

**Raz Kletter, *Just Past? The making of Israeli Archaeology*, London: Equinox, 2006, xix+362, figures and tables, USD 90.00, ISBN 1845530853.**

*Reviewed by Christopher J Davey*

Early Israeli archaeology was often suspected to be unprofessional and of doubtful integrity. The lack of stratigraphic excavation, the discarding of non-Iron Age levels, the looting of archaeological sites, the absence of comprehensive publication and the fostering of the antiquities trade were seen to set Israeli archaeology apart from that practiced elsewhere in the Middle East. Raz Kletter's book confirms much of this perspective and illustrates how this situation came about but leaves one with the view that we should be thankful that there was any Israeli archaeology at all.

Kletter provides a documented review of Israeli archaeology from 1948 until 1967. The book is arranged in chapters addressing particular facets of the subject and while this approach improves the readability, it does compromise a historical understanding. In many respects the work is a tribute to Shemuel Yeivin, the founder and first director of the Israeli Department of Antiquities and Museums (IDAM).

He tells us that in 1947 Eliezer Sukenik and Yeivin, two leading Israeli archaeologists, wanted archaeological supervision in Israel and Palestine to be united. Kletter does not discuss the reasons for their position, but it may have been related to their desire to remain associated with the Palestine Archaeological Museum, known as the Rockefeller Museum, and the Mandate heritage management system.

However as Israel set about a military campaign in March 1948 to expand its United Nations' allocated territory and expel the population, a separate administration became the only path. For Yeivin this meant starting from scratch and an on-going battle to get recognition for archaeological sites and artefacts from Israeli authorities, especially the military.

In a situation reminiscent of the recent US invasion of Iraq, Israel came into being without a government institution to supervise antiquities. Kletter documents the destruction and looting of many archaeological sites by the Israeli military and the general failure of Israeli leaders, with the exception of General Yadin the Chief of Staff (COS), to appreciate the importance of antiquities.

Kletter is aware of the works of some recent Israeli historians including Morris, Segev, and Pappé that have put paid to many of the heroic myths about the establishment of the Israeli state. He acknowledges the Israeli ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, but he is not correct to see it as an after-thought as it actually began from the outset as a deliberate strategy (Pappé 2006). He acknowledges that most of the fighting was around historic Palestinian villages that he euphemistically calls 'settlements'. As most antiquities and historic sites were directly associated with Palestinian villages this was a concern for Yeivin.

Palestinian villages and urban dwellings were systematically destroyed after the inhabitants were driven out and denied any opportunity to return. This according to Kletter was partly to promote the myth of a deserted land, a myth that Kletter believes Israel should now confront. Kletter describes how Yeivin who had been given a role to oversee antiquities by July 1948 tried to halt some of this destruction. Not mentioned by Kletter is the loss of historical geography that this represented. Many of the villages had histories extending back to the Bronze Age, or before, and they preserved names known from ancient texts including Scripture. We are now left with British topographic surveys done during the Mandate and Walid Khalidi's *All that remains*, a listing of the destroyed villages. If Pappé is right, the Israeli planning documents for the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians may also be of use.

It is clear that Yeivin regarded the 1948 war as a disaster for antiquities because of the destruction of sites by the Israeli army. The destruction continued through the 1950's as the army continued to despoil sites and in some cases used them for target practice: the parallels with Iraq continue.

The description of the attempts to retain some historic areas is interesting. While most of Jaffa was destroyed some of it was kept along with Akko, ostensibly as tourist attractions, but other areas, such as the old city of Tiberias with its synagogues, were flattened. The story of Baram in northern Galilee is recounted; the military commander destroyed the village, however subsequently the remains of the synagogue were made a tourist site and the village area turned into its car park. Kletter is correct in saying that once Israel denied Palestinian refugees' right to return to their homes, destruction of them was inevitable. However there were other instances; the village of Kolonia near the western approach to Jerusalem was destroyed and its occupant expelled as late as 1959 so that tourists visiting Jerusalem would not ask awkward questions about it.

Israel today continues to be a centre of the antiquities trade. The section on what Israel called 'Abandoned Property' that is property including cultural heritage belonging to expelled Palestinians, is illuminating. In contravention of International Law much of this was sold by the custodian rather than held by the State as Yeivin would have preferred. Antiquities trading became illegal in Israel in 1978, but according to Kletter dealers still claim that their material was obtained before that time. There is also an intriguing chapter on US funds frozen by Israel and the attempts by Yeivin to get access to the money for the establishment of an Antiquities Authority.

The chapter about Moshe Dayan is most illuminating. Many international archaeologists considered Israel's tolerance of Dayan's unrestrained looting of sites to be evidence of the essential unprofessional and unethical nature of Israeli archaeology. Dayan was Israeli COS 1953-58, Minister of Defence 1967-74 and an insatiable looter of historic sites and nothing Yeivin and his colleagues did could address the situation. Kletter refers to the bizarre situation when the Israeli army was being defeated by Fatah in the battle

of Karamah as it attempted to invade Jordan in 1968, the Minister of Defence was injured looting a Bronze Age cave at Azor.

Kletter says that Dayan's most prolific looting period was after 1967 in the Occupied Territories. He passes over this without much comment, probably because it is beyond the chronological scope of the book. But the fact is that the looting of antiquities from occupied land is contrary to International Law which outlaws the sort of behaviour exhibited by many of Hitler's staff officers in Europe. Dayan was an Israeli hero and was untouchable; clearly where a state reveres such ruthlessness and lawlessness, professional and ethical antiquities management, amongst many other things, is impossible.

A chapter is devoted to the conflict between the IDAM and the Hebrew University together with the Israel Exploration Society and the founding of a body called by Kletter 'the new archaeological council'. Many of Israel's most well known archaeologists were associated with the university and some had previously been in conflict with the British Mandate Department of Archaeology. Kletter reveals that some of the University's excavations were carried on without excavation licences as if the University owned the sites. The IDAM for its part seemed to have its hands full conducting large numbers of 'salvage excavations'. It was deemed to be the successor to the Mandate and was therefore not respected by many Israeli archaeologists. There seems to have been little respect for the rule of law, and the attempt in Israel to regulate antiquities and archaeological sites by a competent government department largely ceased in 1955 when Yeivin lost out to the Hebrew University and the Israel Exploration Society.

Another chapter describes the difficult relationship Yeivin had with the Government Tourist Commission GTC. Yeivin tried to enforce IDAM's legal requirements for the oversight of antiquities, but was repeatedly ignored as the GTC excavated with gay abandon. Yeivin also wanted a say in GTC policy, but was overlooked. In 1959 Yeivin resigned over the issue and in 1962 became founding Professor of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University.

Another interesting chapter follows describing the attempts of John Bowman to get permission to excavate *genizot* (places where disused manuscripts were kept) in Safad. Bowman recently died in Melbourne. He had been one of the first foreigners to excavate in Israel when he was at the University of Leeds. The attempt was unsuccessful, but the story illustrates the sensitivities that arise when dealing with religious issues in Israel.

Israel's early existence was uneasy as large numbers of Jewish immigrants languished in refugee camps without employment. Tom Segev 1949: *The first Israelis*, has documented some of this period. Kletter describes how the unemployed were used on archaeological excavations in what we would now call 'work for the dole' schemes. Hazor is one such site excavated in this way.

Kletter is brutally honest about early Israeli archaeology

'Standards of excavation in early Israeli archaeology were not good' (305). The registration of finds was crude or not undertaken. The pictures of early excavations in the book look like poor backyard landscaping attempts and illustrate the point. Elsewhere in the world extreme care was being taken to acquire all possible information from excavated material using techniques such as the Wheeler-Kenyon method.

Eight hundred and forty excavations occurred in the first 19 years of Israel. As I cast my eyes along the shelves the only serious publication of these is that of Hazor and Beth She'arim and 'foreign' tomes still dominate the archaeological corpus of the archaeology of Palestine.

The book is not an easy read. There are lengthy quotations the salient points of which are often difficult to appreciate. It is hard to get a feel for the overall archaeological picture in Israel during the period; who dug where and when. It is not a history but a description of the relations that Yeivin and the IDAM had as illustrated by the documents, however the situation is often uncertain. A description of the 1950's IDAM licence system would help, as would a map.

Kletter is not complementary about post-1967 Israeli archaeology, possibly because it is harder to excuse the ongoing behaviour. Yeivin and his colleagues were not travelling uncharted territory, but they were operating in a time of great change. Yeivin based his approach on the professional systems he had seen adopted by the British under the mandate and taken up in neighbouring countries. By 1955 the approach was abandoned by the Israeli political and archaeological elite. The book is really about the attempt to establish the rule of law for antiquities in a country that from its establishment had flouted the rule of law. Failure was inevitable.

There are many platitudes excusing Israel's often inhumane and illegal behaviour. Kletter tries to defend the nationalistic use of archaeology in Israel by comparing European and Arab allusions to the past. This attempt is superficial and unconvincing. He also puts the view that the Palestinians should give up their right of return because to return would make them guilty, although it is not clear what they would be guilty of, however it is true that there is no easy solution to the problems created in 1948.

Non-Israelis who find comfort in ideas of modern Israel's connection with the Iron Age of Palestine may find it strange that scientific Israeli archaeology has had such a battle. The expediencies associated with establishing a state for colonists in a land already populated have been overriding. The recent forgery scandals in Israel can be traced to the freedom of the Israeli antiquities market and the belief that history is something to possess and control; scientific archaeology still has some way to go.

Khalidi, Walid 1992 *All that remains*, Washington, DC: Institute of Palestine Studies.

Pappe, Ilan 2006 *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Segev, Tom 1998 1949: *The first Israelis*, Owl Books.