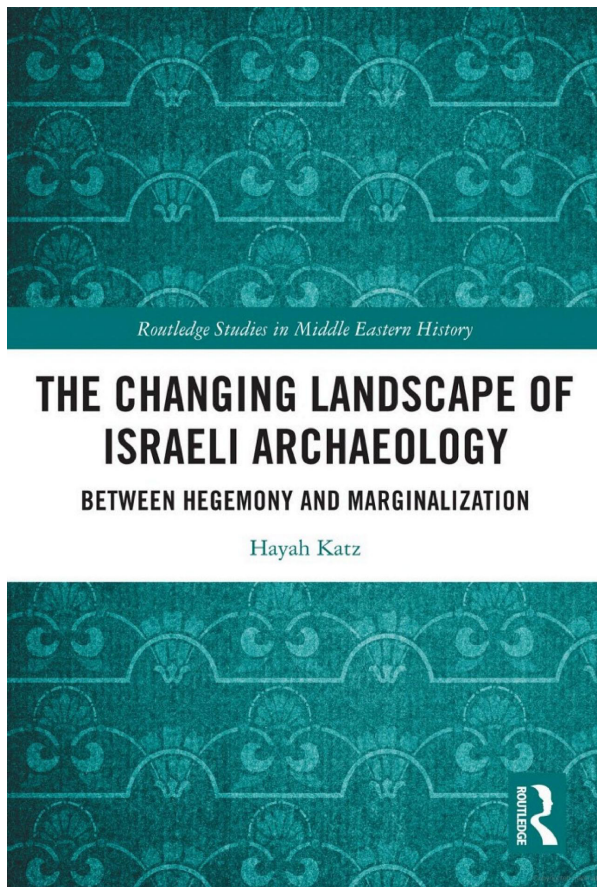


Reviews



Hayah Katz, 2024 *The changing landscape of Israeli archaeology: between hegemony and marginalization*, New York, London: Routledge, ISBN: 9781032487144, pp 140, 18 B/W Ills, USD 144.

Reviewed by Steven A Rosen

The archaeology of the region variously known as the southern Levant, Palestine, the land of Israel, the Holy Land, etc. has been the subject of several sociological and historical analyses. These studies have invariably focused on the relationship between nationalism and archaeological practice/interpretation, which is hardly surprising given the region. The development of Israeli archaeology, from its origins in nineteenth century biblical investigations to current theory and practice, offers a seemingly ideal case study of the relationships between imperialism/colonialism, religious ideologies, nationalism, and archaeology in areas of conflict. Many of these studies are overly polemic, with clear political agendas. The relationship between the politics and the science is indisputable. In spite of this, as naive as it may sound, beginning in the 1980s and coincident with worldwide trends in archaeology as well as developments

in local societies, critical approaches to the archaeology of the region have constituted a strong stream in regional practices of the discipline.

Against this backdrop, in *The changing landscape of Israeli archaeology: between hegemony and marginalization*, Hayah Katz examines the changing roles of three marginalised groups in the practice of archaeology in Israel: Orthodox Jewry (in its different permutations), Palestinian Israelis (in earlier times referred to as Arab Israelis), and women. The underlying thesis links the changing roles of these marginal groups to fundamental changes in Israeli society. In this, Katz offers a more nuanced critique of the hegemony of European/Israeli approaches to the post-prehistoric periods in the region than the usual and simplistic 'Israeli archaeology equals nationalism'.

The volume is organised into seven sections, including an introduction, five chapters, and conclusions. The substance of the book is reflected in the five chapter titles: 'The place of archaeology in Israeli secular society', 'Religious society and its attitude to archaeology', 'Religious society and the attitude to excavating graves', 'The Palestinian citizens of Israel and their attitude to archaeology', and 'Women in Israeli archaeology'. Important background information, for example a glossary of terms and discussions of Jewish law, makes the book accessible to a larger audience.

In the first chapter, Katz traces the evolving role of (post-prehistoric) archaeology in Israel. With its origins in European Christian exploration of the Holy Land beginning in the nineteenth century, and the early Jewish practitioners being almost exclusively of European origin, it is hardly surprising that archaeological narratives were dominated by Biblical interpretation, Ashkenazi (European) Jews, Zionist agendas, and the construction of a national identity in the formation of the state of Israel. This territory has been explored by many researchers (e.g., Silberman 1982; Zerubavel 1995; Abu El-Haj 2001; Ben-Yehuda 2002; Feige & Shilony 2008; Kletter 2014); however, the remarkably small scale of these early Jewish archaeological endeavours, dwarfed by the foreign 'colonialist' archaeological activities prior to the foundation of the state of Israel, has rarely been noted. By contrast, Katz paints a more dynamic picture, noting the rise of community archaeological projects in the 1990s, and the development of educational and heritage projects by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) in the twenty-first century. Both phenomena considerably expanded the foci of archaeological practice in Israel. Even in the tendency to emphasise the Jewish aspects of some of these projects, it is this more dynamic view of Israeli archaeology that serves as a theme for examining the role of smaller, marginal communities in

the development of Israeli archaeology. It is also worth adding that even the ‘hegemonic’ narratives of Israeli archaeology now include considerable diversity in theory, methods, and chronological foci. Examples include: the expansion of datasets beyond architecture, stratigraphy, and ceramics (most notably, but not exclusively, in the archaeological sciences), the partial adoption of social science (as opposed to biblical historical) approaches to the interpretation of the archaeological record, and the increasing emphasis on periods that have previously received less attention, most notably prehistory and the Middle Ages, especially the Islamic periods, and which is reflected in university positions and excavations conducted by the IAA.

The following chapters offer case studies of the developing roles of different groups in the practice of Israeli archaeology. Chapter 2 focuses on the place of religious Jewish communities in archaeological practice in Israel. Notably, Katz (openly declaring herself to be a religiously observant Jew) distinguishes between different streams of orthodox practice: religious Zionists, Haredi Orthodox, a rigorous orthodoxy, and the militant minorities within the Haredi community, which she refers to as the ultra-Orthodox (the use of the term in this context is not standard). The division is useful in the context of her discussion, but it is worth noting that even within observant Judaism, there are many nuances of community and practice. Although not orthodox, the reformed and conservative streams of Judaism, who are certainly less strict in their observance of Jewish law, have produced important archaeologists, the most notable of whom was Nelson Glueck, the pioneer of desert surveys.

The contrast between believing Christian and Jewish approaches to archaeology are notable. Many of the leading practitioners, indeed founders, of early biblical archaeology saw in archaeology an affirmation of biblical accounts and Christian theology. Orthodox Jewry saw no need for such affirmation, and very few Jewish archaeologists in the early days of archaeology in the Holy Land were religious/observant. Beginning roughly in the 1980s, a new generation of observant Jews began to achieve prominence in Israeli archaeology. Although they focused primarily on ‘Jewish archaeology’ (the biblical periods and Jewish subjects such as synagogues in the Classical period), their research falls well within mainstream practice. Katz also notes the founding of the Land of Israel Studies department (incorporating archaeology) at Bar Ilan University, a university whose mandate was the integration of Jewish observance and science. This department offered a natural home for observant archaeologists.

Chapter 3, on the archaeological excavation of graves, is really a continuation of the preceding chapter on religious attitudes towards archaeology. After reviewing Jewish laws concerning the excavation of graves, Katz traces the

origins of disputes between archaeologists and orthodox Jewry to as early as the nineteenth century, reviewing the escalating tensions between archaeology and the religious sector well into the twenty-first century. The excavations at the City of David offer an in-depth examination of how this conflict developed.

The issue is fraught, and several points are neglected in the discussion. The religious burial societies, to which bones are handed over when excavations are deemed necessary, receive payments from the state for each reburial, a direct economic incentive to insist that all human bones from archaeological excavations be surrendered to these societies, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation. This has led to confrontations over bones from patently pagan contexts (or, for that matter, Christian or Muslim contexts), and the levels of mistrust between the interested parties are clearly evident.

Reburial can be problematic. Protests over the excavation of burials, ostensibly to protect the rights of the dead, do not distinguish between Jews, pagans, Christians, and Muslims. There is a de facto and ironic recognition of this when the bones of these different peoples are reburied without distinction in non-denominational interments, without regard to their religious affiliations. Although a status quo exists concerning prehistoric burials, which are clearly not Jewish, tensions still arise during the excavation of protohistoric burials. The increasing power of Haredi political parties in coalition governments, reflected in other aspects of Israeli society, such as the absence of public transportation on the Sabbath, further exacerbates these tensions.

In Chapter 4, Katz addresses the issue of Palestinian Israeli (that is, Palestinian/Arab citizens of Israel) participation in Israeli archaeology. The role of archaeology in the Arab-Israeli conflict in forging a national identity for Jewish Israelis and legitimising the state of Israel, has been explored by many researchers. While Katz briefly reviews some of these arguments, the focus of her study is on the specific role that Palestinians played, or play, in archaeological practice, beginning during British mandate times and continuing into the twenty-first century. Tracing individuals and their roles in the archaeology of Palestine during the British mandate, the primary conclusion is that there was fundamentally little Palestinian interest in archaeology; Katz suggests that Palestinian identity and heritage were built on ethnography and ethnohistory. The number of Palestinian archaeologists was small.

The *Nakba* (catastrophe) that accompanied establishment of the state of Israel left Palestinian society shattered. The Palestinian archaeologists who had worked for the Palestine Department of Antiquities became refugees. For all intents and purposes, there were no Palestinian archaeologists working in the new state until well into the 1980s. Naming a number of currently prominent Palestinian Israeli archaeologists, Katz suggests that

the increasing Palestinian (Israeli) participation in Israeli archaeology stems primarily from the increasing professionalisation of the field and the transition from the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums to the Israel Antiquities Authority, a larger and stronger institution. The establishment of a Palestinian Authority in the 1990s, whose civil administrative functions also included the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, necessitating a cadre of professional archaeologists, suggests a broader context for the rise of Palestinian research in archaeology.

The final section in the chapter deals with the development of an archaeology of the *Nakba*, specifically investigations of Arab villages abandoned, and often deliberately destroyed in 1948. As with other aspects of the development of Israeli archaeology, Katz suggests that attitudes towards these very late periods have evolved from a general policy of erasure, to one of greater appreciation for Palestinian culture, and to grappling with the implications of the *Nakba*. Although she offers examples from modern Israeli practice, it would be hard to argue that such practice is the rule.

The final substantive chapter deals with the role of women in Israeli archaeology. After reviewing the rather substantial contributions of women to archaeology during the British Mandate Period, Katz offers thumbnail sketches of major women archaeologists within Israeli archaeology, with particular emphasis on Ruth Amiran, author of a seminal book on ceramics, and known especially for her excavations at the Early Bronze Age town of Arad. Further discussion focuses on data taken from the Israel Science Foundation grants, suggesting that there were biases against women in the granting processes. The data are more nuanced than this. For example, for the 11 years sampled (2010–2020), women received above their expected proportion of grants in five of those years, and below the expected proportion in the other five years (in 2010 they received exactly the expected proportion); this is hardly a suggestion of bias. Katz notes that the subject matters of the grants differ, with men receiving more money for field work and women more for ‘archaeological housework’, i.e. various types of analytical studies. It is impossible to evaluate whether such classifications reflect real bias or sociological tendencies, but the case for bias is certainly not demonstrated here. On the other hand, the universities have clearly proven to be more conservative in the hiring of women in archaeology than has the Israel Antiquities Authority, and the development of the Authority has certainly offered career options for women. Katz places these trends in the larger context of social structures and compares them to archaeological practice in other countries. The issue of intersectionality, persons filling more than one category of minority, is also reviewed.

The final chapter summarises the conclusions and trends that were discussed earlier. While on the one

hand, Katz accepts the fact of underlying biases in the practice of Israeli archaeology, on the other hand, the picture she draws is not static or flat, but, in fact, one of increasing diversity and inclusion. This is an important dynamic rarely noted in previous studies. Some of these trends are tied to specific features of archaeology and Israel – for example, the increasing professionalisation of the discipline – and others to broader developments in Israeli society, for example, the increasing role of women in archaeology is part of a larger trend of women in the professions in Israel, and is not restricted to archaeology, either in academia or the Israel Antiquities Authority. While such linkages seem relatively clear, the complexities of Israeli society, for example, the fluctuations in political trends, demographic growth, economic growth based on high tech, etc., suggest that the causes are complex. Some of these trends contradict one another, for example, the increasing secularisation of some elements of society against the growth of the Haredi sector. Thus, the increasing presence of observant Jews in archaeology has as much to do with changes within the structure of orthodoxy as it does with changes in archaeological practice and structure. These are discrete trends, not necessarily linked to one another.

Katz offers a more nuanced and less judgmental version of hegemony and placing it in a cultural context. Biases existed, but she makes no attempt to ‘place blame’.

There are other issues. The archaeology that Katz deals with, dominated by its biblical and Jewish subfields, is a very narrow aspect of the discipline as it is practiced in the rest of the world. Prehistoric archaeology is barely touched on, and yet it plays a major role in the shifting structures of Israeli archaeology, having served as a kind of gateway for adopting both scientific methods and anthropological paradigms into Israeli archaeology. Women prehistorians spearheaded the place of women in Israeli archaeology.

This issue of broader frameworks, of archaeology as social science as opposed to particularistic history, is hardly addressed even though it is integral to the development of Israeli archaeology. Global trends in archaeology, from processual to postmodern approaches and beyond, have had significant impacts on theory and practice in Israeli archaeology, even if adopted critically and piece meal. The ever-greater integration of Israeli archaeology into the larger world – evident for example in Israeli publication in journals well beyond those dealing exclusively with Near Eastern archaeology – is virtually by definition also a reflection of the impact of world archaeology on Israeli practice.

If the picture that Katz paints is essentially an optimistic one of greater inclusion and more sensitivity in archaeological practice, there are major unresolved conflicts and contradictions in Israeli archaeology. The increasing polarisations within Israeli society, between

left and right, religious and secular, Arab and Jew, and even conflicts between Jewish ethnic subgroups, are well reflected in archaeological debates; for example, over the activities of the Archaeological Staff Officer of the Civil Administration of the West Bank (a unit of the Israel Defence Ministry), have often been characterised as illegal under international law (Greenberg and Keinan 2009) (although to be sure, some are clearly mandated by United Nations charters). Although there is a status quo concerning the excavation of graves and grave goods, the agreements are fragile, and unquestionably subject to the vagaries of political fluctuation. If there are indeed more 'subaltern' archaeologists today than in the past, the social and cultural trends behind these inclusions are fraught.

Hayah Katz has presented a nuanced view of Israeli archaeology and its development. This is most welcome and will undoubtedly stimulate important discussion.

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