Finding Jerusalem
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My longstanding interest in Jerusalem goes back to 1983, when I first found myself in the trenches of an excavation near the Ottoman city wall. The desire to understand the complexities of my own roots—religious, cultural, and national—led me to pursue a career dedicated to exploring ancient civilizations from an angle at once completely academic, abstract, and removed, while at the same time involved, hands-on, and concrete. Jerusalem’s past and present have played a central and consistent role in shaping this dual perspective.

The physical and visual dimensions of the fields of archaeology, architecture, and art history have allowed me to deeply penetrate the tangible truths of vanished cultures and, at the same time, to maintain a certain distance and ambiguity with regard to the real. Jerusalem’s antiquities are concrete and tangible; they can be seen and touched. Yet our knowledge regarding the sites, monuments, and artifacts is based on incomplete data and perceived ideas. Some of those ideas and related beliefs have given birth to centuries- and millennia-old traditions, producing valuable religious and artistic creations. Others, however, have brought forth conflict and violence. It is this interaction and duality I have tried to examine.

I began teaching the archaeology of Jerusalem in 1996, in two different academic institutions, the École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem (EBAF, the French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem), founded in 1890 by a Dominican priest, which specializes in archaeology and biblical exegesis, and at the Rothberg School of Overseas Studies at the Hebrew University, the first Jewish university in the city, established in 1918. This unique opportunity brought me in contact with students from various national and religious backgrounds, including Israelis, Palestinians, Jews, Christians, and Muslims. This diversity has led
me to approach a highly controversial subject in a manner that scrutinizes carefully all facts and data, using an array of traditional and innovative methods of investigation and presenting a variety of complementary, diverging, and opposing interpretations. My goal—and perhaps fear—was to remain objective without offending anyone’s religious and/or political outlook. This teaching model also shaped the nature of my coauthored (with Hanswulf Bloedhorn) book *The Archaeology of Jerusalem: From the Origins to the Ottomans* (Yale University Press, 2013). Over the years, the difficult task of negotiating facts and fiction, data and interpretation, and objectivity and bias has taught me how significant the impact of Jerusalem’s religious, social, and political context has been and still is on archaeological activity and interpretation, and that science and ideology are two entities that are surprisingly interdependent. The experience of living, working, and teaching in both areas of Jerusalem (East and West) and of maintaining sustained dialogue with the city’s Israeli, Palestinian, and international archaeological communities has allowed me to experience, explore, and analyze the situation firsthand. Rather than relegating religiously and politically explosive and controversial matters—the primary aim of my coauthored book on the archaeology of Jerusalem—to a safe distance, *Finding Jerusalem: Archaeology between Science and Ideology* is an attempt to examine these topics head on, to present the different views, and to bring them into dialogue. Yet, despite my sustained effort and desire to remain objective and fair in my presentation and analysis, I am aware that, first, objectivity in the case of Jerusalem is highly debatable, and second, objectivity is not the same as neutrality. Jerusalem’s antiquities present a highly charged and multifaceted entanglement of facts and values.

My immersion in Zionist ideology during my childhood, youth, and young adulthood in Germany and France and my early conviction that Jews owned the land of Israel were quickly shattered when I made *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) at the age of twenty-two. I came to learn that Christian and Muslim Palestinians, who were only modestly present in the narrative I had been exposed to, had very similar historical and religious attachments to the region. I also came to realize the injustice of being prioritized simply on grounds of my religion, and that being Jewish, regardless of family history (which I can trace down to the sixteenth century in Eastern Europe), gave me prerogatives that were denied to Palestinians, who had lived in the land for multiple generations. Thus, despite my sincere efforts to study Jerusalem’s past in an informed and objective manner, the result of this monograph reflects my own personal journey of inquiry about the significance of tradition, myth, religion, historical records, archaeological data, and political partisanship, for all those nations who claim alliance and ownership of the land of Israel/Palestine.

One area that reflects the contested nature of the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the ambiguity and inflected nature of certain terms, often indicative
of one or another ideological or political opinion. Without going into the debates about terminology, here is a brief account of words and idioms I use in this manuscript:

1. Palestine refers to the geographical entity of the larger region in which Jerusalem is located. From the time the name is first recorded, in an ancient document written by Herodotus in the fifth century B.C.E., through its revival as an official place name at the onset of the British Mandate period, the exact boundaries changed frequently.

2. Israel is the name of the kingdom mentioned in the Bible. It also refers to the modern state, which was established in 1948. The borders of the State of Israel have changed repeatedly since its establishment and are highly contested.

3. The Israelites were a Semitic people who lived, according to the biblical narrative, in parts of Canaan from the Exodus (ca. twelfth century B.C.E.) onward. Israelis are citizens or nationals of the modern State of Israel.

4. In the more recent and contemporary context of this manuscript, I reserve the term Palestinian for the people who lived in this region before the establishment of the State of Israel, to those who were expelled in 1948 and 1967, to Christians and Muslims who continued to live within the current boundaries of Israel, and, finally, to those who live in the Palestinian territories (Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem).

5. I use the term Judeo-Christian to identify common origins of Jews and Christians in antiquity, as formed specifically between the first and fourth centuries C.E., before more distinct forms of rituals and beliefs were formulated. I will also use it, and so indicate my usage, in the contemporary context of its deployment by American Evangelicals to supply a values-based foundation for their interest in Judaism and their political sympathy with the State of Israel. Though their interest in the Christian legacy of the city clearly overlaps with that of Palestinian Christians, the different political alignments of these two groups impacts their heritage outlook and thus their heritage politics.

6. Jews, Christians, and Muslims, also known as the three Abrahamic faiths—thus indicating their common origins and overlapping monotheistic beliefs—define the religious identities of the main protagonists of this study. Though frequently used in the context of an exclusive narrative (Jewish, Christian, or Muslim) or as an indicator of a unified heritage, no one category represents a homogenous group or a monolithic interest.

7. Though the religious and ideological struggles in Jerusalem over the last century have often opposed Arabs and Jews, other populations of Jerusalem have also been affected by or involved in these conflicts, such as, for
example, the Armenian, Greek, and Ethiopian communities. I will thus specify the particular ethnic and religious groups under discussion.

8. I define the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians as the “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” and refer to the region as Israel/Palestine.

9. The term normalization, as understood by the great majority of Palestinian civil society since November 2007, reflects Israel’s intention to present occupation as a “normal” state.

10. I use the term West Jerusalem for the section of the city that remained under Israeli control after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, whose ceasefire lines delimited the boundary with East Jerusalem, the rest of the city. East Jerusalem between 1948 and 1967 was under Jordanian jurisdiction. Its occupation by Israel in the post-1967 era has spurred significant development and expansion of the city (64 km² / 25 sq. mi.).

11. In 1980, the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) passed the Jerusalem Law, which declared Jerusalem as the “complete and united” capital of Israel. United Nations Security Council Resolution 478 declared this action to be “null and void,” and international law defines East Jerusalem as part of the West Bank and as occupied territory. My use of the term “occupied East Jerusalem” reflects the international view.

12. The term “First Temple period” is frequently used by archaeologists working in Israel to define the material culture of Iron Age II (ca. tenth century to 586 B.C.E.) and the “Second Temple period” to refer to the material culture of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods (ca. 332 B.C.E. to 70 C.E.). As these terms are based on written sources that do not reflect the larger geographical region associated with characteristic developments and changes in material culture, most European scholars and a growing number of American scholars eschew the use of this terminology. I use the terms “First Temple period” and “Second Temple period” only in places where they represent the nomenclature chosen by the archaeologist, scholar, or curator associated with the interpretation of the artifact or site in question.

The literature that deals with the politics of Jerusalem and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is too vast to reference here. More relevant to the present study is the rapidly expanding interest among scholars of various backgrounds in the politics of the archaeology, history, and cultural heritage of the city. Among the numerous articles and books I have consulted, I would like to highlight a few particularly useful sources that have influenced and guided me. Neil Asher Silberman’s Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archaeology and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1799–1917 looks at archaeological discoveries in the region from a critical cultural and sociopolitical point of view, focusing on the late Ottoman period. Nadia Abu El-Haj’s anthropological investigation of recent archaeological work
in the region, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society*, applies methodological and theoretical insights from the philosophical and social scientific literature. One of Abu El-Haj’s chapters is dedicated specifically to archaeological activity in Jerusalem, with a focus on the immediate post-1967 period leading up to 1982. In *Just Past? The Making of Israeli Archaeology*, Raz Kletter studies documents from the State of Israel Archive pertaining to the administrative setting of archaeological activity in Israel and the West Bank. He analyzes how fieldwork and interpretation were shaped by social, political, and economic factors, in particular during the first three decades after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Other important publications touching upon the roles that archaeology and cultural heritage play in the regional conflict of Israel/Palestine include historian Meron Benvenisti’s *City of Stone: The Hidden History of Jerusalem* and political scientist Michael Dumper’s *Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict. The Struggle for Jerusalem’s Holy Places*, by Wendy Pullan, Maximillian Sternberg, Lefkos Kyriacou, Craig Larkin, and Michael Dumper, successfully investigates the role of architecture and urban identity in relation to the political economy of the city seen through the lens of the holy places. Shmuel Berkovitz, in *The Wars of the Holy Places: The Struggle Over Jerusalem and the Holy Sites in Israel, Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District*, examines the most significant religious sites and monuments and the related religiopolitical conflict from the viewpoint of the Israeli legal system.

The numerous publications by Raphael Greenberg and Yonathan Mizrachi on the role of archaeology in Israeli society and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been particularly helpful to my understanding of many of the issues at the core of this book. Written by archaeologists, rather than most other studies dealing with the political aspects of archeological fieldwork, interpretation, and presentation (produced mostly by historians, anthropologists, architects, urban planners, social and political scientists), Greenberg and Mizrachi’s work has supplied me, as well as numerous other scholars working on related issues, with valuable data and reflections. Their scholarly work and activism are the result of numerous years of dedication to the subject.

This study would not have been possible without the help and assistance of many colleagues to whom I am deeply indebted. The diversity of their views does not compromise a shared commitment to the preservation and safeguarding of Jerusalem as an essential site of cultural heritage. Special gratitude goes to Yonathan Mizrachi, Jean-Baptiste Humbert, and the late Yoram Tsafir for having taken the time to discuss with me the missions and views of their contributions to archaeology, as well as to Michael Dumper, Ross Holloway, Dieter Vieweger, and the anonymous reviewers who have commented on some or all of my manuscript.
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