INTRODUCTION

Subaltern Archaeology and Strange Beginnings

Salim Tamari, Guest Editor

Palestine has been a rich destination for archaeological excavators the world over. Ever since the discovery of the Lost Cross by Queen Helena in the fourth century CE, pilgrims and collectors have been on an obsessive search for relics and remains in the Holy Land. Israeli archaeology is a popular occupation, with a parallel academic tradition that includes an army of biblical scholars, and a small circle of revisionist investigators. A black market in artifacts (shrouds, pieces of the cross, Dead Sea scrolls) has dominated criminal activities on both sides of the Green Line. Yet, perhaps in reaction to the Israeli obsession with archaeology and archaeological artifacts – or rather with the Israeli use of archaeology as an ideological tool for building national identity, and as a Zionist justification for claiming putative sites to be living testimonials for biblical markers – archaeology has not been an attractive discipline for Palestinians in the occupied territories, neither at the scholarly level nor in popular discourse. Archaeology departments in local universities are few (existing only at Birzeit, al-Najah, and Hebron universities in the West Bank, and the Islamic University in Gaza), and they struggle to attract students.

Exceptions to Palestinians' relative lack of interest in archaeology are excavations that are not biblical or otherwise related to Christian or Jewish themes. Tal al-Nasba in the Bireh region, although ostensibly a "biblical site," is nevertheless focused on extensive pre-Israelite excavations. This great archaeological site is located in the Ma'lufiyya neighborhood of Ramallah/al-Bireh, north of Jerusalem. Ma'lufiyya

is known locally as the site of the Ramallah ‘Araq Factory, named after the Ma‘luf family, originally the Jerusalemite owners of the land where the offices and storerooms of the Tal al-Nasba digs were located. It was excavated in five seasons between 1926 and 1935 by William Badè. Labib Sorial, the excavation’s surveyor and architect, and the only staff member other than Badè to participate in all five excavation seasons, produced the site plans. The final report on the site – published a dozen years after the excavation’s conclusion and largely assembled after Badè’s death in 1936 by his colleague Chester C. McCown and his chief assistant Joseph C. Wampler – focused on the Babylonian and Persian periods (586–400 BCE).[1]

Figure 1. William Frederic Badè, the director of the Tal al-Nasba excavations. Photo courtesy of the Badè Museum.

Figure 2. Labib Sorial, the Egyptian surveyor/architect who drew the Tal al-Nasba plans. Photo courtesy of the Badè Museum.

The site’s problematic stratification and the lack of detailed site plans (most of the site’s architecture was published at a scale of 1:400) impeded scholarly use of the site remains for nearly half a century. In 1993, Jeffrey R. Zorn revisited these, drawing on hundreds of photographs of the site’s architectural remains, in his dissertation, which remains the definitive work on the site’s stratigraphy. Zorn’s study also identified key features of the site, including its inner-outer gate complex and “an until then unsuspected stratum belonging to the Babylonian to Persian periods (ca. 586–400 BCE).”[2] This remark was made in the 1990s, decades after Bade’s early identification of the site in the 1930s.

The photographs, architectural plans, and other materials relating to Tal al-Nasba that Zorn used, and those that would be necessary for any further reevaluation of McCown and Wampler’s findings, are held at the Badè Museum in Berkeley, California. As it happens, the online exhibition *Unsilencing the Archives: The Laborers of the Tell en-Nasbeh Excavations (1926–1935)*, has made the Tal al-Nasba collection available online to the public.[3] The digital files that comprise the exhibition not only include the successive plans and archaeological reports, but provide a vivid account of the work conditions of the local Palestinian men and women laborers – most of whom were recruited from Ramallah, al-Bireh, and Jerusalem – including their pay scales, tasks, and relationship with the American archaeologists. The records also contain detailed accounts of Badè’s relationship with the Ma‘luf family who leased their property

for the site's workshop, and the continued protests made by the workers over hiring practices, wages, and work conditions.

The contribution of these local figures – laborers, landowners, and others – has generally been elided from the narrative of nineteenth- and twentieth-century archaeology in the Middle East. As Allison Mickel's outstanding recent book *Why Those Who Shovel Are Silent* demonstrates, "Workers were not considered crucial participants in the scholarly work of archaeology. Their work was characterized as bodily, not brainy." Using digs at Petra (Jordan) and Çatalhöyük (Turkey) as case studies, Mickel argues that this "belief in the separation of manual and intellectual work, of unskilled versus skilled labor in archaeology" produced a "crisis," effectively ostracizing communities of archaeological experts, to the detriment of "science and history."[4] This work should be read in conjunction with Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sary Zananiri's edited volume *Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography, Modernity, and the Biblical Lens, 1918–1948*, reviewed by Nayrouz Abu Hatoum in *JQ* 91. In one chapter, Rona Sela provides a new reading of Khalil Ra'd's ethnographic photography of archaeological sites where Ra'd "enabled the return of the voices of those who were silenced by colonialism." Further, Sela proposes "refocusing attention away from the indigenous practitioner's subjugation to colonial discourse [and] toward the various strategies of resilient resistance that he or she may employ – among them appropriation, deconstruction, disruption, cross-referencing, and reassembly."[5]

This issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* (*JQ* 90) and the subsequent one (*JQ* 91) focus in part on these invisible subjects in the archaeology of Palestine: the hidden army of site diggers – the men, women, and children – as well as on foremen, surveyors, builders, and labor contractors who were often photographed as the background setting for sites but whose voices are rarely heard. In "Archaeology: Past Meets Present," Serge Nègre discusses the work of the École Biblique, an august institution of Dominican friars whose extensive record of archaeological digs from the nineteenth and early twentieth century is unparalleled in the Middle East. As Nègre observes:

> Over the years, Palestinians were hired on digs to lift blocks of stone, dig the earth, and haul thousands of tons of rubble uncovering many archaeological sites in the country…. [These jobs] brought salaries to the families and therefore the means of survival in an often harsh and difficult existence, in this region scorched by the sun. Working on these photographic collections, I imagine myself as if with them in the field, spending long hours with the workers who were doing the laborious work of digging, clearing, and searching. Under the watchful eye of the archaeologist clearing a shard, the men at the bottom of an excavation load and hoist buckets of earth or rubble to the top. Processions of men and women could be seen carrying heavy baskets on their heads with the remnants of their history and those of their ancestors, of whom they knew nothing.

Sarah Irving's "The Kidnapping of Abdullah al-Masri: (Un)employment and Power in the British Mandate Department of Antiquities," appearing in *JQ* 91, uses

an intriguing story of a Palestinian guard working at archaeological sites during the 1936–39 revolt to consider the political economy of archaeology during the Mandate period. Her approach highlights the ways in which archaeology "was not just a sphere of elite academic discourses *about* Palestine, happening at a distance from the place and people. It was also an everyday practice taking place *in* Palestine, involving ordinary workers and the communities in which they lived." Archaeology provided many different kinds of jobs, and thus drew workers into different kinds of relationships with sites of excavation, the communities around them, and Mandate authorities.

My own contribution ("Archaeology, Historical Memory, and Peasant Resistance," also appearing in *JQ* 91) examines the history of archaeological excavations in Gezer, which involved one of the most important excavations by the Palestine Exploration Fund in the nineteenth century. The digs became entangled with German land settlement in the village of Abu Shusha, and the subsequent struggle over communal land appropriated by the Bergheim banking family. The study is based on a new reading of biblical archaeology in Gezer as well as on oral histories gathered from Abu Shusha elders. These are examined against Ottoman police records and nizamiyya court records in Jaffa, Ramla, and Jerusalem, and highlighted by the murder of Peter Bergheim in 1885. In this light, Gezer becomes an arena for colonial conquest and Palestinian defeat. Although Abu Shusha farmers were defeated in Ottoman and Mandate law courts, their resistance to the imposition of tax-farming (as well as the assassination of their landlord) contributed to a compromise deal with the German caretaker of the Abu Shusha land, and later with Jewish purchasers of the Bergheim estate, that allowed them to retain a part of their possessions, even though they became sharecroppers on their own land.

Dima Srouji's "A Century of Subterranean Abuse in Sabastiya" is a history of the interaction between the villagers of Sabastiya in the Nablus region with five successive archaeological expeditions (Harvard University, the British School of Archaeology, Jordan's Department of Antiquities, and the Hebrew University) in the site saturated with biblical referencing (this is where John the Baptist lost his head to Salome). In what she calls "militarized archaeology," the author examines the most recent dealings between the Archaeological Department of the Civil Administration (ADCA) and the farmers of Sabastiya. It should be noted here that Israeli archaeological surveying in the West Bank is governed by the Civil Administration which is an arm of the Israeli Ministry of Defense. This unofficial adoption of the ADCA "is a conceptual annexation of all archaeological sites within the West Bank into the Israeli government's control."

Mahmoud Hawari's essay on Silwan ("Biblical Archaeology, Cultural Appropriation, and Settler Colonialism") extends the issues treated by Srouji on Sabastiya. He examines how Israel weaponizes archaeology to create an invented "biblical" narrative centered presumably on the "City of David" to justify its settler-colonial project in Silwan. According to Hawari, this contradicts the ethics of accepted archaeological practice and presents a biased narrative of the site as "biblical" and "Jewish," while ignoring its diverse multifaceted history. A major concern for Hawari is the issue of "slippage" in the selective silencing of the past produced by the

preference given "larger architectural structures and artefacts, representing significant 'biblical' or 'Jewish' historical events that can be labelled 'First or Second Temple' (Iron Age through to early Roman)." Not only is material from "later periods" (a euphemism for a vast expanse of time from the late Roman period to the late Ottoman period) undervalued and under documented, it is often destroyed as bulldozers and mechanical diggers are used in an attempt to "get down to the desired earlier strata as quickly as possible."

A similar kind of periodization can be seen in Hamdan Taha's essay on the history of the Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem (appearing in *JQ* 91). Taha examines the roots of Mandate archaeology in the Imperial Ottoman Museum established in the Old City in 1901 and its tribulations during World War I. James Henry Breasted, the American Orientalist, prevailed on the Rockefeller family during the 1920s to support the establishment of the Palestine Museum based on the concept of a "multicultural human civilization" and to highlight the cultural diversity of Palestine. The eventual building that housed the museum was inspired by Umayyad palaces, particularly by the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. Taha notes that the museum presents an Orientalist vision of Palestinian history through its focus on ancient history and a chronology that stops at the end of the Crusades and thus fails to include the Mamluk or Ottoman periods.

Taha's essay also suggests a second theme running through these two issues of *JQ*: ways of displaying and reading archaeological material. In this issue, Beverly Butler tackles the history of the University College London's Institute of Archaeology, its relationship to Palestine and the work of Flinders Petrie, and Petrie's "homeless" Palestinian collection and its movement from Palestine to Britain. Once secured, "the Institute of Archaeology goes on to take a crucial role in the international mission of instituting archaeology; thereby building on the pioneering legacies of Petrie's excavations in the Middle East." Butler also discusses the *Moving Objects – Stories of Displacement* exhibition (2019) at the University College London, co-curated with asylum seekers and refugees. The exhibition featured objects from the Institute of Archaeology's Palestine collection, displayed in an effort "to 'speak' to and of experiences of displacement, marginalization, and conflict." Butler situates this reframing of the objects within a larger discussion of "rehoming" the Palestine Collection.

As several other contributions to these issues of *JQ* illuminate, new readings are made possible not only by reframing the objects or materials collected from archaeological sites – as in the case of the *Unsilencing the Archives* or *Moving Objects* exhibitions – but by revisiting sites themselves. In this issue, Khaldun Bshara's "Lifta's Ruins: The Presence of Absence" is a work of forensic anthropology of Lifta, the Palestinian "ghost" village on the western slopes of Jerusalem that was emptied in 1948 and left to crumble since then. His investigatory method, which includes the use of "forensic architecture" to investigate war crimes, and as "an operative concept and analytical method for probing the events and histories inscribed in spatial artifacts and in built environments," has gained recognition among researchers and

practitioners who try to reconstruct spatial crime scenes. "As in criminology," Bshara writes, "every destroyed or depopulated site is a crime scene that carries within it the fingerprints of the perpetrator, and also shows the type of injury that was committed against the victim – the site itself."

Beatrice St. Laurent's "*Spolia*: A Conscious Display of History in Seventh Century Jerusalem" (appearing in *JQ* 91) is an inventive discussion of appropriated ruins. It inverts the notion of pillage by successive regimes into a practice of monumental spectacles. St. Laurent focuses on the use of *spolia* (a Latin term for spoils that refers to the repurposing of earlier architectural elements as building material) as historic objects on display in seventh-century monuments in Umayyad Jerusalem. What we have here is not "the incorporation of ruins in adaptive reuse such as columns built into walls," but the conscious incorporation of "ruins" in monumental Umayyad buildings during the period of Mu'awiya and his successors. The planners of early Islamic buildings, we are told,

> consciously incorporated *spolia* for prominent display as historic objects from earlier regional cultures and religions worthy of respect and preservation. This concept of displaying the ancient past has been linked with imperial power as early as the Greek Mouseion. Thus, the concept of a "Museum of Antiquities" was voiced by Muslim authority in mid-seventh-century Jerusalem invoking an egalitarian relationship with earlier Christian and Jewish monuments and proclaiming that message to a multicultural multireligious population.

Finally, "The Five Modifications of Dung Gate – Bab Harat al-Maghariba in Jerusalem" by Jean-Michel de Tarragon (appearing in *JQ* 91) is another photo essay using the photographic collection of the École Biblique (as well as auxiliary work by Khalil Ra'd) to show how Bab Harat al-Maghariba was transformed over time, from the late Ottoman period, through the Mandate, and the period of Jordan's administration of Jerusalem.

Endnotes

1 See "The Digitizing Tell en-Nasbeh (Biblical Mizpah of Benjamin) Project," Cornel University Library Digital Collections, online at (cornell.edu) bit.ly/3RtkCP8 (accessed 3 June 2022).

2 "Jeffrey R. Zorn's Academic Research Site," online at jrzorn.arts.cornell.edu/1947_Report.htm (accessed 14 May 2022).

3 "Unsilencing the Archives: The Laborers of the Tell en-Nasbeh Excavations (1926–1935)," online at (storymaps.arcgis.com) bit.ly/3Q47ij9 (accessed 14 May 2022).

4 Allison Mickel, *Why Those Who Shovel Are Silent: A History of Local Archaeological Knowledge and Labor* (Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2021), 6.

5 Rona Sela, "Resilient Resistance: Colonial Biblical, Archaeological, and Ethnographical Imaginaries in the Work of Chalil Raad (Khalil Ra'd), 1891–1948," in *Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography, Modernity and the Biblical Lens, 1918–1948*, ed. Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sary Zananiri (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2021), 219.