

EDITORIAL

Dig, Preserve, Imagine

This issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* is the second of two issues dedicated to how archaeology has affected Palestine. The special series editor, Salim Tamari, wrote in his introduction in the previous issue a comprehensive discussion about the main contributions to *JQ* 91 from Sarah Irving, Beatrice St. Laurent, Hamdan Taha, Jean-Michel de Tarragon, and Tamari himself. The upcoming conference “Reassessing the British Mandate in Palestine,” organized by the Institute for Palestine Studies and taking place from 31 October–2 November, will feature two panels drawn from the work featured in these special *JQ* issues.

JQ takes a broad and interdisciplinary view of archaeology, one that encompasses the social and economic relationships of Palestinians to the remnants of the past on and under the ground, as well as the ways in which the analysis and presentation of archaeological material can highlight or exclude certain histories and emphasize or marginalize certain communities. This was as true in the Umayyad period (as St. Laurent proposes in her discussion of the repurposing of certain spolia in the Haram al-Sharif compound) as it was during the British Mandate (as Taha demonstrates in his piece on the Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem). Yet, as Beverley Butler suggested in *JQ* 90, archaeological objects and collections are not static; their colonial and Orientalist origins need not hinder us from thinking about new, reparative possibilities.

A similar approach to photography can be found in the volume *Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography,*

Modernity, and the Biblical Lens, 1918–1948, edited by Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sary Zananiri and reviewed in this issue by Nayrouz Abu Hatoum. Despite photography’s implication in Palestine’s colonization, Abu Hatoum draws on the volume, as well as the work of Indigenous scholars beyond Palestine, to consider “the liberatory aspect of documenting, archiving, and worldmaking for Palestinians that could have been realized had history taken another turn.” This is not just a matter of considering alternative pasts, but alternative futures.

Indeed, archaeology is not a neutral exercise in preserving the past, but involves judgments about what pasts are worthy of preservation, and whose present and future might suffer disruption or destruction as a consequence. Perhaps nowhere is this decision-making clearer at present than in Silwan, where the right-wing Jewish settler organization Elad, the City of David Foundation, has been authorized by the Israeli government to conduct excavations and stage a bibliocentric touristic experience. Mahmoud Hawari’s essay in *JQ* 90 offers an in-depth look at Israeli activities in Silwan; in this issue, Joel Stokes considers Palestinian heritage praxis in Silwan an an effort to resist the erasure of Palestinians from a literature on heritage that, even if it is critical of Israeli archaeological practices in Silwan and elsewhere, tends to focus on state-led or institutional, rather than community-driven, heritage work.

One can locate an alternative form of heritage work in the Dakkak Award-winning essay “A New Horizon in an Old City: Amin Shunnar, *al-Ufuq al-Jadid* Magazine, and the Intellectual History of 1960s Jerusalem” by Adey Almohsen in which he undertakes a different kind of excavation. Through a deep reading of the brief run of this small but influential magazine, Almohsen illuminates the cultural scene of Jerusalem under Jordanian rule – a period, or in archaeological terms a stratum, often overlooked – and the ways in which the Nakba of 1948 brought together authors and artists from various political trends to engage in production and criticism that forged a new kind of “Jerusalemite modernism.” A bottom-up approach to Palestinian heritage is consistent, too, with the efforts of the Palestine Museum US, founded by Palestinian-American businessman Faisal Saleh in Woodbridge, Connecticut. The museum, which opened its doors in 2018, curated the exhibition “From Palestine with Art,” an official collateral event at the fifty-ninth Venice Biennale, reviewed in this issue of *JQ* by Francesco Saverio Leopardi.

Whether in Silwan or in Venice, such activities seek to combat ongoing efforts to marginalize or erase Palestinian history, identity, and culture. Rasmieyh Abdelnabi’s “Letter from Jerusalem” in this issue provides a window on how return is envisioned, experienced, and practiced by diaspora Palestinians. We can also see the struggle over history and identity being played out in the realm of education: In East Jerusalem, the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem municipality are seeking to impose Israeli-approved textbooks and curricula on schools that have long been using textbooks produced by the Ministry of Education in the Palestinian Authority areas, and threatening to suspend the permanent licenses of schools that refuse to adopt the censored and reprinted versions of the same textbooks. Parents’ associations and school administrations in East Jerusalem responded on 19 September

with a universally observed shutdown of schools in protest. In the Tel Aviv–Jaffa municipality, meanwhile, the Israeli Ministry of Education has banned the use of maps distributed to schools by the municipality that show the post-1948 armistice line (the “Green Line”). The struggle is also evident from Israel’s crackdown on rights groups, including the August raids on seven NGOs – Addameer, Bisan, Defense for Children International–Palestine, al-Haq, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, the Union of Palestinian Women’s Communities, and the Union of Health Work Committees – the first six of which had been designated by Israeli authorities as “terrorist organizations” a year ago. It may be noted that nine European countries that support these organizations have denounced the Israeli measure. And we can see the struggle against erasure perhaps most fundamentally in this August’s assault on Gaza, the latest in what seems now to be an annual escalation of Israeli violence on the besieged population there.

Once again, Palestinians are tasked with shifting the rubble, salvaging what they can, and repurposing it toward a vision of the future – a kind of collective work that ultimately cannot be divorced from the archaeological work of digging, preserving, and imagining addressed in these two issues of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*.