Holy Land Archaeology:
Where the Past Meets the Present

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Abstract: This paper discusses the ways the archaeological search for the past can be affected by the situation in an archaeologist's present. This is especially true for projects in the "Holy Land," where religious and political issues often play a role in site selection and in the interpretations of finds. Excavations of five sites (Beth Alpha, Hazor, Masada, Jerusalem, and Sepphoris) are examined as examples.

Introduction

The word "archaeology" is derived from Greek *arkhaiologia*, "the study of ancient things."[1] Modern archaeology arose from, and then departed from, nineteenth-century antiquarianism, in which non-professionals studied or collected ancient objects for their artistic or cultural value. Today, for most archaeologists and for the general public, archaeology can be defined in numerous ways, a simple one being "the study of the human past through its physical remains" (Ashmore and Sharer 1999: 10-11). More technical definitions highlight the role of archaeology in recovering cultural processes on the basis of reconstructed lifeways. As the eminent archaeologist Brian Fagan commented decades ago (1978: 21), archaeology aims "not only to describe the past, but to explain it as well."

The "logy" in the word archaeology lends an aura of scientific inquiry to the discipline; archaeology is considered a scientific, objective, and even dispassionate process. However, rarely is the search for the past simply a matter of antiquarian interest or scientific endeavor. Rather, in its search for the past, archaeology is integrally related to the present. The present affects what and how we learn about the past in a variety of ways. Archaeologists are often influenced by their present-day context in their choice of sites to excavate. The way finds are interpreted may also relate to the current religious and political setting of the site or of the country from which the excavators come. And the discoveries that get the most attention are often ones considered relevant to the national narrative of the country in which they are found.

Thus religiosity or nationalism can affect the archaeological enterprise in the Holy Land.[2] Religiosity, for example, often plays into the desire of archaeologists to find evidence that "proves" the Bible or at least illuminates biblical passages. The major European and American organizations (notably the Palestine Exploration Fund, the Deutscher Palästina-Verein, the École Biblique et Archéologique, the American Palestine Exploration Society, and the American Schools of Oriental Research) founded in the nineteenth century for the study of ancient

Palestine had the explicit intention of recovering information about "sacred" sites related to the Bible (Hallotte 2006; Chapman 1997; Conrad 1997; Murphy-O'Connor 1997; King 1983: 25-28; see also Meyers 1997). In some cases (e.g., the Palestine Exploration Fund; see Chapman 1997: 235) verifying the Bible was among the goals. Decades later in the twentieth century, the cautious but theologically conservative "dean" of American biblical archaeology, William Foxwell Albright, gave prominence to the task of authenticating biblical texts (Broshi 2001: 25). He argued that "discovery after discovery confirmed the historicity of [biblical] details which might reasonably have been considered legendary" (quoted in Long 1997: 112). This strain of biblical archaeology, which sought to demonstrate the Bible's historical reliability, continued to dominate American (but not European) Palestinian archaeology well into the 1960s if not later (Dever 1997: 315). Although most current excavations eschew any intention to verify biblical passages, interest in connecting the Bible with biblical sites often remains powerful, especially for American and Israeli archaeologists.[3]

Just as powerful, especially in Israel—arguably the most excavated area on the planet—is the role of nationalism in archaeology. The excavation of certain sites can generate a people's pride in their heritage. For a people like Israel with a diverse population, the discovery of a shared past can help produce and sustain a sense of unity and common identity. And when territory is an issue, as it is in Israel, the discovery of the historic roots of the people in the land can be used to justify the right of those people to the land. This phenomenon of using the past to serve present political interests is hardly unique to Israel; it can be found in countries all over the world, including Greece, Egypt Peru, China, and Bangladesh, to name a few (see Kohl 1998; Kohl, Kozelsky, and Ben-Yehuda 2007).

This essay presents several important examples of the intersection of present interests with the recovery of the material culture of the past in the Holy Land. The authors have consulted published information (including

Figure 1: Eliezer Lipa Sukenik at Samaria 1933. Photo: Nancy Champion de Crespigny courtesy of Geoffrey Movius

newspaper articles) and excavation reports and also draw on anecdotal evidence, often from their own experiences as students and then excavators in Israel since the 1960s. It is not meant to be a theoretical or general analysis of the complex ways in which Holy Land archaeology has functioned beyond its basic goals of understanding past societies; many books and articles have been written on this subject, and the reader is referred to them.[4] Rather, it provides information about five sites (Beth Alpha, Hazor, Masada, Jerusalem, and Sepphoris) that collectively show how excavations can contribute to our understanding of the ancient occupants of the Holy Land but can also serve nationalist functions or religious interests or both.

Beth Alpha

Beth Alpha is a kibbutz nestled in the shadow of Mount Gilboa in the eastern Jezreel Valley. The young Jewish women and men who founded this collective settlement in 1922 were among the throngs who immigrated to Palestine in the 1920s to escape European pogroms. The Beth Alpha pioneers were part of a socialist youth movement that embraced a utopian form of communism and

was adamantly secular. As the story goes (Elon 1994), in December 1928 some of the kibbutzniks were digging an irrigation channel when they accidentally struck a brilliantly colored mosaic floor. They realized that they had come across an ancient Jewish building, probably a synagogue.

This discovery was not uniformly welcomed by the settlers of Beth Alpha. As avowed secularists — for many were in rebellion against religion, especially the pious orthodox Judaism of their parents — some wanted to rebury the mosaic floor immediately and keep its discovery secret. Their anti-religious stance would be compromised by having a synagogue, even an ancient one, on the grounds of their settlement. But others saw the discovery in political rather than religious terms. They recognized that an ancient synagogue could serve Zionist purposes by providing evidence of the historic presence of Jews in the land. The second group apparently won the argument, perhaps because they were persuaded by Eliezer Lipa Sukenik (Figure 1), who was summoned to the site. An immigrant from Lithuania and a former high school teacher, Sukenik had studied archaeology at the University of Berlin in the early 1920s and wrote a doctoral thesis on ancient synagogues in 1926 at Dropsie College in Philadelphia. He dreamed of creating a world famous "Jewish archaeology" (Fine 2003: 29). He apparently convinced the reluctant members of Beth Alpha that uncovering these important remains of the ancient Jewish presence in the land was part of their identity as Jews, a people of memory, and that excavation at the site would help close the gap between them and the ancient occupants of the land.

Excavations soon began (Figure 2) with the sponsorship of the archaeology department of the newly founded Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The kibbutzniks became passionately involved in helping Sukenik uncover the sixth century C.E. synagogue with its brilliant mosaic carpet featuring a zodiac, Jewish symbols, and a narrative scene depicting the "sacrifice" of Isaac (Genesis 22). As word spread, people came from all around to volunteer at the site. What was to become Israel's national pastime for many decades burst forth among the pioneering young people of the region. To be fair, this was not the first Jewish excavation in Palestine. In 1921 Nahum Slouchz excavated the ancient synagogue of Hammath Tiberias with the expressed aim of revealing the roots of Jewish existence in the land (Shavit 1997: 49). That project was sponsored by the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society (later the Israel Exploration Society), which had been founded in 1913; aware that many foreign expeditions were investigating archaeological sites, the founders felt that it was the responsibility of Jews, in resettling the land, to recover materials from Jewish antiquity (Amitai 1997: 190).

Sukenik soon became something of an international celebrity. His discoveries were immediately announced in the *New York Times*, on January 23, 1929, in an article that

Figure 2: Beth Alpha Excavation, 1929. Photo from Sukenik 1932: Pl. II.2

emphasized the prominence of the zodiac. The headlines remarked on the "excellent workmanship" of the mosaic floor, and the article noted that "the colors are marvelous examples of early art in designing."[5] Less than a week later, Sukenik was in Berlin for the centennial celebration of the Berlin Archaeological Institute. The headlines of an article in the *New York Times* on January 29, 1929 announced that "Old Mosaics Trace Origins of the Jews" and that the discovery of the synagogue "makes New History in Judaism."[6] The rather sensationalist report, no doubt influenced by Sukenik's extraordinary enthusiasm for the site, considered the discovery "as important as the recent excavations in Egypt of King Tut-ank-Amen's tomb." Sukenik is quoted as saying that "in the history of art we have found at Beth Alpha the connecting link of the road from Jerusalem to Rome." Moreover, according to the newspaper article, Sukenik explicitly linked Jewish art to Christian art in describing the narrative scene:

God's hand replaces God's voice while Isaac is being sacrificed. It is the same spirit of symbolism that created Ixthus (the Greek word for fish) the symbol of Christ's name among the early Christians. God's voice becomes God's outstretched hand, so the Jew in the village of Beth Alpha drew the hand in the same manner as the Christians drew the fish in the catacombs of Rome.

Although the discovery of the Beth Alpha synagogue was entirely accidental, it became a milestone in the history of Jewish archaeology in Palestine for several reasons. First, despite Slouchz's earlier excavations, the Beth Alpha dig is usually regarded as the beginning of Jewish archaeology, perhaps because it marks the emergence of Jewish and eventually Israeli fervor for archaeology.[7] Second, it served nationalist interests by showing Jewish presence in the land more than a millennium and a half earlier. Third, it helped overcome the low morale, caused by economic woes and mounting tension with the Arab inhabitants of the land, of the Jewish population of Palestine in the 1920s. And fourth, as is clear in Sukenik's statements emphasizing the zodiac and comparing Jewish art to Christian art, it showed that Jews participated in the great European classical traditions and thus helped combat anti-Semitic European notions of the Jews as a people lacking artistic sensibility.[8] This last point affected not only the Jews of Palestine but also the Jews of New York. One of the first, largest, and most important Reform Jewish synagogue in the United States, Temple Emanu-El, paid for Sukenik's publication of Beth Alpha; the discovery of an ancient Jewish building of great artistic value helped them gain acceptance as a people of culture in New York society of the early twentieth century. The excavated past — the synagogue and mosaics of Beth Alpha — served the needs of the New York Jewish community as well as the early Zionists in Palestine.

and organizational skills as well as his charisma equipped him well for this enterprise. He excavated there for four seasons (1955–1958 and 1969), training most of the future leaders of Israeli archaeology in the process.

The size and prominence of the site no doubt figured in Yadin's decision to excavate Hazor, but there's more to the story. As he explains in his popular publication of the Hazor excavations, he had been drawn to the site ever since his doctoral work on warfare: "Its unique fortifications, an association with the great battles of Joshua and the [biblical] references to it in the period of Solomon and later Israelite kings were most alluring" (Yadin 1975: 23). Decades later, Amnon Ben-Tor, a student of Yadin's and co-director of the current Hazor excavations,[10] recalled that the choice of Hazor had been explicitly linked to attempts to verify the Bible: "The archaeology of the land of Israel was born of an effort to confront and verify the biblical narrative with the findings in the field. One of the biggest stories is the story of the conquest and settlement of the land. That's a seminal story and that's why Yadin came here [Hazor] to check the story."[11]

Another factor must be considered. Hazor was the first major dig to be conducted by Israelis after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The new country came into being after a bloody war against the seven-nation Arab league. For General Yadin, the Israeli victory against considerable odds resonated with the biblical story of Joshua's conquest of the consortium of Canaanite forces amassed at Hazor millennia before. What more sensational discovery could he make than evidence of a biblical precursor for the 1948 victory! And the recovery of King Solomon's rebuilding of the city would add to the importance of the site in validating Israel's rebuilding of the land.

The Hazor expedition produced spectacular results, revealing many successive Bronze Age cities spanning nearly two millennia. The discoveries included monumental architecture — massive ramparts and gates, elaborate temples with cultic stele and statues, and impressive palaces — all associated with the Canaanites of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (Figure 4). Yadin's expedition also uncovered evidence of an extensive conflagration

Figure 3: Yigael Yadin, director of Hazor and Masada excavations, in 1978. Photo: No. 102, 1671 in State of Israel National Photo collection item no. 016721

Hazor

Fast forward to the 1950s and the imposing Upper Galilean mound of Hazor, the largest archaeological biblical site in Israel. At its greatest Bronze-Age (Canaanite) extent in the mid-second millennium B.C.E., it occupied over 200 acres and had a population that may have reached 50,000 (Yadin 1975: 143). Mentioned more often in Mesopotamian and Egyptian documents than any other Palestinian site, its prominence is reflected in its biblical description as "the head of all those kingdoms" (Josh 11:1).

Sukenik's excavations at Beth Alpha originated in an accidental discovery, but not so for the excavations at Hazor, organized by none other than Sukenik's son, Yigael Yadin (Figure 3), who would go on to become even more prominent than his father.[9] Yadin was the chief of operations in Israel's 1948 War of Independence (or "Catastrophe" in Arab terms). He resigned his army post in 1952 to resume his studies at the Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology, which his father had helped to establish. His army experiences led him to a dissertation topic on warfare in biblical lands. Soon after receiving his doctorate in 1955, he launched his archaeological career at Hazor. This large site with huge ramparts required a large-scale excavation, and Yadin's military background

Figure 4: Reconstruction drawing of massive Canaanite fortifications uncovered by Yadin at Hazor. Photo: Yadin 1975: 138, Courtesy Weidenfeld and Nicholson
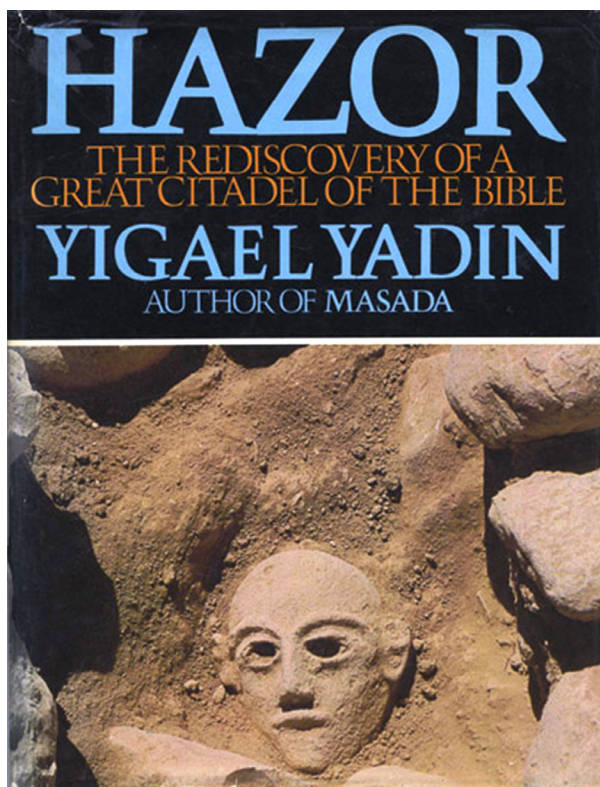
Figure 5: The cover of Yadin's popular Hazor book, showing the subtitle ('The Discovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible') emphasizing the biblical connection.

that apparently destroyed the last Late Bronze Age city at the end of the thirteenth century B.C.E. Then Hazor was virtually uninhabited until the Iron II period, in the tenth or ninth century B.C.E.

Like his father, Yadin relished opportunities to announce his discoveries in popular media as well as report them in scholarly publications. In informing the general public about his work at Hazor, he focused on the thirteenth century destruction and the renewed city in the Iron Age, for those two features could be, in his view, related to biblical accounts: the destruction was none other than the one purportedly carried out by Joshua (Josh 11:1–11), and the rebuilding could be attributed to Solomon (1 Kgs 9:15). A *New York Times* article after the 1957 season, for example, bears the headline "Digging in Israel Supports the Bible" and proclaims that the recent discoveries at Hazor provided "further evidence of the Bible's accuracy." It also reports that the dig had found "evidence that Hazor was fully destroyed by Joshua in the thirteenth century B.C. as the Bible says, and that it did not exist again until it was rebuilt by Solomon in the tenth century B. C."[12] To be sure, the emphasis in the newspaper article on these two

aspects of the dig rather than on the much more extensive and monumental remains of the Bronze Age might be attributed to the journalist writing the article. However, Yadin's popular book on Hazor (Figure 5) is titled *Hazor: The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible* (1975). Again, although the Bronze Age city comprised the bulk of the discoveries, only about half of the book reports on them; the rest concerns the supposed Israelite destruction and rebuilds by the United and Israelite monarchies.

Yadin's interpretation of the discoveries as evidence of Israelite conquest has since been challenged.[13] Other forces besides Israelite ones could have caused the conflagration, for Palestine was a very unstable region at the end of the Late Bronze Age, and the idea of a genocidal act by Joshua's forces is repugnant to many. It is interesting that Ben-Tor, one of Yadin's star disciples, sticks firmly to his mentor's interpretation of the destruction (Ben-Tor 2013). Yet the co-director (Figure 6) of the excavations, the late Sharon Zuckerman, has a different theory. She excavated a late thirteenth-century domestic area and found no signs of burning. She thus claims that the conflagration was localized: it apparently was limited to public buildings, some of which had been abandoned before the fire, and did not involve the entire city.[14]

Ongoing excavations may or may not one day resolve the scholarly impasse about the destruction, and the reliability of the discoveries to authenticate the Joshua narrative may always remain uncertain. Meanwhile, looking back at Yadin's dig, it is clear that his uncovering of Hazor's past was undertaken to some extent in order to validate the new State of Israel by documenting the Israelite precursors of the country and by indicating the military power of both ancient and 1950s forces.

Figure 6: Prof. Amnon Ben-Tor and Dr. Sharon Zuckerman of the Hebrew University's Institute of Archaeology, who have been leading the Hazor Excavations. Dr Zuckerman passed away in November 2014. Photo: courtesy Ben-Tor and Zuckerman

Masada

Yadin features prominently again in the story of the excavations at Masada, a majestic hilltop fortress on the west side of the Dead Sea and second only to Jerusalem as the most visited archaeological site in Israel. With his publication of Hazor virtually complete, Yadin again undertook a challenging project that resonated with military valor. The gripping story of Masada, as told by the first century C.E. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, was well known. Masada, a holdout in the First Revolt against Rome after Jerusalem fell in 70 C.E., was besieged by the Roman army. Running out of food and water, and rather than succumb to the Roman forces, the leaders of the 960 Jewish Zealots on the Masada plateau agreed that the 200 or so men would kill their wives and children, ten men chosen by lots would kill the remaining men, and one of those ten would be chosen by lots to kill the other nine and then himself. By the 1920s, this story had given rise to a rallying cry, "Masada shall not fall again," that encouraged Jews to stand up to the forces around them. By the mid-1960s, just before the Six Day War, the euphoria of the new state of Israel had ended; tensions on the borders were very high, with guerilla raids coming from Lebanon and Jordan and rocket attacks from Syria. Yadin's choice of Masada drew upon the nationalistic symbolism of Josephus's narrative as a story of heroic resistance that could serve the Israeli public again in a very tense time. Little did it seem to matter that the Zealots of Masada were hardened criminals and fighters who had fled the war with Rome to hold out at Masada.

As it happens, in 1964-65 we were in Jerusalem and learned of the call for volunteers to work at Masada; we thus joined the excavations for several weeks between
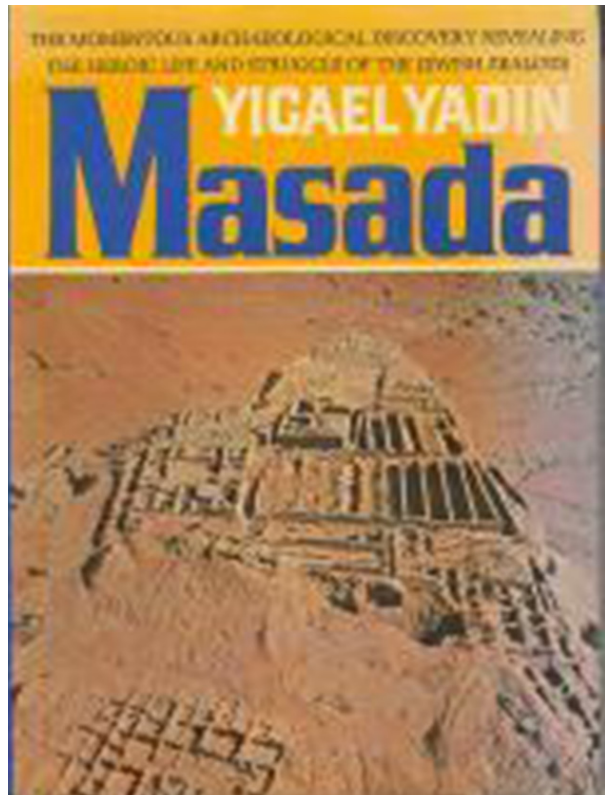

Figure 8: Cover of the first edition of Yadin's popular book on Masada. Its subtitle emphasizes 'the momentous archaeological discovery revealing the heroic life and struggle of the Jewish Zealots.'

terms. It was one of the most memorable experiences of our archaeological careers, especially because we were enrolled in Yadin's archaeology course at the Hebrew University. Sometimes called the Big Dig, the Masada expedition was the first major excavation to depend on volunteers from all over the world. Yadin drew on his military connections, counting on the Israel Defense Forces to provide security and deliver food for up to 400 people.[15] He also forbade photography, and would immediately eject anyone found with a camera, in order to maintain his control of reporting the discoveries.

At the conclusion of our stay at Masada, like every other participant we received a bronze medal (Figure 7) with the inscription "Masada shall not fall again" (a slogan that Israeli army recruits declared in their induction ceremonies at Masada for a time), making it clear that the excavations were part of Yadin's nationalist goals. Journalist Stuart Alsop labeled the mentality that underlies this slogan the "Masada Complex."[16] This meant of course that Israel like the Zealots of antiquity would heroically oppose at all costs the power of the Arab states to take back Israel/Palestine. Yadin used the ancient narrative of Josephus to promote this idea. And the subtitle of the first Random House edition (1966), a popular account of the excavations, highlighted Zealot heroism (Figure 8) although most of the excavated materials were the spectacular remains of King Herod's building projects.[17]

Figure 7: Masada medal bearing the inscription 'Masada Shall Not Fall Again'
Photo: http://taxfreegold.co.uk/1965israelmasadrockfo rtressgoldmedallion.php

Yadin not only took at face value (as he had the biblical Hazor narrative) Josephus's account about the final days and mass "suicide" of the 960 rebels, but also he identified a group of eleven ostraca inscribed with names as the lots mentioned in Josephus's narrative. The Eleazer whose name is supposedly inscribed on one of the ostraca was none other than the rebel leader Eleazer ben Yair. However, the details of the so-called mass suicide have been challenged for several reasons, including: the absence of skeletal remains; the prohibition of suicide in Judaism; the fact that the ostraca group had eleven, not ten, inscribed sherds; the recognition that the ostraca could have been related to food rationing; the disputed reading of Eleazar's name; and the fact that suicide was used in Greco-Roman literature as a rhetorical device for emphasizing certain points. These problems appear, inter alia, in the stinging criticism of Nachman Ben-Yehuda, the former Dean of Social Science at Hebrew University. His two major books (1995; 2002) and several articles accuse Yadin of uncritical use of Josephus and of manipulating archaeological data in order to maintain the myth of heroic resistance, which was especially important to Israel in the mid-1960s.[18]

Yadin's dramatic flair along with the political tensions of the 1960s produced a public Masada narrative, still maintained at the visitors' center at Masada, that highlights Jewish heroism and resistance to enemies. This mix of nation-state politics and archaeology does not necessarily serve the search for the truth about antiquity.

Jerusalem

Israeli excavations have been carried out in Jerusalem on a huge scale, unparalleled either in Holy Land or world archaeology, since 1967 when the city was reunited in the aftermath of the Six Day War. The ongoing excavations in Jerusalem underscore how archaeology can be intertwined with politics, nationalism, and the Bible.

Several months after the 1967 war, Eric recalls sitting in the Harvard office of his mentor, Professor G. Ernest Wright, when the phone rang. It was Herbert T. Armstrong — evangelist, conservative voice of the Christian right, and president of Ambassador College (Pasadena, California). He wanted Professor Wright to conduct excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem and offered him a million dollars. But there were several caveats, including that *The Plain Truth*, the magazine of his Worldwide Church of God, would first publish results of the dig. A million dollars was a huge chunk of money in 1967 (about seven million in today's terms); with it Wright, then president of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), could have carried out extensive excavations and enhanced ASOR's reputation. But Wright immediately told Armstrong that Ambassador College was not a suitable match for Harvard or ASOR.

We recount this story to create a context for considering the sponsorship of much subsequent work in Jerusalem and to indicate what is at stake when scientific inquiry is underwritten by people with political and/or religious

Figure 9: Silwan, the village in which the City of David is located (on the spur in the center of the photo).
Photo by Bert de Vries

Figure 10: "David's Harp" marking the entrance to the City of David archaeological park. Photo: wikipedia/commons/9/98/Davids-harp

agendas. Excavations from the 1960s to 1990s were carried out by leading archaeologists — notably, Nahman Avigad, Magen Broshi, Benjamin Mazar, and Yigal Shiloh — who may have had nationalist interests but who sought to learn about ancient Jerusalem and used proper excavation techniques and interpretations. Even so, political issues affected the various excavation projects because they were carried out on contested land. For example, the Western Wall excavations were condemned by UNESCO in 1968. Thus Shiloh took every possible step to be fair to the local inhabitants when he excavated the City of David on the southeast spur of the Temple Mount from 1978 to 1985. He involved the people of Silwan, the Palestinian neighborhood adjacent to the site (Figure 9), in the excavation project and thus enjoyed warm and cordial relations with them. In fact, his only altercations came at the hands of the orthodox Jews who wrongly accused him of excavating Jewish tombs there. He was physically attacked by a group of religious extremists who knocked him into a trench twenty feet below, causing back injuries that plagued him until his untimely death in 1987.[19]

Today it is different, especially in Silwan but also in other parts of the city, because of the work of El'ad, an organization that since 2002 has developed and managed an archaeological park to showcase the City of David excavations, which are visited by nearly

every tourist coming to Israel.[20] The entry to the park features a towering sculpture known as "David's Harp," drawing attention to the link between Jerusalem and the biblical king (Figure 10). El'ad (a Hebrew acronym meaning "To the City of David") is the common designation for the City of David Foundation, a private organization that intends to Judaize East Jerusalem, especially but not only Silwan.[21] Why would the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) and Israel's National Parks Authority cede such an important function to a private organization with an agenda? It is likely that undisclosed large sums of money were paid to the IAA by right-wing Jewish supporters of a greater Israel, who hoped to regain possession of Silwan and other non-Jewish areas of Jerusalem — areas considered part of the land promised to Abraham in the Bible (e.g., Gen 12:7) — and also by conservative, dispensationalist Christian organizations that believe that a rebuilt Jerusalem will presage the Second Coming of Christ (Meyers 2012: 212).[22] Political and religious motivations thus underlie El'ad's work.

Most of the archaeologists working under El'ad's sponsorship are well qualified. Yet, all too often they report their finds in a way that enhances El'ad's claims about ancient Israelite presence in Jerusalem as justification for expanding current Israeli control.[23] Archaeologists who agree to work with El'ad are implicated in the use of archaeology "as a weapon of dispossession" (Greenberg 2009: 35). Moreover, not only have archaeology, religion, and nationalism become intertwined at the City of David, but the site's "theme-park tourism" (Greenberg 2009) has distorted the archaeological remains. The signs posted at the site along with the El'ad-controlled visitor's center and publications foster what can be called a fundamentalists and one-sided approach to the cultural history of this part of Jerusalem. The Canaanite remains are virtually ignored; and the Iron Age and later remains are considered evidence of the ancient Israelites and their Jewish successors. El'ad's presentation of the site effectively proclaims the area to be part of the Jewish homeland and the rightful property of the state of Israel and Jewish people. There is no room in such an approach for the Palestinians who live in Silwan today or the Canaanites (or Jebusites, see 2 Sam 5:16-10) who lived there in the pre-Israelite past.

Figure 11: Sign in Silwan opposing Israeli tunnelling. Photo by the authors

Another of El'ad's plans was a project to tunnel from the Shiloach (Siloam) Pool to the Western Wall and even build an underground synagogue beneath or adjacent to the Haram (Temple Mount). The tunnel has been completed, despite Palestinian protests (Figure 11); but fortunately, thanks to the intervention of a group of Israeli lawyers led by Danny Seidemann,[24] the high court in Israel issued a stop order in early 2008, and the future of the synagogue is now in doubt. Seidemann claims that El'ad has ambitions far beyond Silwan and that, since mid-2008, the Israeli government has accelerated a policy of "aggressively and covertly expanding and consolidating control over Silwan and the historic basin surrounding the Old City" (quoted by McGirk 2010). This plan involves "the take-over of the public domain and Palestinian private property…accelerated planning and approval of projects, and the establishment of a network of a series of parks and sites steeped in and serving up exclusionary, fundamentalist settler ideology" (*ibid.*). In short, the plan would give Israel control of a large area of Arab Jerusalem. Seidemann warns that the plan "risks transforming a manageable, soluble political conflict into an intractable religious war" (*ibid.*)

The work in the contested sacred space of Jerusalem, sadly, is no longer a matter of academic discussions or political tensions; it has also led to violence. For example, in 1996 when Prime Minister Netanyahu ordered that the tunnels running alongside the Western Wall be opened for Israelis, the first major outbreak of violence between the Israel Defense forces (IDF) and the security forces of the Palestinian Authority ensued; about 100 people died, mostly Palestinians. The archaeology of the Temple Mount area is a powder keg that could be re-ignited at any moment, as the ongoing El'ad project continues to incite Palestinian ire. Current archaeology in Jerusalem is firmly entrenched in the issues of the present. We can only hope that the work of archaeologists like Greenberg and citizens like Seidemann will bring about an inclusive archaeology and a fair adjudication of property issues. As Greenberg (2013) says, "Jerusalem is not a ghost town, where time stands still, but a vibrant city; a religious and political arena….[Its antiquities] acquire their meaning through interaction with living people. All of Jerusalem's residents are entitled to live in it, but they must be able to hear its many voices." Jerusalem's past should enrich the present, not endanger it.

In Conclusion: A Look at Sepphoris

Located just several kilometers from Nazareth on a commanding hill in Lower Galilee, Sepphoris was a major Galilean city in the Roman and Byzantine periods. Our excavations there, beginning in 1985, provide our final example of how the discovery of the past relates to the present. But the case of Sepphoris is different in that we believe the discoveries there may transcend nationalisms and be a force for peace rather than turmoil.[25]

Even before excavation, analysis of the references to Sepphoris in ancient texts (including coins) showed that people of several religions or ethnicities were resident at the site. As the place where the famous sage, Rabbi Judah the Prince, codified the Mishnah (the first major rabbinic work, dated to the early third century C.E.), the site is frequently mentioned in rabbinic literature and for a time was the seat of the Sanhedrin (Jewish administrative council). It also appears in Christian sources in references to a bishopric there in the early Byzantine period.[26] Roman presence is noted by the Jewish historian Josephus, who mentions the city's importance as one of the main administrative centers of the Roman government after 57 B.C.E. There is also a hint of a Roman presence in the numismatic evidence: the inscription on several medallions (found at other sites) of the early third-century C.E. emperor Caracalla refers to an alliance between the council of Sepphoris and the Romans; this liaison might be expected, given the location of a Roman legion in the vicinity and the increased Roman presence in Galilee at that time.

Excavations at Sepphoris have since recovered artifacts associated with each of these groups. Pottery and lamps marked with crosses (Figure 12) and menorahs (Figure 13), for example, signify the presence of Jews and Christians; and bronze statuettes of figures from Greco-Roman mythology — Pan and Prometheus (Figure 14) — provide evidence of Roman presence or influence. The many mosaics found at the site also reflect these three cultures: menorahs on a synagogue floor, scenes of Dionysos in a mansion, and an inscription mentioning the bishop Eutropious in the mosaic along a colonnaded street. Architectural elements — *miqva'ot* (Jewish ritual baths), two synagogues, a theater, two churches, and various civic buildings — likewise represent these three groups. And the presence of pig bones testifies to a non-Jewish

Figure 12: Stamped cross on potsherd discovered at Sepphoris. Courtesy of Sepphoris excavations

Figure 13: Menorahs on lamps found at Sepphoris. Courtesy of Sepphoris excavations

population in certain areas or periods, whereas the absence of such bones in other areas signifies a Jewish presence.[27]

In our reports — some published and others in process — we highlight these discoveries as evidence of the diversity of Sepphoris's population in at least some of the periods of the site's history. The Jewish community, which had clearly assimilated into the Greco-Roman culture of late antiquity, was probably dominant throughout. The Christian community probably grew in the early Byzantine period. And a Roman (pagan) presence was likely in most if not all periods.

In our discussions with students and in presentations of these discoveries in lectures, we push our interpretation further by suggesting that these groups lived together peacefully. Although archaeology can hardly reveal whether there were tensions among the groups, certainly none of the written sources mention strife. Moreover, the similarity of styles in some of the artistic productions suggest the existence of common artisans or even workshops (Weiss 2010) and thus of intergroup cooperation. In addition, several museum exhibits featuring materials from Sepphoris have stressed its multiculturalism. The announcement of an exhibit at the Kelsey Museum at the University of Michigan (which carried out the first excavations at Sepphoris in 1931) proclaims that "Sepphoris was a thriving provincial capital where Jews, pagans, and later Christians coexisted in relative harmony."[28] And the *New York Times* report of an exhibition in New York of a Sepphoris mosaic concludes that the "nearly intact work gives a glimpse into a cosmopolitan ancient world in which Jewish, Christian and pagan populations lived side by side."[29] The idea of the peaceful coexistence of different groups has enormous resonance in the present climate, with strong discord and periodic violence marking relations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Yet as we write this, the current political climate in Israel is taking our hopeful interpretation of the site

in a different direction. The Sepphoris antiquities are in a national park, and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) along with the IAA (both government agencies) is in the process of upgrading the facilities and signage at the site and also consolidating the deteriorating walls of many of the excavated buildings. It is our understanding that the Jewish presence at Sepphoris will be emphasized — a move which is in line with the decision, made years ago despite our attempts that it be otherwise, to exclude the Crusader church from ready access to tourists. It is also in line with the Zippori (Sepphoris) page on the INPA website, which calls Sepphoris a "talmudic-era city," a chronological designation that effaces Roman and Christian presence.[30] The nationalism of these government agencies is superseding the possibilities for having the site highlight the coexistence of Jews, Romans, and Christians in antiquity. The government may prefer to provide a nationalist message by emphasizing the Jewish presence there, but many of its excavators continue to hope that Sepphoris's multicultural past can be a force for peace. Indeed, the inscription on a coin of Nero, dated to 67–68 C.E., refers to Sepphoris as "Eirenopolis" ("City of Peace"; Figure 15).[31]

Figure 14: Bronze statuette of Prometheus. Courtesy of Sepphoris excavations

Figure 15: Nero coin with inscription on obverse referring to Sepphoris as "Eirenopolis" (City of Peace). Courtesy of Sepphoris excavations

In sum, the past retrieved by archaeologists clearly is not passive. Social, religious, and political issues in the archaeologists' present inevitably impact the way many sites are selected, excavated, displayed, and interpreted, especially when local governments or other organizations are charged with excavating or maintaining a site. At its extreme, data from the past are manipulated or used selectively to promote a present-day agenda—and scholars continually try to expose and correct ideas that stem from the distortion or misinterpretation of data. Even with all these problems, we believe that the use of the past for present-day purposes can nonetheless be valuable, if for no other reason than it helps maintain an interest in and support for the archaeology of the Holy Land. We can thus continue to learn about the history and culture of all peoples who lived there over many millennia. One of the students of our course on Holy Land Archaeology perhaps summed it up best: "Archaeology does things. It is not an isolated study of rocks or remains, nor a collection of facts that collects dust on a shelf. Archaeology is the umbilical cord tethering the present to the past."[32]

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Endnotes

1 From ἀρχαῖος ('ancient') and λογία ('study of'): see http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=archaeology&searchmode=none

2 "Holy Land" is a term signifying the territory in the east Mediterranean that has religious significance for Jews, Christians, and Muslims; depending on who is using the term, it can refer to areas in Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and sometimes Jordan—for places in all those polities are mentioned in Jewish and Christian scripture.

3 One need only peruse the pages of any issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* to see the intense interest, to which many archaeologists contribute, in drawing explicit connections between archaeological discoveries and the Bible.

4 For discussions of nationalism and archaeology, see, e.g., Silberman 1989, Alon 1994, Silberman and Small 1997, Abu el-Haj 2001, Broshi 2001, Hallote and Joffe 2002, Meyers 2003. The pietist and fundamentalist aspects of biblical archaeology have often been discussed, especially in the writings of William Dever (e.g., Dever 1997), who sought for years to do away with the fraught term "biblical archaeology". An exploration of the current relationship between archaeology and the Bible can be found in Benjamin 2010 and Levy 2010.

5 http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9501E0DD173EE33ABC4B51DFB7668382639EDE

6 http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9803E1D81530E33ABC4151DFB2668382639EDE

7 Fine (2005: 25–27) would rather attribute this role to the Hammath Tiberias excavations.

8 Sukenik also noted the synagogue's architectural resemblance to Byzantine churches (Sukenik 1929: 27–38).

9 For details of Yadin's life and career, see Silberman 1993.

10 Excavations at the site were renewed in 1990 and are still in progress (as of summer, 2014).

11 *Ha'aretz* English Language Edition, July 23, 2012.

12 http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1957/11/17/132851942.html

13 Yadin's attribution of major rebuilding by Solomon has also been challenged, e.g. by Finkelstein (1999).

14 *Ha'aretz* English Language Edition, July 23, 2012.

15 See Silberman 1993: 270–93 for Yadin and his Masada project.

16 In his weekly column in *Newsweek* on July 12, 1971.

17 Other editions of the book acknowledge this in a different subtitle: *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealot's Last Stand.*

18 Yadin's student Amnon Ben-Tor (2009) has sharply criticized Ben-Yehuda's views. See also the discussions in *Bible and Interpretation* by Joe Zias (http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/masada357902.shtml#sdfootnote5sym) and James Tabor (http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/resp357902.shtml).

19 Shiloh was a visiting professor at Duke during 1986–1987, where he spent his last months in hospital before returning to die at home in Jerusalem. He shared with authors many stories of his years digging peacefully in Silwan.

20 See the discussions in Bronner 2012 and Meyers 2012; cf. de Vries 2012.

21 The 2002 awarding of control to El'ad goes back to1986 when El'ad's founder, David Beeri, went before the Jewish National Fund to ask to take control of Silwan, a poor Arab suburb with thousands of people, on the basis of claims that the land had been purchased by Baron de Rothschild at the beginning of the twentieth century.

22 On conservative Christian support for Israel, see Ariel 2014.

23 Eilat Mazar, for example, says she has discovered King David's palace (Mazar 2006), an assertion contested by many archaeologists (e.g., Faust 2012, Steiner 2009).

24 Seidemann works with an organization known as "Ir Amim" (literally, "City of [All] Peoples"); see http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/220.

25 Preliminary reports on our discoveries at Sepphoris can be found in Meyers, Netzer, and Meyers 1992 and Nagy, Meyers, Meyers, and Weiss 1996; final publication is in progress. Other excavations have worked there concurrently with ours; for a summary of the work of all the projects, see Meyers and Meyers 2013.

26 Sepphoris became so important in Christian tradition as the birthplace of Mary that the Crusaders built a church there in the twelfth century to mark the supposed site of Mary's birth.

27 B. Grantham, forthcoming.

28 http://www.umich.edu/~kelseydb/Exhibits/Sepphoris/Press_release.html .

29 http://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/11/arts/art-in-review-079570.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3Aw%2C{%222%22%3A%22RI%3A14%22%2C%221%22%3A%22RI%3A9%22}

30 http://old.parks.org.il/BuildaGate5/general2/data_card.php?Cat=~25~~685252593~Card12~&ru=&SiteName=parks&Clt=&Bur=44872343. The website does, however, note the presence of Christians at the site.

31 This designation reflected the fact that Sepphoris apparently did not join other Jewish cities in rebelling against Rome in the First Jewish War.

32 B. Sincox, course blog, January 7, 2013: https://sites.duke.edu/hla2013/