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In his Harvard Noble Lecture, the American preacher and essayist Frederick Buechner remarked that “all theology, like all fiction, is at its heart autobiography.” After reading Katherina Galor’s Finding Jerusalem, one wonders if the same could not be said of archaeology. Reflecting on her own personal journey as an Israeli archaeologist, raised as a Zionist in Germany, Galor laments the displacement of science with ideology in her chosen field. As such, her book is less about archaeology and more about epistemology with autobiographical undertones; it should, therefore, hold wide appeal among multi-disciplinary scholars from a range of fields.

At the outset, Galor is clear about her preferred scientific methodology: research should “expose physical and tangible data, with the goal of producing a scientific analysis of the finds and an unbiased presentation of data and results” (4). Yet, as she acknowledges, this ideal is an impossibility in archaeology. Fundamentally, the researcher’s tools are “extrapolation, interpretation, and imagination” (4). To complicate matters further, the motivating forces behind the establishment of archaeological activities are themselves highly contingent on “changing sociocultural and political contexts” that lend “meaning and significance” (4). Clearly, Galor sees archaeology primarily as a social science where knowledge is produced when one rises above ideological motivations and allows facts to shape conclusions, not vice versa.

As its etymology suggests, archaeology should be concerned with exposing what is first. In nine fast-reading chapters, Galor sets out to show how, in the case of Jerusalem, the discipline has become more concerned with what is last.

Chapter 1 describes the evolution of Jerusalem’s boundaries and physical characteristics throughout its several-thousand-year history. Full of photographs,
topographical images, city plans, diagrams, and political maps, this chapter provides an excellent introductory overview, showing how various national-ethnic-religious developments have shaped and were shaped by the built environment.

Chapter 2 looks at the context in which the archaeological enterprise developed in Jerusalem during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Specifically, Galor explores activities under missionary auspices, during the Ottoman era, through the British Mandate period, and ultimately under Jordanian and Israeli rule. She seeks to expose the tensions and interplay between ideology, knowledge, and science during the Western colonial period, which are then set in contrast with the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although on one level Galor places science in opposition to ideology, she adds an important qualification: it is not simply ideology that is the problem, but the ways in which it interacts with science. When ideology acts as a catalyst, sparking inspiration and novel research questions, it can actually advance the scientific enterprise. When ideology acts as a straitjacket, science is inhibited. Galor shows how nascent archaeological operations in Jerusalem were motivated primarily by mid-nineteenth and early twentieth-century political (colonial) and religious (Protestant/Catholic) ideologies. The desire to map Old and New Testament scriptures onto physical sites eventuated in the field of Biblical Archaeology, which made seminal contributions to our understanding of ancient history, using both sacred and secular data. A notable accomplishment is the dating of the enclosure wall of the Haram al Sharif to the first century BCE by early nineteenth-century Biblical scholar Edward Robinson (29).

Chapter 3 illuminates cycles of preservation and destruction. It shows how the Zionist movement embraced many of the objectives of the field of Biblical Archaeology, as it looked for tangible ways to establish a connection between modern Jewish nationalism and ancient Jewish history. Here, however, Galor argues that the ongoing twenty-first century religio-nationalist conflict tends not only to constrain science, but also to literally destroy its possibilities. The discovery and preservation of the past became subsumed as another front in the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A few examples are instructive: under Jordanian rule of the Old City and East Jerusalem between 1948 and 1967, numerous Jewish synagogues and institutions were damaged or demolished. After the 1967 War, the Mughrabi (Moroccan) Quarter was destroyed under Israeli rule to connect the Western Wall Plaza to the Jewish Quarter. More recently, a far-right extremist Israeli group, the Temple Mount Faithful, took ideologically driven archaeology to new levels by working in tandem with far-right American Christian millenarians. Together, they wish to reconstruct the Jewish Temple, which would result in the destruction of the Islamic Dome of the Rock mosque (45). In fact, plans to lay the cornerstone of this proposed temple resulted in the 1990 Temple Mount Riots, during which 19 people died and more than 100 were injured. One can only
imagine the scale of the apocalyptic conflict that could emerge should such wild ambitions be fully realized.

Chapter 4 surveys contested issues of cultural display and preservation, ownership of the past, and the complex interaction between Israeli occupation, Palestinian activism, and international institutions. Galor argues that past cultural heritage has essentially become a social construct, especially when research is used explicitly for ideologically driven “propaganda” (59, 82).

In Chapter 5, Galor builds on themes from Chapter 2, showing how initial ideological motivations produced Jerusalem’s premier archaeological institutions. In 1890, Dominicans established École pratique d’études bibliques. In 1900, the American Schools of Oriental Research was established, and in the same year the Deutsches Evangelisches Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes was created. Nineteen years later, the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem was founded. The Studium Biblicum Franciscanum was instituted shortly thereafter, in 1923. With a cluster of new institutions funded by Western donors, local Jewish leaders saw the importance of initiating their own organization: in 1920 the Hebrew Society for the Exploration of Eretz-Israel and Its Antiquities was established explicitly for “national political reasons” (88). It was not until the 1990s that the first independent Palestinian institutions focusing on Jerusalem archaeology were established (92–93).

Chapter 6 tackles the ethics of Jerusalem archaeology. Here Galor highlights the complicated ethical dimensions of performing archaeology in the context of war, occupation, and in a system where the Israeli government—not international institutions—establishes norms and adjudicates ethics.

The final chapters, 7, 8, and 9, are concerned with three case studies—the City of David/Silwan, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and the Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount—which have engendered controversy due to the implications of archaeological evidence for validating or questioning religious and national orthodoxies. These case studies are used carefully by Galor to demonstrate the pitfalls associated with Jerusalem archaeology along with its high possibilities.

With a title like Finding Jerusalem, one could be forgiven for expecting a definitive archaeological analysis that settles the multitude of historical questions associated with the ancient city. But Galor does not do this; perhaps this might be done in a subsequent volume. She does, however, do something rather more interesting and philosophical by conducting an archaeology of archaeology. Michel Foucault once remarked, “there was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert-traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the condition of history, and attained meaning through the restitution of a historical discourse.”3 In Finding Jerusalem, we find this aspiration too has been buried along with the past.
Notes

