

Introduction

The Archaeology of Archaeology

Finding Jerusalem is not about bringing back to life ancient stones and walls hidden underground. It is not an adventurer's quest for long-lost treasures and monuments of a city venerated by the three Abrahamic traditions. And least of all, it is not an attempt to uncover the biblical truth. *Finding Jerusalem: Archaeology between Science and Ideology* is concerned with archaeologists, professionals, scholars, institutions, and governmental agencies, who and which are engaged in excavating and interpreting Jerusalem's past; it deals with those who support, control, and promote endeavors of cultural heritage; it examines the implications for individuals, communities, and nations affected by the processes of archaeological activity; and, finally, it aspires to differentiate between the real, concrete, and material on the one hand and the created, imagined, and perceived on the other.

In more concrete terms, this book surveys the history of archaeological exploration, discovery, and interpretation in Jerusalem in the contexts of social, political, and religious debates from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, with an emphasis on the post-1967 period. It examines the legal settings and ethical precepts of archaeological activity, the developing discourse of cultural heritage, as well as archaeology's place in the various educational systems and institutions in the city. It analyzes the ongoing struggle to discover and define the city's past, to expose its physical and historical legacy, and to advance claims of scientific validity and objectivity against the challenges of religious zeal and political partisanship—the latter two intimately related to each other in ways not necessarily limited to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Jerusalem's Historic (or Holy) Basin (which includes the Old City and surrounding area), the primary focus of this study, is one of the most intensely excavated



FIGURE 1. Aerial view of Jerusalem's Old City, looking northeast. Photo by Hanan Isachar.

and thoroughly researched places in the world and one of the most historically and culturally complex areas (see figure 1).¹ Over the last 150 years, leading archaeologists under the auspices of major academic institutions have conducted numerous excavations there, by and large following standard professional procedures of field-work and research, as well as conventions of public education and presentation. At the same time, however, religious and national conflicts have increasingly blurred the lines between past and present and between fact and fiction. The claims that modern Israeli citizens are descendants of the Israelites or Hasmoneans and that the early Christians and first Muslims of the region were the ancestors of today's Palestinian Christians and Muslims, respectively, are only rarely challenged. The numerous exiles, emigrations, immigrations, conquests, destructions, and annihilations, as well as the countless intermarriages, interculturations, and conversions, render these assumptions clearly a product of tradition and religious beliefs rather than one based on historical probability. Instead of making claims of direct lineage, more interest should be placed on cultural and religious similarities and continuities, which are often more significant across different religious groups within the same geographical and chronological context, and less so within the realm of a single faith or religious tradition over centuries or millennia.

Finding Jerusalem is an attempt to create clarity within an increasingly confusing maze of archaeological initiatives used and manipulated to form public opinion, locally and internationally. By laying out the factual record, it invites us to

participate in a multifaceted voyage through time, spatially defined by numerous boundaries and layers, vertically and horizontally intertwined, and to explore a space interspersed with monuments and artifacts, fashioned and colored by a multitude of cultures and nations.

Excavation, survey, and research in the city between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century were shaped by Western imperial interests in the region, which combined scientific curiosity with the desire to establish the physical reality of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament narratives. This model of biblical archaeology, initiated by Jerusalem's first Catholic and Protestant explorers, influenced early Zionist endeavors aspiring to establish a tangible link between Judaism's local roots and the growing Jewish presence in the city and region. From the beginning, and increasingly during the twentieth century, the pursuit of archaeological investigations has had an impact not only on professional and academic circles but also on society at large, both regionally and internationally. This impact came to fullest fruition after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and in particular after Israel's capture of East Jerusalem in 1967. The new political reality of occupation has had various practical, administrative, legal, and political consequences for the field of archaeology. Since 1967, the Israeli state has held almost exclusive monopoly over the excavation of antiquities sites in Jerusalem. As a governmental agency, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA, known before 1990 as the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, or IDAM) has managed fieldwork in East Jerusalem according to the same legal precepts as in West Jerusalem.² According to international law, however, East Jerusalem is occupied territory, and therefore, these initiatives have been condemned and declared illegal by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

Given this political framework, Palestinians have desisted from excavating in the city, thus indicating their objection to occupation and imposed Israeli sovereignty, archaeological administration, and control. For these reasons, Palestinian cultural heritage initiatives have almost entirely been dedicated to standing monuments, mainly Mamluk (1250–1516) and Ottoman (1516–1917) buildings, which to this day dominate the Old City's urban landscape. In contrast to several large-scale excavations conducted in East Jerusalem during the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war, which highlighted the Jewish heritage and which some scholars have classified as nationalistic and colonial state-building efforts, Israeli archaeological activity since the mid-1990s has evolved significantly, following higher professional standards.³ Recent excavations are characterized by a much more even treatment of different periods and cultures, also exposing and documenting features of significance to the Palestinian cultural heritage, encompassing finds relevant to both Christians and Muslims.⁴ The scholarly results of these field projects, however, remain mostly accessible to a small circle of professional archaeologists. The more broadly projected narrative of archaeological findings, in particular as offered

in public presentations, displays, and outreach efforts, still aligns with the early Zionist ambition of providing a direct link between the city's Israelite and Jewish past and Israel's present. Palestinian efforts to engage archaeology as a means of claiming sovereignty over the city of Jerusalem have been relatively modest in comparison. The lack of an official Palestinian-controlled municipality, the poorly coordinated and competing efforts of the Palestinian Authority, the local and the Jordanian Waqfs (religious foundations)⁵, as well as the emerging Islamic Movement in Israel—also known as the Islamic Movement in 48 Palestine—have limited the success of fostering appreciation of a distinct Palestinian material and cultural legacy.⁶ Palestinian archaeological activity in Jerusalem is thus almost exclusively limited to the survey, study, and conservation of architectural structures preserved above ground, rather than on the excavation of underground sites.

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Instead of examining the archaeological remains of Jerusalem chronologically, structuring the city's history of occupation sequentially, horizontally according to area or site, vertically according to layers or strata—as most archaeologists would proceed—I decided to present and analyze the archaeology of the city in terms of its history of exploration. My study places the emphasis on the archaeologists who have explored the city's material culture: their schools, their training, and their personal, cultural, religious, professional, institutional, and national contexts. Rather than assuming that the exposed objects, structures, and more generally material culture have an intrinsic, indisputable, and static nature, which can be presented and understood in a monolithic way, I argue that it is the archaeologists' unique and permanently changing sociocultural and political contexts that shape the archaeological finds and sites and give meaning and significance to them. Thus, instead of telling the story of Jerusalem's archaeological exploration in a progressive manner, producing a narrative in which knowledge and professionalism grow exponentially, I present the history of excavation in cumulative levels, periods, and paradigms, in which the latest achievements build upon earlier ones, depend on them, and, indeed, never quite liberate themselves from the inseparable components of science and ideology.

The inherent motivation of the archaeologist to expose physical and tangible data, with the goal of producing a scientific analysis of the finds and an unbiased presentation of data and results, has proven elusive. Archaeological evidence per se is always partial and contaminated, and our knowledge, regardless of how meticulous and comprehensive our investigation, relies primarily on extrapolation, interpretation, and imagination.⁷ In the case of Jerusalem, moreover, the ambition to enhance our knowledge of the city's cultural development has been linked consistently with aspirations to settle and own the land: to own—legally and intellectually—not only the visible and palpable ground but also, and perhaps even more importantly,

the foundations and roots hidden below the ground, both metaphorically and physically. Scientific progress, scholarly curiosity, and knowledge, have continuously been linked with the desire to exert power and authority: social, religious, and political. In Jerusalem, as in many other places, archaeological excavation and interpretation have consistently relied on the practice of exclusionary science and practices. This interdependence of science, power, and ideology—which has determined the shaping of a field and its interrelation with various religious, political, and national entities—has persevered, rather than regressing over time, and in fact, it has reached new heights in the escalating conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

The categories of science and ideology remain famously difficult to control, all the more so when—as is the case here—their mutual imbrication is asserted. Without rehearsing the voluminous literature on this topic, let me characterize my use of the term *science* to describe a practice or discourse that evinces the search for objectivity by subjecting itself to review, correction, and verifiability or falsifiability. The claims of science understand their own ephemerality, as Max Weber famously argued in “Science as a Vocation.”⁸ Ideology, on the other hand, seeks credibility by posing as science, but its truth claims are based on strategies of interest rather than on objective analysis, a gap that can be intentional or not, conscious or unconscious.

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My inquiry is framed chronologically by four stages, beginning with *Colonialist Archaeology*, between 1850–51 and 1948, and leading to a phase of *Nationalist (Neo-Colonial) Archaeology*, from 1948 to 1967. The decades between 1967 and 1996 I understand according to the duality of *Archaeology and Occupation*, followed by the age of the *Archaeology of Occupation*, from 1996 to the present.

The historical framework of *Colonialist Archaeology* begins with the first excavation conducted in the city of Jerusalem by French numismatist Félix de Saulcy in 1850–51 and ends with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. This period of archaeological exploration is characterized by Palestine’s colonial rule, transitioning from the last few decades of Ottoman governance through the full duration of the British Mandate (the British civil administration in Palestine between 1920 and 1948). Throughout this period, most of the city’s archaeological explorations were conducted by educated and privileged Westerners and proceeded without much participation and support of the indigenous population. This is the era that gave birth to the field of biblical archaeology and the image of the explorer holding a “spade in one hand, and the Bible in the other.” The relationship between religious belief and political ambition in the realm of late Ottoman explorations was aptly described by Neil Asher Silberman as “digging for God and country,” a combination that continued to shape archaeological work during the Mandate period, although characterized by a more regulated and sophisticated practice.

Between 1948 and 1967, the period defined by its *Nationalist (Neo-Colonial) Archaeology*, the city of Jerusalem was divided into West Jerusalem, governed by Israel, and East Jerusalem, under Jordanian rule.⁹ Archaeological governance and procedure, despite the political and administrative transformation, changed little during these years. The Department of Archaeology in Jordan remained in the hands of a British archaeologist. The Israel Department of Archaeology and Museums (IDAM) was directed and staffed primarily by Jewish archaeologists. The field of biblical archaeology continued to be the main focus of exploration, with the original, almost exclusively Catholic and Protestant angle now officially joined on the Israeli side by Jewish perspectives and interests. Though both Israel and Jordan saw themselves as the rightful owners of the respective land slots and, indeed, as indigenous to the land, archaeological exploration continued to be shaped by Western institutional models and rules, and fieldwork and research continued to be carried out primarily by individuals educated overseas.

Archaeology and Occupation begins in 1967, when Israel captured East Jerusalem and extended Jerusalem's municipal boundaries to enclose areas and villages inhabited predominantly by Palestinians. The Israel Department of Archaeology and Museums, as of 1990 the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), have administered all and executed most archaeological excavations and surveys in the city since then. The majority of field projects have focused on the Old City and its immediate surroundings, located within the occupied sector of the city. Massive archaeological projects in East Jerusalem have gone hand in hand with Israel's occupation policies, which have instigated the creation of Jewish settlements, Palestinian house demolitions, and the establishments of national and archaeological parks. Nadia Abu El-Haj, in *Facts on the Ground*, has shown that by exposing layers and highlighting finds that are predominantly of relevance to the Jewish/Israeli narrative of the city, in particular in East Jerusalem, archaeologists produce finds that are often presented as tangible proof of Israel's entitlement to return to its ancestral homeland. Despite repeated efforts of the international community to promote peace negotiations in the region (the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995 and the Camp David Summit of 2000), during the period following Benjamin Netanyahu's election as Israel's prime minister in 1996, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has reached new heights, fostering radical religious and national movements on both sides. The final status negotiations of Jerusalem have remained, for the most part, off the table, but continued and coordinated investment in Jewish settlements, Palestinian house demolitions, archaeological sites, and tourist development in East Jerusalem indicate Israel's commitment to render the occupation an irreversible reality.

The *Archaeology of Occupation*, from 1996 to the present, is defined by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA), the IAA, and Elad (also known as the City of David Foundation or Ir David Foundation), an Israeli settler NGO, which in

strong coordination and collaboration, have determined the archaeological landscape of East Jerusalem. UNESCO's ability to counter Israel's monopoly of cultural heritage decisions in the context of the increasingly volatile political climate has been negligible. Palestinians, though implicated in matters of cultural heritage, have, for the most part, been passive onlookers. With the increasingly populated and built-up areas of the Old City and its immediate surroundings, limited zones have remained available for large-scale excavations. Rather than creating "facts on the ground," there has been a shift to producing "facts below the ground." The most controversial activities that have transformed Jerusalem's historic landscape are the extensive tunnel excavations conducted under the auspices of the IAA, as well as the underground Marwani Mosque construction initiated by the Islamic Movement in Israel (also known as the Islamic Movement in 48 Palestine). Though Israel maintains that all excavations carried out in East Jerusalem since 1967 are "salvage (or rescue) excavations"—suggesting that they are carried out merely to protect or save an endangered site that was or is threatened to be damaged as a result of development work—it has become increasingly obvious that virtually all excavation efforts in the Historic Basin are directly or indirectly linked with Israel's occupation policy. The political act of occupation and claimed ownership has taken on new dimensions, which go beyond the surface and the present reality of a densely populated and built-up city.

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Against the background of this conceptual framework, I have organized the following nine chapters of *Finding Jerusalem*, in three parts, all of which are dedicated to untangling the enmeshed complexity of a world-contested city's ancestry and heritage—an encounter of archaeology, science, religion, and ideology.

Part 1 of this book lays out the physical and historical backdrop of the study. Chapter 1 provides a description of the physical landscape, summarizing the topographic and geographic features of the Historic Basin, delineating the frequently changing city boundaries, barriers, and walls from the Bronze Age to the present. Chapter 2 surveys the process of institutionalization of archaeological exploration in the city, highlighting several key excavations and surveys, some of the most legendary individuals, establishments, and governmental agencies who have administered the field. It demonstrates the persistent overlap of archaeology, science, and ideology.

Based on the background information provided in part 1, part 2 then delves into the timely interest in the multifaceted cultural heritage of Jerusalem, heightened among others by the recent international lawsuits questioning the ownership of antiquities worldwide. Awareness that archaeological activity can be harmful to the natural and urban landscape and the call for excavation and restoration procedures to comply with international standards of cultural, scientific, and ethnic principles

began to emerge in North America and Europe as a result of massive destructions caused during World War I and II. Though Jerusalem's cultural legacy had been recognized as significant in the context of world heritage long before the beginning of archaeological exploration, it was not until 1981 that the Old City was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL). In spite of the international involvement in Jerusalem's cultural-heritage management, however, Israeli forces continue to operate with apparent autonomy. Destruction and preservation policies appear to reflect domestic political rivalries rather than global heritage legacies.

Chapter 3 investigates the roles that the IAA, the Waqf, and UNESCO—as well as several additional Israeli, Palestinian, and international organizations—have played in the forming of cultural-heritage perceptions and preservation programs. The chapter clarifies the complex administrative governance of the city's cultural legacies in the context of two differing approaches: the excavation and possibly intrusive intervention in the case of underground sites, and the largely restorative surface work involved in the built heritage, whether domestic or monumental.

Chapter 4 surveys the display of archaeological sites and artifacts as an effective means of disseminating professional and scientific work to the wider public. It examines how different modes of presentation reflect religious and ideological arguments. Archaeological sites and monuments—some within the Old City, others located in the designated national parks and West Jerusalem—are integrated into Jerusalem's urban landscape, thus forming a vital part of the contemporary city. Numerous artifacts with an explicit Jerusalem provenance can be viewed in the context of various permanent or rotating exhibits on display at, among others, the Islamic Museum of the Haram al-Sharif, the Palestine Archaeological Museum (PAM), the Israel Museum, the Bible Lands Museum, and the Tower of David Museum.

Chapter 5 examines how the recent history of the city and its geographic and cultural divides contribute to the complexity of educational systems engaged with the field of archaeology. The numerous foreign establishments in the city devoted to the study and research of archaeology include the *École biblique et archéologique française* (French Biblical and Archaeological School); the William Foxwell Albright Institute; the *Deutsches Evangelisches Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes* (German Protestant Institute of Archaeology of the Holy Land); the Kenyon Institute; and the *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* (Franciscan Biblical School); all of which were established around the turn of the twentieth century and are still active centers of learning to this day. The first Jewish establishments in the city dedicated to the field of archaeology were the Hebrew Society for the Exploration of Eretz-Israel and Its Antiquities (since 1948, the Israel Exploration Society, IES) as well as the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University, both of which have continuously remained involved in the fieldwork, research, and education of the field. Al-Quds University's Institute of Archaeology, the Center for Jerusalem Studies, and the Jerusalem Archaeological Studies Unit

represent the leading Palestinian academic establishments dedicated to the learning and teaching of the field. The curricula of the Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute; as well as the education departments of the IAA, the Israel Museum, the Bible Lands Museum, the Tower of David Museum, and Megalim (also known as City of David Institute for Jerusalem Studies) are primarily invested in the dissemination of knowledge among the wider Jewish and Israeli public. Since fieldwork and other related activities in Jerusalem as of 1967 have become the almost exclusive domain of Israeli archaeologists, the most significant contributions to archaeological education and public knowledge and opinion have been made by Israeli experts.

Chapter 6 focuses on archaeological ethics, scrutinizing the current methods and policies of excavation, documentation, and preservation; examining the laws and practice of trading antiquities and the associated fakes and forgeries market; and finally, analyzing the controversies of digging up ancient burials. Since the early 1980s, various associations and societies have established codes of ethics that formulate scientific and ethical standards of archaeological investigations. Several archaeological projects in Jerusalem have been criticized for not following those guidelines. Among these are the excavations in the City of David / Silwan, resumed in the early 1990s. This project has been criticized for its outdated methods, including tunnel excavation, as well as for the resulting destabilization of modern construction and the exclusion and even harassment of the Palestinian residents of the neighborhood. Ethical questions also pertain to commercial aspects of antiquities. According to a law implemented in 1978, the trading of antiquities in Israel is legal, a situation which, according to some, encourages the illegal excavation and looting of antiquities. This activity has also impacted the local market in fakes and forgeries, exemplified by the notorious “James, brother of Jesus” ossuary. The flourishing antiquities business, stimulated by sensational claims of Jewish and Christian discoveries and artifacts, not only boosts the tourist industry but also has significant ideological consequences. Finally, further initiatives raising ethical concerns are the excavation, potential desecration, and reburial of human remains in Jerusalem, which have led to heated debates, repeated protests, and occasional violence. Hostilities between archaeologists and ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups, instigated by the excavation of Jewish tombs from the Roman period in the modern Jerusalem neighborhood of French Hill, reached a peak in 1992. Following those clashes, the Israeli government issued new legal directives, severely restricting the scientific study of human bones. Meanwhile, the construction of the Museum of Tolerance by the Simon Wiesenthal Center over a historic Muslim cemetery in Mamilla was approved by Israeli authorities in 2011. This project has been broadly condemned for denying the religious, cultural, and historical impact of a site of significance to Muslims.

Building upon the discussions in part 2, part 3 then turns to a more detailed look at three highly contentious sites—the City of David / Silwan, the Church of

the Holy Sepulchre, and the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif—exploring how religious beliefs and ideological discourses impact archaeological excavation and interpretation, notwithstanding claims of scientific neutrality. Chapter 7 reports on early, recent, and current excavations in the City of David / Silwan. Part of the discussion is based on the fieldwork results from a professional standpoint, evaluating the scholarly discourse on material culture as well as the related typological and chronological assessments. It examines how surveys and excavations conducted in the area over 150 years have contributed to our knowledge of Bronze and Iron Age Jerusalem, how perceptions have changed over time, and why the same physical evidence has led to diverse and sometimes even opposing interpretations. The major part of this chapter is devoted to an in-depth analysis on how archaeological methodologies have been compromised by religious and political agendas. The recent activities of Elad—their involvement in fieldwork, scholarship, site management, and education—are evaluated independently and also in light of recent criticism voiced by another Israeli NGO, Emek Shaveh (translated the “Valley of Equality,” referencing Genesis 14:17). Finally, the relationship of both institutions with the Israeli and the Palestinian publics and their impact on local and international opinions and policies is scrutinized.

Chapter 8 lays out the major site transformations and archaeological investigations carried out in and near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, exploring the impact of the Eastern and Western churches on the site’s history from its inception under Constantine the Great in the Byzantine period (fourth century) to the present. A detailed study of the archaeological and architectural remains, preserved both below and above ground, establishes the major building sequences and sheds light on the related scholarly interpretations and controversies. These pertain to the question of authenticity of the church’s location, traditionally marking the place of Christ’s crucifixion and burial. The prevailing Catholic tradition of identifying the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the site of Jesus’s burial is compared to a more marginalized Protestant tradition, which locates it in the Garden Tomb. Attention is also given to the evolving role the different Christian communities have played in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and in the city more generally. Recent and current tensions are largely based on the shared control of the church among the Greek Orthodox, the Latins (Roman Catholics), the Armenians, the Copts, the Syrian-Jacobites, and the Ethiopians. This division is enrooted in a longstanding agreement confirmed by an Ottoman *firman* (decree) in 1852, the Status Quo of the Christian Holy Places. Recurring incidents of verbal and physical confrontations involving members of the different religious orders have required police intervention and have resulted in local and international media coverage. Though the Christian communities in Jerusalem only represent a small minority of the city’s population, their role has been defined as religiopolitically sensitive and thus significant in the context of global public opinion.

Chapter 9 reviews all major excavations and surveys carried out on, near, and under the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif platform, originally built by King Herod (first century B.C.E.) to support the Second Jewish Temple and transformed into one of Islam's most important sanctuaries during the Umayyad period (seventh century). The chapter evaluates both scholarly assumptions and political claims made in connection with this architectural complex and its associated monuments. The Haram, crowned by the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, has been venerated by Muslims since the mid-seventh century. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, explorers have been intrigued by its structural relation to the former Jewish Temple. Excavations and surveys of the site and its surroundings have led to turmoil, political tension, and physical violence. The opening of the Western Wall Tunnels in 1996 brought about armed confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis, resulting in more than one hundred casualties. Various other initiatives of the IAA, including excavation and restoration projects bordering the southwestern corner of the platform, have been perceived as an attempt to undermine the Muslim compound politically, religiously, and structurally. Local demonstrations, regional protests, and international condemnations, as well as UNESCO's attempts to halt those activities, have been largely ineffective, and archaeological investigations have proceeded without apparent delays.

Conducting an archaeological journey of the archaeology of Jerusalem in the framework of these chapters is thus a somewhat unconventional attempt to peel away and expose the different layers of exploration and motivation, rather than of its archaeological strata of cultural deposits. It is also a means of revealing the growing enmeshment of knowledge, science, professionalism, religion, ideology, and politics.

