fawcett 1995 and Hamilakis and Yalouri 1999). The enormous power of what has been come to be called 'collective memory' has been shown to be closely linked in some cases with the pace and direction of archaeological research (in the case of Israel, see Zerubavel 1995 and Ben-Yehuda 1995). Thus, over the last 200 years, the study of Jerusalem by historians, geographers, theologians and archaeologists has likewise exerted practical effects far beyond the closed circles of academia (Abu El-Haj 1998). Of course, archaeology is but a weak weapon when rival peoples engage in a bloody contest for possession of a single small territory, with tanks, helicopter gunships, small-arms fire and petrol bombs. Yet antiquarian arguments have more than once provided potent rationalisations for conquest and dispossession. And archaeology has far more been used to justify a reductionist view of Jerusalem's historical character than to provide an informed context for discussions about its historical complexity.

First a few words of archaeological background, for, despite the fondness of political commentators to describe the 'eternal' conflict of peoples over Jerusalem, archaeological excavations in Jerusalem have provided a clear chronological sequence for the formation of the city's material heritage (for a general survey, see Bahat 1990). In comparison to the other great centres of the region, Jerusalem's material history is modest, having neither extensive agricultural hinterland, nor access to valuable natural resources or an important trade route. The earliest signs of occupation – restricted to a narrow ridge between two steep valleys – date from the Early Bronze Age, around

3000 BCE. Some thousand years later, after a lengthy period of deurbanisation, the ridge was again thickly settled and heavily fortified. But with the destruction of that Middle Bronze Age urban settlement around 1550 BCE, the city entered a period of almost a millennium in which historical and biblical references are abundant while the archaeological remains are fragmentary, confusing and in most cases almost completely destroyed.

This period encompasses the era, around 1000 BCE according to the biblical chronology, when the city was conquered by the Judahite warrior chieftain David, who made it the capital of a United Israel. Then, according to the Hebrew scriptures, came Solomon's vast empire and the construction in Jerusalem of the Temple to the God of Israel. Even though there is virtually no unambiguous archaeological data about the extent or even character of Davidic Jerusalem – with a lively debate now raging about whether Jerusalem was anything more than a tiny, out-of-the-way village at the time of Solomon (summed up in Shanks 2000) – there is unmistakable evidence of the later *commemoration* of the Temple and power of the Davidic dynasty. Some 200 years *after* the time of Solomon, soon after 722 BCE, following the conquest of northern Israel by the Assyrians – Jerusalem became the sole cultic centre of the Israelites – the city exploded in size and function. Within a single generation in the late eighth century BCE, it was transformed from a narrow ridge-top town to a great metropolis and national cultic centre, surrounded by monumental tombs that celebrated the power of the Temple priesthood and the Davidic aristocracy.

Following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BCE, there arose another Jerusalem, a Jerusalem of the mind and of prayer, existing quite apart from the earthly city of the same name. 'By the waters of Babylon', begins the exiles' plaintive verse in Psalm 137, 'there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres . . . how shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!' *That* Jerusalem of the mind and the spirit existed quite apart from the all-too-fluid material reality. By the late first century BCE, with the accession of the Roman client king and local tyrant Herod, the modestly rebuilt Second Temple was replaced by an architectural extravaganza. Appealing to the fervent longings of Jews throughout the empire for a spiritual centre in a time of globalisation, Herod transformed Jerusalem's Temple Mount into an ostentatious Roman-style pilgrimage centre, equal to any in the Mediterranean world.

Yet in 70 CE, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem as their final act in the suppression of Jewish rebelliousness against the empire, they set out to eradicate all memories of the Temple and paved over the earlier streets and squares of the Herodian city with the properly symmetrical *Cardo* and *Decumanus* of the new Roman city of Aelia Capitolina. And in the early fourth century CE, when Christianity was accepted as the official religion of

the Roman empire, a Christian geography studded with Christian monuments – primary among them the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – were overlaid upon Aelia Capitolina, which in turn, had covered Herodian and Israelite Jerusalem.

The Muslim conquest of the city (in 638 CE, under the command of the Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, according to tradition) began a period of antiquarian reinterpretation tied to the new political and religious realities. Qu’ranic exegesis of Sura 17:1 identified the Temple Mount in Jerusalem as the *masjid al-aqsa*, ‘the further mosque’ to which Mohammed was transported for his *miraj* or ‘night journey’. This interpretation led directly to the construction of the al-Āqsa mosque and the elaborate Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount – and to the transformation of the long-desolate Herodian temple platform into the Haram esh-Sharif. Half a millennium later, the bloody Crusader conquest of the city in the summer of 1099 brought about another profound transformation of Jerusalem’s historical landscape, even if the scholarly conclusions arrived at by Frankish antiquarians were not as sound as they might have been. With the identification of the Dome of the Rock as the *Templum Domini* and the al-Aqsa mosque as the *Templum Salomonis* and the underground chambers of the Herodian platform as the ‘Stables of Solomon’, another vivid level of interpretation was added to the steady accumulation on Jerusalem’s landscape of antiquarian myth.

With the reconquest of the city by the Ayyubids (1187) and the establishment of firm imperial control by the Mamluks (1250–1517) and the Ottomans (1517–1917), the configuration of Jerusalem’s landscape of religious commemoration gradually stabilised. The Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque dominated the city much as Islam dominated its political and economic life. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre towered over the Christian quarter along with the dozens of other shrines and sub-shrines carefully (if not always peacefully) partitioned among the various Christian sects. For the Jews, the sanctity of the Western Wall of the Temple Mount compound became ascendant in the Middle Ages, together with a thick network of tombs and shrines ringing the city, connected with famous biblical and talmudic personalities. For centuries – right up to the modern era – this multilayered historical landscape was composed of several simultaneous, totally independent visions of Jerusalem’s sacred character. The legends and religious attachments of Jews and Christians grew and flourished in silent and often sullen coexistence with the official Muslim version, no less vivid or meaningful in their lack of political possession or declaration of sovereignty.

### **Image vs. reality: the Protestant rediscovery of Jerusalem**

Coexistence is an ideal that had a difficult time surviving in an age of archaeological exploration where scholars’ main concern was physical description and sequential dating. Indeed, the very pursuit of modern biblical

archaeology can be said to have emerged from a sense of deep disappointment that the Jerusalem of religious idealisation did not precisely correspond to material reality. From the sixteenth century, with the spread of the Protestant Reformation, a large segment of the Christian population of northwestern Europe had abandoned the practice of physical pilgrimage to Jerusalem and consequently lost a physical connection to the earthly Jerusalem. During the succeeding centuries, Jerusalem thus became in the consciousness of the Protestant world more of a theological ideal than an actual place. Psalms, prayers, hymns and Sunday sermons idealised Jerusalem and the Holy Land as sacred geographical templates. Jerusalem was imagined as an ideal realm – the seat of wisdom and divine majesty. It was no accident that as the English, Dutch and Germans established colonial enclaves in North America, Africa and the Pacific, the use of names such as ‘Salem’, ‘New Canaan’ and ‘Zion’ multiplied on the colonists’ maps (Lowance 1980).

How great the shock, then, in 1798–9, in the wake of Napoleon’s disastrously unsuccessful invasion of Egypt and Palestine, when Protestant travellers and scholars drawn to the Middle East by a *de facto* British occupation of Egypt first encountered Jerusalem’s contemporary reality (Silberman 1982: 18–27). It was not a splendid vision of Divine Order, but the grim reality of an impoverished Ottoman garrison town in a rather out-of-the-way part of the Province of Syria. The poverty, misery and technological backwardness encountered by early modern explorers such as the antiquarian Edward Daniel Clarke of Cambridge and the adventurer John Silk Buckingham led to an ideological adjustment: they came to the conclusion that Jerusalem’s present was nothing more than a late, unfortunate veneer of squalor. Clarke was determined, as he wrote in his memoirs, ‘Not to peer through the spectacles of priests’ in his use of erudition – rather than tradition – to uncover Jerusalem’s biblical past. And for Clarke and Buckingham, and for generations of Western scholars who would follow, the *real* Jerusalem was buried or concealed beneath the modern city – and it was their pious and scholarly duty to bring that truer, holier Jerusalem to light.

The dominating intellectual force in this intellectual and spiritual endeavor was to be a Congregationalist minister from Connecticut – the Reverend Edward Robinson – whose epoch-making book *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai, and Arabia Petraea* (1841) remains the epistemological core of mainstream biblical archaeology even today. Travelling through Palestine in 1838 and again in 1852 with Eli Smith, fellow minister and accomplished Arabic-speaker, Robinson sought to identify and reconstruct the authentic biblical landscape by recognising in the distribution of modern Arabic place-names how the original Hebrew terminology had been mutated (and presumably degenerated) over the centuries.

Today Robinson is best remembered by tour guides for his ingenious identification of some stones protruding from the western wall of the Haram esh-Sharif as the vestiges of a monumental entrance arch to the Herodian Temple compound. The discovery of ‘Robinson’s Arch’ was a typical exercise

in reconstructing the topography and monuments of a city that had been transformed many times since the biblical era. And for Robinson, those transformations were all negative. As he explicitly stated in the introduction to *Biblical Researches*, his pioneering study of the historical geography of Palestine was 'a first attempt to lay open the treasures of Biblical Geography . . . which have lain for ages unexplored, and had become so covered with the dust and rubbish of many centuries, that their very existence was forgotten' (Robinson 1841: xii–xiii).

The 'dust and the rubbish' was nothing more and nothing less than the peoples and cultures of the present. The Arab residents of the country were seen not as independent peoples who had undergone a long and complex historical development, but rather as quaint fossils of biblical customs and lifeways. Likewise the local Jews of Jerusalem were not seen as a community possessing viable alternative historical traditions, but as fossilised New Testament pharisees. Indeed, the modern rediscovery of the Holy Land was scientific only in so far as it described those aspects of culture and history in which it was interested. The profound implication for the future was that the discovery of the true Jerusalem through biblical archaeology was an implicit ignorance or rejection of other possibilities (Silberman 1991).

### **Diggers for God and country: the imperial contest for the antiquities of Jerusalem**

The initial Western attempts to rediscover the authentic antiquities of Jerusalem received a decidedly nationalistic impetus with the intensifying competition between the major European powers for diplomatic advantage in the Near East in the wake of the Crimean War. By the late 1850s, Jerusalem had become the scene of fierce international antiquarian competition, with the 1856 excavations of Felicien de Saulcy on behalf of the French government succeeded by the work of the Piedmontese engineer Ermete Pierotti (in 1858–60), which were, in turn, followed by an era of official British exploration in the Holy City under the auspices of the Palestine Exploration Fund (Silberman 1982).

The official establishment of the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1865 in Westminster Abbey under the patronage of Queen Victoria and the Archbishop of Canterbury led directly to the dispatch of several contingents of Royal Engineers who carried out the most ambitious archaeological projects ever to have been undertaken in Palestine. The first expedition (1865–6), under the command of Captain Charles Wilson, successfully compiled the first accurate topographical map of the city and began the exploration of some of the subterranean structures around the Haram esh-Sharif. (Indeed, one of the massive arches on the western side of the enclosure is still known as 'Wilson's Arch'.) The most famous of the Jerusalem expeditions of the PEF was led by Captain Charles Warren (1867–70). Excavating narrow shafts through tonnes of dangerously unstable building blocks and rubble, Warren



and his men succeeded in measuring and mapping most of the outer walls of the Herodian Temple complex.

This was not only 'science'. The Warren expedition was informed and motivated by a spiritual vision no less superstitious or fanciful than the folk legends of the Muslims or Jews. As active Freemasons, Warren and much of the leadership of the PEF were anxious to measure and study the mystically significant proportions of Solomon's Temple, which was built, according to masonic lore, by the Phoenician architect Hiram Abiff, the Widow's Son. Much of the subsequent archaeological conflict between European explorers likewise centred on *illustration* of existing ideologies rather than the dispassionate discovery of Jerusalem's past.

Masonic fascinations notwithstanding, much of the subsequent archaeological conflict centred on the more traditional monuments of the city. None was more prominent – or disputed – than the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Ever since the arrival of the first Protestant scholars in the early decades of the century, the authentic location of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus was a matter of great dispute. The present location of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – well *within* the present walls of the city – had led most early Protestant scholars to conclude that the 'traditional' site could not possibly memorialise the extra-mural execution place described in the gospels. But this assumption was based as much on instinctive suspicion of Latin and Greek traditions as on empirical evidence; Edward Robinson, Jerusalem's greatest explorer, never even set foot inside the precincts of the Holy Sepulchre. And while subsequent research demonstrated that the line of Jerusalem's walls took a quite different course in the first century of the Common Era – and that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre may indeed memorialise the precise place of the Roman place of public execution – Protestant researchers identified a number of alternative locations in the course of the nineteenth century (Silberman 1982: 151–3).

The most famous of these alternatives to the Holy Sepulchre was the 'Garden Tomb', a rock-cut family tomb located to the north of the city walls, first made famous in the 1880s by the British military hero Charles Gordon. The scholarly consensus now regards the Garden Tomb to be a burial place of the Byzantine Period, yet it still attracts groups of Protestant tourists and pilgrims who find that its quiet, unadorned charm is a more 'appropriate' visual setting for the tomb of Jesus than the dark, icon-filled Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Here, as in so many other cases in the history of modern exploration, it is evident that the visitor's consciousness plays as large a role as objective evidence in the search for Jerusalem's antiquities.

The climax of Great Power competition for archaeological supremacy in Jerusalem and throughout the Holy Land came with the official visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1898. As part of the New Germany's *Drang Nach Osten*, Wilhelm's increasingly close diplomatic, economic and cultural ties with the various provinces of the Ottoman empire led to the substantial government funding and official, institutionalised status of German scholars in the Holy

Land (most prominently in the establishment of the Deutsches Evangelisches Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes in 1900). It was therefore not an accident that, at around this time, representatives of other Great Powers also established permanent national institutions in Jerusalem – among them, the Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Française (1890) and the American School of Archaeological Research (1900). Each of these was a national institution, rather than the research centre of a particular university. Even though the conditions of archaeological work in Jerusalem would eventually change, the national – and to a certain extent, confessional – basis of archaeological research has endured to the present. That structural characteristic has both made it almost impossible to construct a truly ecumenical archaeology of Jerusalem and – at the same time – provided potent anti-quarian ammunition for modern partisan claims.

### **Modernising the past: the British administration of archaeology in Jerusalem**

World War I and the assumption of British mandatory rule over Palestine marked a dramatic turning point in the country's history and, naturally, in the character of the continuing search for its ancient past. It should be mentioned that the very borders of the Palestine Mandate, which created the distinct territorial entity that Jews and Arabs would wage war over for many decades, were themselves the direct product of archaeological research (Ra'anani 1976). Throughout the Ottoman period, Palestine was never a discrete political unit; it was divided among several sub-provinces of Ottoman Syria. Yet in the 1870s, the British Palestine Exploration Fund mounted an ambitious mapping project in which the Fund's explorers delineated a precise territorial unit that encompassed the traditional 'Land of the Bible', from Dan in the north to Aqaba in the south, and that archaeological map served as the basis for territorial division and colonial administration at the Versailles Conference after World War I.

But perhaps the most conspicuous sign of the changing status of archaeology in Jerusalem was the construction of the Palestine Archaeological Museum, an impressive building designed by the British architect Austen St Barbe Harrison in a 'neo-Gothic' style and opened to the public in 1938 (Sussman and Reich 1987). The museum was funded by a large grant from John D. Rockefeller Jr, and designed to serve both as the headquarters of the Palestine Department of Antiquities and as the modern national museum of Palestine. Visually, it resembled other prominent public buildings erected in Jerusalem under British rule (among them, the Main Post Office, the Scottish Church and the High Commissioner's Residence) thereby lending an official air to the pursuit and public presentation of archaeology. Inside, its chronologically arranged galleries presented a vision of the past that departed dramatically from the specific religious perspectives that had hitherto been dominant in Jerusalem. With the flints and human bones of the Paleolithic

Period followed by the pottery, jewellery and weapons of the Bronze and Iron Ages, and those, in turn, followed by the artifacts of the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic Periods, the museum offered the public an unmistakable example of the universalising history of technological (rather than spiritual) progress, so beloved of Western scholarship.

Yet if the British mandatory authorities believed they could create a homogenised archaeological history for all the people of Palestine, they far overestimated the appeal of technological progress and increasing social complexity and far underestimated how tenacious the old legends and historical identities could be. Indeed, a distinctive nationalist variant of Western nationalistic archaeology was already crystallising within the Jewish community of Palestine (Shavit 1987). For centuries, the Jews of Palestine had venerated traditional sacred places (the most prominent being the Western Wall of the Herodian temple complex) and in some cases had actively opposed the activities of Western explorers in excavating ancient Jewish tombs in Jerusalem (see Silberman 1982: 72). Yet throughout the 1920s, a small group of Jewish Palestinian scholars undertook a study of the ancient tomb monuments in Jerusalem's Hinnom Valley. Their clearance and detailed archaeological analysis of these rock-cut tombs from the Second Temple led to further excavation of a number of Jewish ossuary tombs of the same period, undertaken both by Jewish scholars employed by the Palestine Department of Antiquities and by the staff of the Department of Archaeology of the Hebrew University.

While the Arab Palestinian intellectuals were drawn primarily to the intangible heritage of folklore and literature (Silberman 1993) and Arab political leaders selected as their main symbols the traditional shrines of the Haram esh-Sharif (cf. Mattar 1988; Shragai 2000b), the discovery of ancient Jewish artefacts and inscriptions in Jerusalem was seen by members of the Palestinian Jewish community in particular and the Zionist Movement in general as validations of modern political rights (Sukenik 1952). Indeed the study of the inscribed ossuaries in Jerusalem had both scholarly and political consequences in the years to come. Professor Eleazar Sukenik of the Hebrew University, an expert in the decipherment of Hebrew and Aramaic scripts of the Second Temple Period, was the first scholar to recognise the antiquity of the Dead Sea Scrolls on the basis of their distinctive calligraphy. And the acquisition of four important Dead Sea Scroll texts by the Hebrew University in November 1947 – at the moment of the United Nations vote for the partition of Palestine – was widely seen as a poetic counterpoint to the creation of a modern Jewish state (Yadin 1957).

### **Whose Jerusalem? The archaeology of competing nation-states**

The 1948 war and the division of Jerusalem between an eastern sector controlled by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and a western sector controlled

by the state of Israel had obvious effects on the conduct of archaeology in the city – and the evolving visions of antiquity drawn from it. On the Jordanian side of the border, the character of archaeological investigations remained much as it had been under the British Mandate, at least initially. While the Hashemite government devoted considerable resources to the renovation of traditional holy places, particularly to the regilding and structural restoration of the Dome of the Rock and the other Muslim monuments on the Haram esh-Sharif, the direction of the Department of Antiquities was left in the hands of a foreign expert, Gerald Lankester Harding, an experienced British colonial administrator. Excavation in the Jordanian-controlled sector of the city was limited to a few probes by foreign teams. Through the 1960s, the British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon sank small test pits throughout the area of the Old City and in the village of Silwan immediately to the south of the Haram esh-Sharif (Kenyon 1974). Yet Kenyon's excavations never became a subject of wide public interest. Traditional shrines, rather than Western-style archaeology, continued to dominate the popular historical consciousness among both the Christian and Muslim communities.

On the other side of the border – in the Israeli sector of Jerusalem – the situation was quite different, for the exploration of the city's antiquities was a matter of considerable public concern. Because the partition of the city had removed most of Jerusalem's historical landmarks from direct accessibility by the Israeli public, a new kind of 'ancient landscape' had to be built. Throughout the rest of the country, as Arab villages (long considered to be a valuable source of information about ancient lifeways) were destroyed or abandoned, archaeological finds from major tell sites such as Hazor and Megiddo took their place as a source of illustrations of antiquity for school textbooks, children's Bibles and popular art (see Silberman 1997: 69–70). In Israeli Jerusalem, where new excavations of major antiquities sites were not possible between 1948 and 1967, other, modern shrines took their place. The conspicuous modern architecture of the Israel Museum – and of the Shrine of the Book, containing the Dead Sea Scrolls in Israeli possession – became almost iconic symbols for the relationship between past and present in the modern state of Israel (Roitman 1997). With regard to the antiquities of Jerusalem, in particular, a uniquely artificial archaeological attraction was born. An impressive miniature model of Jerusalem in the era of the Second Temple, constructed on the grounds of the Holyland Hotel in a new suburb of West Jerusalem (Rubinstein 1980: 46), offered tourists to Israel a direct, if highly imaginative and miniaturised, glimpse at the past. Designed in consultation with prominent Israeli scholars, among them Professor Michael Avi-Yonah of the Hebrew University, this model was far more than a mere tourist attraction. It represented the most up-to-date reconstruction of one of Jerusalem's most impressive architectural periods. Indeed, the modern Israeli fascination with the grandeur of Jerusalem during the Herodian period would eventually be expressed in an agenda of renewed archaeological digs.

The 1967 war and the Israeli conquest of East Jerusalem and the West Bank once again dramatically transformed the political conditions for archaeological work. A striking physical metaphor for the changing control of the archaeological monuments of Jerusalem took place at the height of the battle for Jerusalem, when Israeli paratroopers captured and occupied the strategically located Palestine Archaeological Museum building – at the same time bringing a large archaeological collection and a large number of Dead Sea Scroll texts under Israeli control (Silberman 1995: 151–4). The Palestine Archaeological Museum – soon to be officially renamed the ‘Rockefeller Museum’ (in preference to its original, politically suggestive name) – now became the headquarters of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums. Other, even more overt, changes in the landscape were effected. Almost immediately after the conclusion of the 1967 war, the narrow alley running along the traditional Jewish prayer site at the Western Wall was expanded into a huge public plaza by the demolition of the houses of the former Mughrabi neighborhood (Rubinstein 1980: 120–1). In addition, large-scale excavations were initiated along the southern and western walls of the Haram esh-Sharif enclosure, with the aim of exposing large areas of important archaeological remains (Ben-Dov 1985).

The Temple Mount and the shrines were left in the control of the Muslim authorities (Shragai 2000b) but the larger status quo of religious and antiquarian commemoration was hardly preserved. The Temple Mount excavations, directed by the doyen of Israeli archaeologists, Professor Benjamin Mazar, and working almost continuously between 1968 and 1978, revealed the complexity and the impressiveness of Jerusalem’s material history (Mazar 1975). Although only very limited remains from the Iron Age were discovered in the area, the massive Herodian construction of the Temple platform, its entrances and adjoining structures, and the violence of the Roman destruction in 70 CE were documented in great detail. Indeed, evidence from the Mazar excavations prompted a revision of some of the basic theories about the physical appearance of the Temple complex (including the recognition that Robinson’s Arch was a vault for a massive entrance staircase, rather than a bridge spanning the Tyroepoan Valley). A number of important inscriptions and artefacts relating to the Temple were uncovered and a massive entrance staircase along the southern wall was reconstructed and opened to the public as a tourist site.

Another major excavation project with enormous implications for the ongoing understanding of Jerusalem’s past got underway at about the same time at the traditional site of Jerusalem’s Jewish Quarter, overlooking the Temple Mount from the city’s western hill (Avigad 1983). This area of the walled city had been occupied by Jews since at least the Middle Ages, but during the period of Jordanian rule, following the 1948 expulsion of the Jewish Quarter’s inhabitants, its buildings and narrow streets had fallen into disrepair. In preparation for a large-scale rebuilding of the Jewish Quarter, Professor Nachman Avigad of the Hebrew University was charged with the task of

conducting extensive excavations in the area. The Jewish Quarter excavations conducted between 1969 and 1983 proved to be unexpectedly rich in finds, for they uncovered the remains of the residences of Jerusalem's priestly and secular aristocracy during the Herodian period.

These two major areas of excavation sites were opened to the public and became important evidence of the city's ancient Jewish past. However, despite the fact that in the southern wall excavations important remains from the Byzantine and Umayyad Periods were uncovered in the course of the excavations, they received relatively little attention in the popular literature and almost none in the public presentation of the site. The remains overlying the Temple were, as in Robinson's time, seen as obstructions to understanding the structure of the Temple complex, and of only secondary interest themselves. Thus in counteracting the dominating visual impression of the Muslim shrines on the summit of the Temple Mount by creating new public monuments, archaeology had played an important role in reshaping Jerusalem's visible historical landscape.

### **Tunnel vision: the continuing struggle for the past**

The last of the major Israeli excavations in the post-1967 era took place in the 'City of David', the site of Bronze and Iron Age Jerusalem on the steep lower ridge immediately to the south of the Temple Mount (Shiloh 1984). This dig, conducted between 1978 and 1985 by Professor Yigal Shiloh of the Hebrew University, uncovered significant remains of private and public buildings from the time of the Judean monarchy. In certain respects, Shiloh's excavations corrected the earlier, more limited findings of Kenyon in the same area. Yet the social significance of these excavations was in the loud and occasionally violent opposition they aroused from ultra-orthodox Jewish religious authorities within Israel. The ostensible reason for the religious demonstrations at the excavation site was the contention that human remains had been uncovered and not properly reburied; the deeper motivation could be found in the modern power struggles between religious and secular parties in Israel. Even though the Supreme Court of Israel ultimately ordered that the demonstrations cease and the excavations continue, the importance of archaeological excavations in Jerusalem in the battle for the heart and soul of Israeli society continued and intensified in the following years.

Indeed, the religious-secular struggle for the authority to maintain and interpret the historical significance of the city became a battle with many unexpected fronts, and the stakes in the struggle for Jerusalem's past were to have unexpectedly serious consequences in political and human terms. In the years that followed the 1967 war, the physical control over the archaeological remains around the Herodian Temple complex had been uneasily shared between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Department of Antiquities (officially reorganised as the Antiquities Authority after 1990). For the most

part the Ministry of Religious Affairs regulated prayer and religious observance in the vicinity of the Western Wall – and to that end, controlled several interior chambers adjoining the Western Wall plaza, among them the large room formed by Wilson's Arch. The impressive underground constructions discovered a century before by Wilson and Warren to the north of this chamber eventually attracted the attention of the ministry officials and an extremely unorthodox 'archaeological' excavation was begun. Using untrained (and largely unsupervised) labourers to clear a 448-metre-long tunnel along the face of the Herodian retaining wall, the Ministry of Religious Affairs created a new tourist attraction. It offered visitors a chance to explore more than 2,000 square metres of impressive subterranean structures including aqueducts, quarries and a monumental entrance to the Temple Compound (Rabinovich 1996).

The 'Western Wall tunnels' were at first entered only through the Western Wall plaza and their existence was not widely known. From time to time, rumours of the excavations sparked protests both by professional archaeologists and by the Supreme Muslim Council of Jerusalem, under whose property the tunnels were dug. Yet it was only after the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister in 1996 – and in the atmosphere of nationalist demagoguery that he ushered in – that the Western Wall tunnels became a cause for open conflict. Declaring that the tunnels represented 'the bedrock of our national existence', Netanyahu ordered that the northern end of the tunnels be opened, to permit an increase of tourist visitation to them (Erlanger 1996). Since their outlet was in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, the reaction was explosive. In the days following the opening of the tunnels in the autumn of 1996, open violence erupted between Israelis and Palestinians, in which hundreds were injured and scores were killed.

Of course, had anyone been of a mind to use the finds from the Western Wall tunnels as genuine archaeological data rather than ammunition for polemics, the lesson of this highly controversial excavation would have been abundantly clear. In the tangle of finds from the Herodian Period, the Roman Period, the Byzantine Period, the Umayyad Period and the Middle Ages, the evidence of continuous commemorative activity showed, in fact, how difficult it is to judge any of the major building periods to be more important or politically significant than the others. The major supporters and promoters of the project were a coalition of Jewish and Christian groups who saw in it tangible evidence of the primacy of the Temple in Jerusalem's history. Certainly the Herodian and earlier Jewish remains are extraordinarily impressive and mark a formative era in the evolution of the site (Bahat 1995). Yet as far as national bedrock was concerned, there are clearly many other facets. The monumental viaduct to the Temple Mount built by the Umayyad Caliphs or the Ayyubid vaulted chamber was no less worthy of mention for being Islamic, or the Crusader structures for being Christian and European. Neither is the evidence of a medieval synagogue built into a blocked gate of the Haram esh-Sharif any less significant for belonging to a period when Jews did *not* have political sovereignty.

In a sense, the archaeological evidence in the Western Wall tunnels (as elsewhere in Jerusalem) offered examples of the same inextricable ethnic interaction and conflict that underlay the modern political clash between Israelis and Arabs. But because the modern archaeological study of Jerusalem was structured throughout its previous two centuries to seek and celebrate either original 'essences' or national roots, it could but exacerbate rather than ameliorate the modern dispute over the identity and future of Jerusalem.

### **The legacy of archaeology in Jerusalem**

The affair of the Western Wall tunnels opened up a new era in the archaeology of Jerusalem, not only because its evidence of cultural diversity was so singularly ignored in its public presentation (Ministry of Religious Affairs n.d.), but also because it led the Palestinian public to identify even the most legitimate archaeological research and preservation efforts in Jerusalem as politically inspired, Israeli acts. Thus in the autumn of 1999 – in blatant violation of the antiquities laws of Israel – the Muslim Religious Trust (Waqf) in control of the day-to-day administration of the Haram esh-Sharif began large-scale excavation works with absolutely no archaeological supervision in connection with the renovation of a large mosque in the underground halls of 'Solomon's Stables' (Singer 2000). For more than a decade, the Waqf had been regularly removing or cementing over ancient architectural elements that had come to light in the course of routine maintenance work (Adler 1994). But this time, the archaeological damage was far more extensive: tonnes of earth were removed from the construction site in the Temple Mount and were simply hauled away. Even though Israeli archaeologists, intellectuals, and literary and public figures filed a formal appeal to the government to put an end to the illegal activity, Prime Minister Ehud Barak – in the midst of delicate and sensitive negotiations with the Palestinian Authority over the future of Jerusalem – refused to step in.

In the autumn of 2000, the stage was therefore set for an explosion, with the politicisation of archaeology added to the sensitivity of the issue of Jerusalem, to the overlapping sanctity of the Temple Mount, and to the reductionist positions of hardliners on both sides.

Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount was not the sole cause for the bloodshed and warfare that followed, nor was archaeology responsible for the radicalisation that preceded it. But archaeology did play a part in the story, for memories engraved on the heart and powerfully linked to uncovered historic monuments are not easy to partition. One people's commemoration will never (and has never) convinced another to give up its own vision, or to accede to its relegation to second place.

Indeed, the deadly cycle of violence, counter-violence, reprisal and re-primination soon took on a life of its own. With the election of Ariel Sharon as prime minister of Israel in the elections of 6 February 2001, exclusionist



ideology on both sides won the day. The intensity of Israeli and Palestinian archaeological and historical claims rose to unprecedented rhetorical heights. Controversy continued – and was politically exploited by both sides – over the construction work on the Temple Mount conducted by the Muslim authorities (Izenberg 2001; Romey 2000). The public committee of Israeli archaeologists, intellectuals and public figures filed a formal appeal to the Israeli government to enforce the antiquities laws and put an end to the Waqf's illegal activity on the Temple Mount (Kiley 2001). Yet at the same time, other instances of severe damage to the archaeological heritage of the city, occasioned by development activity in the Jewish Quarter, went almost unnoticed in the public debate (Lefkovitz 2001a).

Later in the year, the technologies of computer imaging were recruited to rebuild what could not be constructed on the Temple Mount with mortar and stones. The Israel Antiquities Authority opened a 'Virtual Reconstruction Center' at the Dung Gate near the Western Wall in an effort to depict through digital technologies the splendours of the Temple Complex of the Herodian Period. This new tourist attraction inevitably became the focus of yet another political confrontation, for lacking either the means or the incentive to mount a virtual reality counter-attack, the Palestinian Authority minister for Jerusalem affairs, Faisal Husseini, simply condemned this effort as 'a further attempt to Judaize the city' (Lefkovitz 2001b).

This intensified cycle of historiographical assertions and denials offers a cautionary lesson to any scholars who would approach the problem of archaeology and nationalism as an isolatable phenomenon in the development of individual nation-states. The historical (and historiographical) death embrace of Israelis and Palestinians in Jerusalem may necessitate a new approach to the study of nationalism and archaeology, in the recognition that the mutual feedback of *two* opposing nationalist archaeologies can create a socio-political formation of unique destructiveness. Jerusalem's archaeologists, for their part, might contribute something to the diffusion of the tensions and hatreds by analysing the broader context of commemoration rather than stoking the fires of partisan memory. They could do it by focusing less on the individual monuments of a given period – and to whom they 'belong' – and more on understanding the natural process of demolition, eradication, rebuilding, evasion and ideological reinterpretation that has permitted ancient rulers and modern groups to claim exclusive possession of Jerusalem. But it may be idle daydreaming to believe that archaeologists (any more than other citizens) are any less susceptible to the ideological and nationalist pressures of the society in which they live. Thus it may be the supreme irony of this period of intensified concern for and attention to the study of Jerusalem's antiquities that the true complexity of its material heritage has been almost completely lost to memory.

'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,' wrote the psalmist, 'let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth . . .' What we are now witnessing is a period of profound physical dysfunction and inarticulateness

regarding the history of Jerusalem, despite all the effort and energy devoted to it. The digging continues. Claims and counterclaims about exclusive historical 'ownership' weave together the random acts of violence in a bloody fabric of bifurcated collective memory. And it is the profound *forgetfulness* of Jerusalem's centuries-long clash of cultures – not the celebration of selected Golden Ages and chosen peoples – that tragically allows competing illusions of historical and religious precedence in Jerusalem to continue to be the violent and explosive battle banners of cultural exclusivity.

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