

ARCHAEOLOGY, POLITICAL CULTURE, AND CULTURE IN ISRAEL

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I

How come that in spite of their devotion to their homeland, they leave it for us, the Christians, to dig after the hidden-treasures of the ancient Hebrew past in the rubbish heaps of their ruined cities?

Thus wondered the Scottish adventurer John MacGregor after visiting Tiberias and sailing his canoe, the 'Rob Roy', down the River Jordan in 1869.¹

Jewish writers speculated about this as well. In 1912, for instance, David Smilanski wrote his readers in Russia from nascent Tel Aviv about a lecture by German archaeologist Carl Watzinger, in which Watzinger discussed his own excavations in Jericho and some synagogues in the Galilee recently discovered by E. Sellin and G. Schumacher:

thus Christian-Germans are working in our historical homeland. Both religious and scientific interests are the driving forces behind their activities. And we, who should be the most interested party in the success of these archaeological excavations, do almost nothing in this field and leave it to whoever else wants it: Germans, Americans, British.²

Eight years later, upon the founding of the 'Hebrew Society for the Study of Palestine and Its Antiquities' in Jerusalem in 1920, its secretary, Yeshayahu Peress, declared that the establishment of such an institute was imperative for both cultural and national-political reasons. He found it scandalous that Jews stood by idly as various nations conducted

1. John MacGregor, *The Rob Roy on the Jordan* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1982), p. 228. Since I was unable to obtain the original, I used the Hebrew translation of this book.

2. David Smilanski, *A Town is Born* (Hebrew), ed. Yossi Katz (Tel Aviv, 1981), p. 134. This is a collection of articles published in Russian newspapers between 1906 and 1913. German scholarship used the term '*Hebräische Archäologie*'.

archaeological research on the Holy Land via their respective institutions in Jerusalem. Peress called the creation of a corresponding Hebrew institution surveying the land's antiquities 'in the spirit of Israel' a 'holy duty'.³

Many of the Jews arriving in Palestine in the late nineteenth century and after showed no interest in ancient monuments and artifacts and even opposed archaeological exploration. Conservative in temperament, they felt that the Jewish people could do without stone carvings as a propaedeutic for the understanding of Judaism and Jewish links to the Holy Land. Nevertheless, from the late nineteenth century onward, the majority of the Jewish public in Palestine accepted biblical and post-biblical archaeology as a legitimate and useful discipline. Moreover, local interest in archaeology shifted from a purely intellectual interest to an active one.

What did proponents of Hebrew archaeology mean by encouraging archaeology 'in the spirit of Israel'? Nahum Schloucz, supervisor of the first 'Jewish' excavation in Hamat-Tiberias in 1920, opined that the aim of Hebrew archaeology was to reveal the deep roots of Jewish existence in the land of Israel and 'resolve the riddle of its creative forces'. More specifically, he wrote that archaeology could help recover important chapters in Jewish national and spiritual history in Palestine that had been literally forgotten and buried. He cited, by way of example, the history of the Galilee in the Late Roman and Byzantine period.⁴ In this conception, Hebrew archaeology was 'national' because its main or even sole interest was the Jewish people.

One aspect of this 'nationalization' process was the inception of a Jewish periodization instead of the 'objective' one. Jews, wrote Y. Ben-Zvi in 1953, should use terms such as the 'period of the Patriarchs' or the 'First Temple period' that stress the 'Jewish character of the land'. By using Hebrew terminology, he concluded, 'we will compensate for the poor history of our nation and, at the same time, we will be more

3. *Collection of the Hebrew Society for the Study of Palestine and its Antiquities* (Hebrew), I, 1921. See also A. Y. Brawer, 'From the Early Days of the Hebrew Study for the Study of Palestine and its Antiquities', in *Galilee and the Coast of Galilee: The 19th Archaeological Convention of the Israel Exploration Society* (Hebrew) (October 1963; Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 228-36.

4. 'The Excavations at Hammath Tiberias' (Hebrew), *Hashiloach* 38 (1930), pp. 546-51. A stone lamp was found and Schloucz invited the High Commissioner, Herbert Samuel, to visit the excavation, but he declined.

precise'.⁵ Another feature of this 'nationalization' was the claim that only Jewish scholars were acquainted with the Jewish sources and therefore only they were competent to work with them. Moreover, it was argued that Christian scholars were interested only in findings relevant to a narrow, Christian theological perspective, whereas Jewish scholars were curious about the totality of Palestine's past.

In the first years of the State of Israel, broad public interest in archaeology intensified and was quickly institutionalized by state and public bodies. The old lament about 'foreigners' handling the archaeological recovery of the Jewish past in Palestine faded into the dim recesses of memory, but a new complaint was aired: Israeli society chose to live in the shadow of ancient spirits, as it permitted ghosts from the past to shape its consciousness and lord over it. Archaeology, it was argued, had become a popular national cult, a cornerstone of Israel's civic religion, and a formidable component in its symbolic repertoire. Ancient excavated sites became objects of secular-national pilgrimage. Collectively, they constituted a new mandatory touring itinerary, tantamount to a remapping of the land, both symbolic and real. This new map was conveniently stretched over the pre-1948 map of non-Jewish settlement in Palestine.

Another critique leveled at the cult of archaeology alleged its deleterious effects on Jewish religion and spiritual engagement with modernity. The worship of monuments from the past became, in this view, a spur in the 1950s to religious and secular fundamentalism, territorial nationalism, and messianism. The sort of relation between Israel's past and present that the archaeological discourse encouraged was, for the critics, a fanciful one, as archaeology influenced politicians to indulge in a 'politics of the past'.⁶

5. Y. Ben-Zvi, *In the Caves of the Cliffs and the Crevices of the Boulders* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Molad, 1953), pp. 237-41.

6. The literature on this subject is quite extensive. Examples include: Amos Elon, *The Israelis* (New York, 1971), pp. 365-78; Aharon Kempinski, 'Die Archäologie als bestimmender Faktor in der israelischen Gesellschaft und Kultur', *Judaica* 45 (1989), pp. 2-20; N.A. Silberman, 'Desolation and Restoration: The Impact of a Biblical Concept on Near Eastern Archaeology', *BA* 54.2 (June 1991), pp. 76-87; Magen Broshi, *Israel Museum Journal* 6 (Spring 1987), pp. 17-28; Leslie J. Hoppe, 'Archaeology and Politics in Palestine', *The Links* 20.1 (January-March, 1987), pp. 2-14. To put this in comparative context, see also the modes of acceptance of archaeology among other Near Eastern nations in such works as Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs: The Search for*

I will review such assessments of the role of archaeology in the state of Israel, starting with some definitions.

II

By 'culture', I mean a system of values and symbols and their creative product in a given society; by 'political culture', I mean the sphere of political and ideological polemics that appropriates the past for ideological ends, taming it into a mytho-allegorical or utilizable past. By 'archaeology', I refer both to 'greater' and 'lesser' archaeology. Since the 1920s, archaeology for most has practically been synonymous with excavations.⁷ In Israel (and elsewhere), however, 'archaeology' never meant only sites, ruins, or the various material findings. It meant 'greater archaeology': an archaeology that renders new pictures of the past (*Geschichtsbilder*), a new concept and a new narrative of history. Of course, every evaluation of the role of archaeology must view it in proper context as but one element in a complex value system. Only as an addendum to a constellation of historical, linguistic, geographical, and literary dimensions does archaeology figure as a stimulus for visions of the past and, consequently, the present. We cannot specify the location, task, and utility of archaeology in a given culture without regard for the overall cultural system, with its many layers, determining historical narrative, historical myths, and collective memory. Archaeology constitutes the most fundamental stratum in the narrative of the people's historical emergence and of the land's development. In this sense, archaeology underwrites and validates all segments of the narrative layered above it. In the Jewish case, it serves to verify the historicity of biblical accounts,

Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). For a good survey of Egyptology with an extensive bibliography, see Brian M. Fagan, *Rape of the Nile* (London: Moyer Bell, 2nd edn, 1992). There is, naturally, a greater spiritual attachment between Israelis and biblical history than between modern Muslim Egyptians and pharaonic history. See recently, Peter R. Schmidt and Thomas C. Patterson (eds.), *Making Alternative Histories: The Practice of Archaeology and History in Non-European Settings* (Advance Seminar Series; Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996); and Philip L. Kohk and Clarke Fawcett (eds.), *Making Alternative Histories: The Practice of Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

7. Kenneth Hudson, *A Social History of Archaeology* (London: Macmillan, 1981). On different categories of archaeological theories, see Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge, reprint 1990), pp. 20-26.

thus validating the ancient history of the Jews. Translating received chronicles of history into authorized citations of historical fact, archaeology also provides Jews with a post-biblical link to the land of Israel by substantiating Jewish habitation in the land of Israel after the exile had begun.

In light of this, I will argue that for the past century 'greater archaeology' contributed much to what Redfield and Singer call the new 'Great [Jewish] tradition', meaning the system of values and codes by which (Jewish) culture interpreted and reinterpreted its old sacred texts and potentially produces new ones.⁸ Lesser archaeology became an integral agent of modernization, shaping Judaism these last two hundred years, though in the Jewish context, modernistic elements combined with romantic ones.

III

Against this background, it is important to ask whether there is any truth to the maxim that 'in no country does archaeology loom so large as in Israel'. As supporting evidence, one might cite Israel's status as one of the most excavated countries in the world; the astounding numbers of professional and amateur archaeologists; the way the public stays abreast of archaeological discoveries; the ubiquity of archaeological museums in Israel; and such phenomena as the popularity of stamps with archaeological motifs.⁹ These indeed indicate public interest and an archaeologically saturated culture, but such data do not specify the manner of archaeology's impact on historical consciousness. Other criteria are needed in order to evaluate archaeology's impact on the collective awareness of the past.

In fact, it is hard to say what determines intellectual interest in archaeology as opposed to an interest motivated by nationalist ideology. A visitor to Masada, for example, may be 'nationalistically' inspired,

8. Milton Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization* (New York: Prager Publishers, 1972), pp. 4-10.

9. Magen Broshi, 'Archaeological Museums in Israel: Reflections on Problems of National Identity', in Flora E.S. Kaplan (ed.), *Museums and the Making of 'Ourselves': The Role of Objects in National Identity* (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 314-29. Ninety-four out of slightly more than a thousand stamps issued by the State of Israel in its first 40 years have borne archaeological motifs (Tsachor, *Israeli Postage Stamps, 1948-1980* [Jerusalem: Israeli Philatelic Authority, 1989]).

whereas a visitor to Caesarea, Beit Shean, or even Gamla will be impressed primarily by the 'archaeological merits' of the sites. In other words, we must distinguish between the function of archaeological sites or monuments as ideological agents, on the one hand, and the non-tendentious history that archaeology helps tell or retell, on the other.

The ancient past suffuses the Israeli landscape, but grasping the past's impact on the present is an elusive task. The popular Israeli guidebook *Every Place and Site* details each last tell and *hirbe* (ruin). These witness the past silently: most such ancient or not-so-ancient places impact not at all on the collective consciousness. They might interest tourists or even go entirely unnoticed, regarded merely as the 'archaeological furniture' that comes with the landscape. Only select monuments, holy places, sites serving national myths, and certain major documents (such as the Dead Sea Scrolls) have the potential to figure as part of general culture and perform some active cultural or political role because the historical or symbolic message they bear suits the mytho-poetic exigencies of the nation.

From all this, it is clear that it is not enough to dig and restore, for this in itself does not guarantee that the sites or monuments will impress themselves on national self-perception. And real remembrance, in the words of the sages, is remembrance that spurs action. A site's capacity to evoke emotive reaction is in itself insufficient; (greater) archaeology truly impacts the Israeli consciousness or collective behavior through school textbooks and popular and scholarly works, especially when the intention is to bestow symbolic significance. Only the strategic packaging of sites can result in new images of the past; the sites per se are powerless to do so.

In an article entitled 'Truth Shall Spring out of the Earth: The Development of Jewish Popular Interest in Archaeology in Eretz-Israel',¹⁰ I suggested an outline of early Jewish interest in Palestine and Near Eastern archaeology, since the mid-nineteenth century. This interest began with the Jewish encounter with biblical criticism and the history of the ancient Near East. Against the background of this intensive encounter, it is important to distinguish between approaches to the history and the development of Jewish faith and religion, and approaches toward the political, social, and cultural history of the Jewish people.

10. Yaacov Shavit, 'Truth Shall Spring out of the Earth: The Development of Jewish Popular Interest in Archaeology in Eretz-Israel' (Hebrew), *Cathedra* 44 (June, 1987), pp. 27-54.

The first issue, Judaic faith, prompted attention to archaeology throughout the ancient Near East, primarily to that of Egypt and Mesopotamia, since events in the Bible are closely connected to them and indeed often transpired within these civilizations. The second issue—the political, social, and cultural identity of the Jews—mandated that attention be paid to the archaeology of the land of Israel, because it had been the national arena of the people of Israel. One must, then, distinguish between historical literature whose writing was influenced by archaeological findings in the Near East generally, and history whose writing was influenced by findings within the land of Israel.

This dual rapport with archaeology reveals a cleft in modern Jewish historical awareness. Given the disparate religious and secular interests in archaeological findings, many secular-national scholars maintained that Orthodox Jews rejected archaeology out of a fear that it undermined tradition. Secular Jews furthermore claimed that, for their own part, they did not ignore the religious dimension of archaeology, for they drew a distinction between the Torah as moral guidebook and the Torah as historical account. Accordingly, they pointed out that archaeology was superfluous for moral aspects of the Bible—the Ten Commandments do not need the validation of the Mesha Stele—whereas consideration of the Israelite monarchy does need this sort of historical verification.¹¹

Secular proponents of archaeology did appreciate aspects of biblical morality, such as what they identified as ‘biblical socialism’ and the lessons of the Prophets, but argued archaeology’s irrelevance for these elements. Archaeology could provide nothing more than a backdrop to prophecy, containing nothing that might validate the message of such prophecy. Joshua was in urgent need of archaeological corroboration, but the visions of Isaiah and Jeremiah, like biblical laws, did not require any such reinforcement in order to fulfill their crucial task in molding the Jewish ethical outlook.

Archaeology increasingly won over larger sectors of the Israeli public, as secular boosters of archaeology managed to sell their thesis that appreciation of archaeology did not require religious identification with the sites, on the one hand, yet permitted a hazy sympathy for biblical morality, broadly conceived, on the other, all the while nurturing the nationalist enthusiasm for ancient roots. Such an approach might be termed the public’s ‘secular biblical scripturalism’, and it appears to

11. M. Soloweitshik, *Outlines of Biblical Sciences* (Hebrew) (Odessa: Moriah Publishing House, 1914).

characterize the relationship most Israelis have with the Bible as well as with archaeology. The public more or less accepts the historicity of biblical accounts as validated by archaeology. Religious Jews also avail themselves of such external evidence verifying the biblical narrative, which creates a common albeit tense ground with secular Jews.

It is clear, then, that archaeology helped revolutionize modern Jewish national awareness. It lent extra credibility to history (and not only to early sacred history) and, as a corollary, it legitimized the introduction of outside certification in discussions of biblical topics. Furthermore, it reconstructed old–new models of Jewish nationhood by recovering long-forgotten images of Israel’s past: antique images that henceforth became decisive components of Jewish modernity. Archaeology’s contribution to the overall Jewish modernist sensibility is often obscured by its purely nationalist uses.

IV

In the Yishuv or Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine, archaeology inspired popular study of the land of Israel (*Yediat Ha’aretz/Moledet*) and a new historical-geographical awareness. Ancient sites became stations along the route of organized tours (*tiulim me’urganim*) of national-secular pilgrimage, like medieval *hakafot* or *sibuvim*.¹² This interest in ruins and ancient objects grew as Judaism became less a religion of halakhic practice.¹³ The historicity of sacred events and the palpability of the landscape in which they occurred became more central to the faith—myths, the Law, and record of the prophecies, but also a national history in the broad sense: the source of Jewish national existence and its foremost spiritual-cultural product. Zionism was a ‘return to the Bible’ no less than a return to the land of Israel.

Nevertheless, for secular nationalists, the Bible was not important as the repository of a theological claim to Palestine; the Bible’s value consisted in the objective historical account of the Jews’ title to the land, borne out by archaeological evidence.¹⁴ Given the historical, nontheological use

12. See Saul Katz, ‘The Israeli Teacher-Guide: The Emergence and Perpetuation of a Role’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 12 (1985), pp. 49-72.

13. See Jacob Neusner, *Writing with Scripture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 166-82.

14. Gaalya Cornfeld and David Noel Freedman (eds.), *Archaeology of the Bible: Book by Book* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 18. See M. Soloweitshik, *Gems of the Bible: A Treasury of Pictures for the Scriptures and their Times*

to which the Bible was put, it was part and parcel of Jewish modernity, and thus stood in the foundation of secular Israeli society, exerting a romantic and conservative influence simultaneously. Archaeology's transformation of biblical stories from the theological, literary, and allegorical realms into reality, fueled a cyclical process: the more credible the Bible became as a historical account, the more it served historical-national ends, increasing demand for yet more archaeological verification. Biblical history was not the only subject spun about like this. Almost every known trace of the periods of the First and Second Temple and of the Mishnah-Talmud era was unearthed and installed prominently in the new historical-national awareness. Of course, there was nothing fabricated about the artifacts and history emerging from the ground. What was manufactured was the linkage between them and the present, between ancient Hebrew history and modern Israel.

During that period, archaeology served mainly intra-Jewish ideological needs. The Arab challenge to Jewish historical claims to the land was of lesser importance. This internal Jewish discourse helped normalize Jewish existence in Palestine by recalling a time in which Jewish sovereignty was taken for granted, banishing ingrained Diaspora dissonance over the notion of Jewish national autonomy in the land of Israel. It provided young Jewish immigrants with local historical roots to replace the pseudo-roots of the Diaspora. It also supplied a local folklore (*Volkskultur*). As a result, secular Jews marveled over discoveries of synagogue mosaics and ancient cemeteries such as those at Beit Alpha and Beit She'arim.¹⁵ The Beit Alpha mosaic, a copy of which was displayed in Tel Aviv, was celebrated as 'more decisive proof that many hundreds of years after our loss of sovereign freedom, Jewish settlement in the land endured'.¹⁶

Not only did archaeological findings nurture a sense of continuous Jewish habitation of the land, but also served to mirror the spread of Jewish settlement as the Mandate era drew to a close. Since both

(Hebrew) (Berlin: Dvir-Mikra, 1925). He writes that by means of archaeology, the Bible leaves the realm of mere literature and springs fully to life. He accomplishes this, in part, by ranging beyond the history of the people Israel, and discusses general knowledge regarding the development of human culture.

15. These sites were not given any religious significance but were considered to be manifestations of Jewish culture of that period.

16. *Ha-Poel HaTzair* 5 (April, 1939). On the consequences of the discovery of burial caves at Beit She'arim, see Bracha Habas, *Alexander Zayd* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: The Center for Youth of the Workers Federation, 1938), pp. 85-95.

religion and national culture need their *verba visibilia*, monuments were enlisted, satisfying what A.D. Smith calls a 'desire for physical tangibility' and for 'stations in time'.¹⁷ He elaborates:

For Jews archaeology has been allied to religious zeal in defining the homeland of Israel, in demarcating its boundaries... and in fusing the human monuments with 'their' landscape, thereby uniting the people to 'its' homeland... By naturalizing the monuments, the community is defined in space and time. We are told 'where we are'.¹⁸

It is important to note that unlike in Europe, archaeology in the land of Israel had no antimodern dimension. Serving various sectors of the population and corresponding to their sundry needs, it was essentially an agent of liberalism, conveying Jewish cultural history in all its plurality and diversity, nor did it ignore non-Jewish neighbor peoples whose histories impinged on the Hebrews.

V

Conventional wisdom has it that during the early years of the State, archaeology became a vital component of the civil religion, as it continued to provide Jews with roots. Both before and after 1948, archaeology did much more than merely disclose data about the past; it outfitted the past with specific images and meaning. In reality, very few findings became objects of public enthusiasm, and not every ruin met criteria to warrant attention by the State. Ben-Gurion was especially selective. He regarded the Bible as the *sola scriptura* of Judaism and, moreover, showed only scant interest in archaeology.¹⁹ He displayed no affinity at all for the Second Temple era, and the State assistance he permitted for excavations at Masada and for the Bar-Kochva caves are exceptional cases. Support for these projects did not derive from any archaeological bent on his part, as many claim. There is no basis to the view that he saw the cult of archaeology as integral to modern Israeli identity, nor did

17. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 181.

18. Smith, *Ethnic Origins*, p. 188.

19. Although supportive of Yadin, Ben-Gurion did not make a point of touring the excavations. He was far more interested in the biblical text itself: its historical narrative and moral-prophetic message. On this, see Michael Keren, *Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals: Power, Knowledge, and Charisma* (De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983), pp. 100-14.

he believe that the new immigrants were in any way inspired by archaeological findings.

That there were powerful aficionados of archaeology who offset Ben-Gurion's apathy, such as Moshe Dayan, did not ensure the cultural ascendance of archaeology in the post-1948 era. Even the stir created by the discovery of ruins at Masada and documents in the Judean Desert only affected certain sectors of the public, and moreover, archaeology per se did not move even them. It was always part of a broader context and discourse, and certainly not the principal part.

For those whom archaeology did impress between 1949 and 1967, it conferred self-assurance based on continuity and affinity with the past, just as it had before 1948. (It was somewhat problematic that the Hebrew past with which archaeology helped Israelis to identify was primarily that of Judea and Samaria: the 'West Bank'.) To reach the general public beyond those by nature inclined toward archaeology, promoters of archaeology emphasized finds particularly evocative of Jewish continuity and belonging in Israel.

While this meant that certain finds and symbols were stressed and others marginalized or neglected, those highlighted were still only part of a more comprehensive and more complex network of symbols and motifs. In the sphere of creative activity, while providing a backdrop for some historical novels and contributing models to the fine arts, mainly in painting and sculpture (and stamps), archaeology's impact was minimal in comparison to other sources of artistic inspiration. Canaanite art was far less influential than the monumental art of Mesopotamia, whereas the Jewish-Hellenistic and Byzantine art that had flourished in Palestine was not even considered true Palestinian art. In any event, all the so-called ancient elements that had been absorbed into Israeli visual arts did not render Israeli art any less modernist. Archaeology certainly had a place in Israeli high culture, but left its modernist (and often 'Diaspora Jewish') nature intact.²⁰

In the sphere of political culture, the situation was different. Attitudes toward archaeology were used by political camps as shibboleths demarcating battle lines in a *Kulturkampf*. After 1967, the symbolism and mytho-allegorical value of certain archaeological sites became more highly charged than ever as holy justifications for national ownership. On the other hand, many archaeological excavations in Jerusalem incited

20. Amos Kenan (ed.), *Sculpture in Israel: In Search of Identity* (Hebrew) (Tefen: Open Museum Press, n.d.).

the ultra-Orthodox to take to the streets in opposition, while secular-liberal 'post-Zionist' critics voiced their own objections against the Israeli cult of archaeology.

The ultra-Orthodox attitude had undergone some interesting transformations. From early indifference, it had evolved into conditional acceptance. Archaeology of the Second Temple period was particularly appreciated for offering evidence of Jewish observance and for disclosing data that helped one to understand the genesis and rationale behind many *halakhot* that liberal Jews pointed out with alacrity.²¹ However, the orthodox position on archaeology is nuanced. Findings from the Second Temple period are welcomed, while First Temple period excavations often prompt anxiety. A large segment of the orthodox population is implacably averse to digs disturbing grave sites, and the violent demonstrations in which they express their disapproval testify to the radicalization of the ultra-Orthodox in Israel. Their rage against excavations is only secondarily about the excavation, and primarily about announcing to secular Israel that they have become emboldened and are willing to use new measures to promote their agendas.

The most important novelty in archaeology's status in political culture these last 30 years is the convergence of nationalist ideology, scholarship, and pseudoscholarship in the Gush Emunin camp. Gush members' historical writings on the land of Israel and its antiquities reveal the modern, secular means which some religious spokespersons are willing to wield in order to further their brand of messianic Judaism.²²

The appropriation of archaeology by national-religious Jews such as these evoked a negative response by the secular public, which in large part turned against archaeology itself rather than against its uses and abuses. Many seculars impugned archaeology in Israel as a 'pagan-national' cult intrinsically amenable to nationalist-territorial manipulation. They agree with the traditional-Orthodox approach we encountered above in terms of claiming that spiritual values need no validation by artifacts. A more extreme secular wing argued that national culture, too, can dispense with possession of its material heritage. Previously,

21. Israel L. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class in Palestine during the Talmudic Period* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1986). Yoram Tsafrir, *Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, vol. 2: *Archaeology and Art*. 'Discussions with Avraham Shapira', *Yediot Achronot* 23 (September, 1983).

22. On territorial aspects in historical perspective, see W.D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

however, secular enthusiasts of archaeology drew the distinction between religious investment in unearthed artifacts and their national value, precisely in order to win over portions of the secular public that might recoil from archaeology because of the religious association with ancient sites; now, the argument was made in order to dissuade the secular public from supporting archaeology.

This argument was revived for the opposite purpose out of the desire to damage the national-religious camp at any cost, often spearheaded by ultraliberal 'post-Zionist' activists. Their goal is not so much to detach Israel from its past entirely—for they do endorse the moralistic, prophetic tradition of the Scriptures—as it is to discredit their rivals' specific discourse of the past. And since their rivals rely heavily on archaeology, they feel they must muster an assault expressly against archaeology. Once again, attitudes toward archaeology are an oversimplified reflection of cultural and political trends.²³

It is worth noting that after the destruction of the Second Temple, opposition grew in Judaism to the adoration of graves. Nevertheless, in the Middle Ages, a cult of 'holy graves' and holy places developed, principally around tombs of patriarchs, which served as tangible signs of ownership over the land despite foreign suzerainty.²⁴ Ironically, the chief reason after 1967 for the intensification of the West Bank cult of holy places was not a religious renaissance in Israel, nor even the natural result of regained access to the places after years of denial; rather, the political-cultural debate in Israel increased the need for religious-historical symbols of ownership over the land. Secular exigencies of the society provoked a sharpening of the cult of holy symbols precisely when Israel's sovereignty over the West Bank might be expected to have reduced the need for the symbolic.²⁵

23. For example, it is an open question whether the critique of the Masada myth is targeted specifically at the act of heroism at Masada or is addressed to the manner of fabrication of all myths of heroism in ancient and modern Israel.

24. Elchanan Reiner, 'Pilgrims and Pilgrimage to Eretz Yisrael, 1099–1517' (PhD thesis, Hebrew University, 1988).

25. Jehoshua Praver, 'The Hebrew Itineraries of the Crusader Period' (A), *Cathedra* 40 (July, 1986), p. 34. It should also be noted that in recent years popular religion in Israel has sprouted hundreds of new 'holy places' that are the destinations of pilgrimage and sites on which miracles are requested.

VI

No group in Israel has a monopoly on the historical knowledge divulged by archaeology. Archaeology supports different historical visions, and it is possible to deduce virtually any desired conclusion concerning the development of Judaism, the character of the Jewish monarchy, or such other subjects as the 'open' or 'closed' propensities of Jewish culture.²⁶ Or taking a less traditional track, it is possible to use archaeological finds to stress the metahistorical character of Jewish history, even to offer a pagan view or to emphasize the commonalities among the various peoples that lived in the land of Israel.

In other words, archaeology is irreducibly nonmonolithic, accommodating rather diverse hermeneutic strategies. All in all, however, it seems that the public tended toward one stance: 'scriptural fundamentalism', the belief that archaeology's task is to verify biblical tradition. Consequently, this was archaeology's main contribution to the discourse of self-understanding in Israel's previous generation, in contradistinction to critical historiography and liberal, post-Zionist trends. But if Israeli political culture continues to evolve in this liberal direction, archaeology might find itself relegated solely to the domains of scholars and tourists, losing its traditional grip on the popular imagination and on the nation's collective consciousness.

26. Thus, there are a number of schools of Israeli Bible research—some traditional, others critical and radical. For an example of the way the critical and radical schools approached the problem in the previous century, see Nadav Na'aman and Itamar Zinger (eds.), *From Nomadism to Monarchy* (Jerusalem, 1994).