

Pompeo in Silwan: Judeo-Christian Nationalism, Kitsch, and Empire in Ancient Jerusalem

Raphael Greenberg

Zitiervorschlag

Raphael Greenberg. 2021. Pompeo in Silwan: Judeo-Christian Nationalism, Kitsch, and Empire in Ancient Jerusalem. Forum Kritische Archäologie 10:55–66.

URL <http://www.kritischearchaeologie.de>
DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/refubium-30952>
ISSN 2194-346X



Dieser Beitrag steht unter der Creative Commons Lizenz CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 (Namensnennung – Nicht kommerziell – Keine Bearbeitung) International. Sie erlaubt den Download und die Weiterverteilung des Werkes / Inhaltes unter Nennung des Namens des Autors, jedoch keinerlei Bearbeitung oder kommerzielle Nutzung.

Weitere Informationen zu der Lizenz finden Sie unter: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.de>.

Pompeo in Silwan: Judeo-Christian Nationalism, Kitsch, and Empire in Ancient Jerusalem

Raphael Greenberg

Tel Aviv University

Abstract

Intrigued by repeated visits of Trump administration officials to the archaeological tunnels at the foot of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, I examine the extraordinary connection between American and Israeli nationalism, “Judeo-Christian values,” and Holy Land archaeology, and propose a “Pompeo premise” that equates Jewish antiquities and settlement with bedrock values of “Western civilization,” promotes a political narrative of redemption (even if accompanied by massive violence) and relegates Palestinian Muslims to an ephemeral existence. The “recovery” of a “true” Jerusalem, purified of any Islamic content, beneath the contested, chaotic surface of Palestinian and Israeli Jerusalem is delegated to archaeologists, who have for the most part accepted their task.

Keywords

Ancient Jerusalem, City of David, Silwan, Judeo-Christian values, evangelicals

Zusammenfassung

In Anbetracht der wiederholten Besuche von Vertreter*innen der Trump-Administration in den archäologischen Tunneln am Fuße des Tempelbergs in Jerusalem untersuche ich die außergewöhnliche Verbindung zwischen amerikanischem und israelischem Nationalismus, „jüdisch-christlichen Werten“ und der Archäologie des Heiligen Landes. Ich nenne dies die „Pompeo-Prämisse“, die jüdische Altertümer und Siedlungen mit den Grundwerten der „westlichen Zivilisation“ gleichsetzt, ein politisches Narrativ der Erlösung fördert (auch wenn es von massiver Gewalt begleitet wird) und palästinensische Muslime in eine ephemere Existenz versetzt. Die „Wiederherstellung“ eines „wahren“, von jeglichem islamischem Inhalt gereinigten Jerusalems unter der umstrittenen, chaotischen Oberfläche des palästinensischen und israelischen Jerusalem wird an Archäolog*innen delegiert, die diese Aufgabe größtenteils akzeptieren.

Schlagwörter

Alt-Jerusalem, Davidsstadt, jüdisch-christliche Werte, Evangelikale

Introduction

One of American Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's last acts under the Trump administration, and perhaps one of his first as an aspiring presidential candidate for the American evangelical right, was a whirlwind visit to the high-profile, settler-run antiquities site of "the City of David" in Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem, in and beneath the Palestinian neighborhood of Wadi Hilweh (Silwan), less than two hundred yards away from the Temple Mount and the Al-Aqsa mosque. This dramatic act of political symbolism, which, as stated to the press, "highlighted the more than 3,000 years of Jerusalem's heritage upon which the foundations of both the US and Israel rest" (Kempinski 2020), offers a clear demonstration of a religious-political ideology that continues to reverberate in Israel and Palestine, even after the end of the Trump years. A plaque installed in the excavation tunnels by the embassy and the Commission for the Preservation of American Heritage Abroad, mere days before the end of the Trump administration, doubled down on the sentiment (fig. 1): "The spiritual bedrock of our values as a nation comes from Jerusalem. It is upon these ideals that the American Republic was founded, and the unbreakable bond between the United States and Israel was formed."

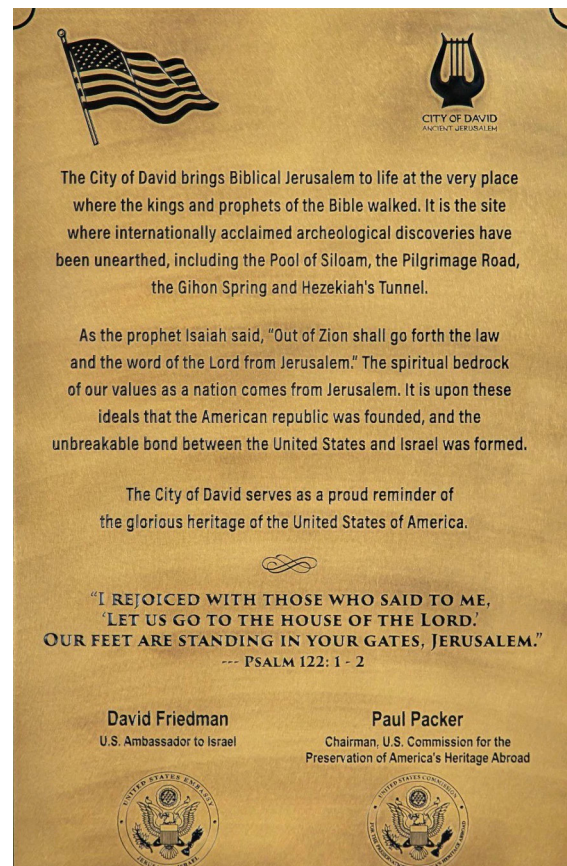


Figure 1. The plaque presented to the City of David Foundation in a tunnel beneath modern Silwan (Matty Stern, U.S. Embassy in Israel).

In dedicating the plaque, Ambassador David Friedman said: "In modern America, we are inspired by many monuments that remind us of the history of our Republic. I've often wondered, what monuments inspired our Founding Fathers. ... I suggest that those monuments are located right here, in the ancient City of Jerusalem. We have given this plaque to the City of David Foundation with the hope that it will prompt all who read it to think of the Judeo-Christian values upon which our country was founded and how those values were inspired by ancient Jerusalem and its inhabitants" (U.S. Embassy in Israel 2021).

In the following pages I would like to explore the source of the sentiments that underlie the extraordinary connection, demonstrated in these last symbolic acts of the Trump administration, between Christian nationalism, Israeli national-religious ideology, and Holy Land archaeology. I will suggest that the repeated demonstration in the “City of David” of allegiance to biblically-inspired American and Israeli exceptionalism promotes a bedrock premise of the American Christian right, a “Pompeo Premise,” that implies, (a) western (white) supremacy and the invisibility (or spectrality) of indigenous people; (b) a blanket justification of settler-colonialism; and (c) the adoption of Holy Land archaeology as an institutional feature of the civilizing project and scaffold for apocalyptic world views.

By showcasing these ideals among the antiquities of ancient Jerusalem, under the auspices of the Israeli settler right, in the heart of Palestinian Silwan, Pompeo and his envoys appropriate Jewish history as their own and assert the centrality of the biblical-apocalyptic world view to their political identity. True to their self-perception as a persecuted community, they join forces with their counterparts in the Jewish Zionist right to identify common enemies, promote a “clash of civilizations” rhetoric, and defy the dominant reality of 1400 years of Islamic presence in Jerusalem. They are aided in their quest by archaeologists, who play the role of active accomplices (albeit in a state of denial).

The “City of David” as a Locus of Colonial Appropriation and “Judeo-Christian” Rhetoric

On June 30th, 2019, the Israeli settler organization El’ad and their archaeological arm, the City of David Foundation, which has been awarded exclusive rights to the management and development of the archaeological remains in the heart of ancient Jerusalem, celebrated what might have been the apex of their success to date – the inauguration of the so-called Pilgrimage Road: a Roman-era stepped street, excavated in a tunnel cut several meters below the modern surface, leading from the Siloam pool to the foot of the Temple Mount (the same tunnel in which the ambassador’s plaque was later dedicated). The event, filmed and displayed on the City of David website, offers considerable insight into the aesthetic, affective, and political setting of the excavations in the heart of the nationalist politics of Netanyahu’s Israel and Trump’s America (City of David 2019).

In equal proportions a theatrical, political, and quasi-religious performance, the inauguration ceremony began with a plenary in which speeches were made and credit assigned, continued with a symbolic wall-breaking (explained below), and concluded with a tour for the most distinguished guests. In each of these three acts, the organizers successfully merged and blurred the lines between the ideological, political, and scientific actors in the pageant.

As painstakingly enumerated by the hosts of the event, the select audience included the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Friedman, the Trump-appointed ambassadors to Portugal and Denmark, GOP Senator Lindsey Graham, long-time Netanyahu and Trump billionaire donors Sheldon and Miriam Adelson, Israeli government ministers, the Director of the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Jerusalem District Archaeologist, officials of the Israel Nature and National Parks Authority, a former mayor of Jerusalem, and many other officials and local settler-friendly dignitaries. In the introductory session, conducted on the steps of an ancient pool decorated with theatrical backdrops of “ancient” masonry and “biblical” scenery, brief speeches were interspersed with video clips of archaeologists describing their work and with sentimental musical interludes based on biblical verses glorifying Jerusalem.

The speeches focused entirely on the political and affective aspects of the archaeological site, described by the host of the event – spokesman and vice-president of the City of David Foundation Doron Spielman – as “the 600 most important meters for the spirit of Israel.” In a revealing “tell” that exposes the circularity of settler logic, the *archaeological* video was edited to highlight the emotional and ideological commitment of the excavators and the sentiments evoked in them by walking in the footsteps of Temple pilgrims, whereas the political speeches insisted on the “powerful, irrefutable, undeniable evidence” imparted by “secular scientists”: a “truth” establishing both the priority of Jewish presence at the site, the direct continuity between the past and the present, and the shared biblical ethos of western democracies. Several speakers made the connection between the antiquities and the relocation of the American embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. (Friedman: “Were there any doubt... about the accuracy, the wisdom, the propriety of President Trump recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, I certainly think this [i.e., the archaeological evidence] lays all doubts to rest”). Most telling were the statements made by the head of El’ad, David Be’eri. In addition to appropriating the entire work of excavation (“we discovered”, “we dug”), he strikingly

framed the act of excavation and reclamation as one of historic payback for centuries of Jewish persecution in the diaspora, beginning with the Roman conquest of 70 CE, the horrors of which were said to have been witnessed by the excavated street and its drains, and ending with the Holocaust. His speech concluded with the appearance of his son, in Israel Defense Forces uniform, on stage, as the second generation of the Be’eri family to serve in one of its touted anti-terror undercover units.

The speeches were followed by a choreographed performance in an installation built by the settler group inside the subterranean excavations, beneath the houses of the Palestinian village. Here, Friedman, Sarah Netanyahu, the Adelsons, Graham, and others took turns demolishing a faux-brick wall (apparently made of sheetrock) erected across one of the excavated tunnels. This incongruous construction – red bricks have never been a feature of Jerusalem’s architecture – seemed to reference Hollywood portrayals of prison or ghetto break-outs; the sledge-hammer evoked, perhaps, the picks wielded by generations of archaeologists and treasure hunters in tunnels adjacent to these, or even those of the teams of laborers who carved the rock-cut Siloam tunnels 2700 years earlier. As crude as it might appear, this set of actions is of a piece with the ceremony that preceded it, referencing the same amalgam of sentiments related to Jewish suffering and redemption and similarly striving for emotional effect.



Figure 2. June 30th 2019 tour in the El’ad tunnels beneath Silwan: Sara Netanyahu at center, flanked by Senator Lindsey Graham, Jason Greenblatt, Ambassador Friedman and his spouse, David Be’eri and IAA District Archaeologist Yuval Baruch (Haim Zach, Government Press Office).

The third act in the inaugural ceremony was an archaeological tour, recorded in a remarkable photographed tableau: staged in a large, reinforced concrete tunnel, the tableau is centered on the prime-minister’s wife, in bright red, receiving instruction from IAA archaeologists and the El’ad team (fig. 2). With its interplay of light and dark, its foregrounding of engineering technology, and its focus on elite patronage, it cannot but call to mind a more modest, yet perhaps no less momentous, tableau recorded 150 years earlier, marking the inauguration of popular, crowd-funded colonialist archaeology in Palestine: In a tunnel excavated but a short distance from this one, we see the billowing white dress of a European woman touring the “galleries” excavated in 1867 by Capt. Charles Warren

along the base of the Temple Mount, illuminated by the lamp held by the gesturing archaeologist (another woman is being lowered into the shaft, at left; fig. 3–4).¹ “During the three years our works were open,” Warren wrote in 1871, “about four to five hundred visitors went over them.... [M]any people who went down the shafts perfectly innocent on the subject appeared to be suddenly inoculated with unlimited enthusiasm.” Unlimited enthusiasm seemed to be the order of the day for the 21st century visitors as well. “Honored to make history today with Mrs. Sara Netanyahu, [U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Senator Lindsey Graham] and other dignitaries as we opened the ancient pilgrimage road ... Bedrock (solid) proof of the Judeo-Christian heritage and values that our two countries share” tweeted Trump envoy Jason Greenblatt (@jdgreenblatt45 June 30, 2019).

There are several outstanding themes that emerge from the three-act performance of June 2019: the pathos and kitsch that anchors both the settler strategy and the Trump-Netanyahu political axis; the peculiar and repetitive use of the concept of Judeo-Christianity; and the evidence for the endurance of western imperial interests in the antiquities of Jerusalem.

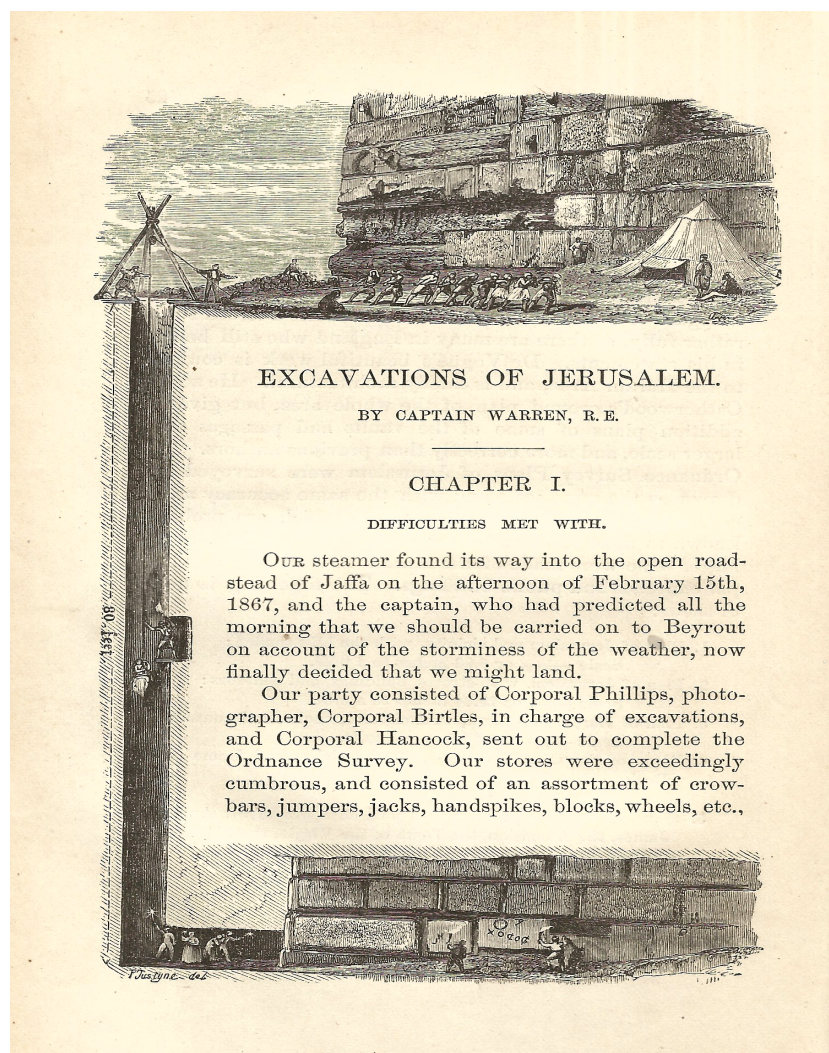


Figure 3. Charles Warren’s excavation team hosting visiting tourists in a shaft and tunnel adjacent to the Temple Mount/Haram ash-Sharif (after Wilson and Warren 1871).

¹ The centrality of the female figure in the tunnel group in the older tableau, I suggest, serves a twofold purpose: the first is to signal the domestication of the conquered space, after its subjugation by the pioneer excavators; the second is to highlight the superiority of Western civilization, where women are “honored as equals”. Both these motivations may well be at work in the present-day case, even if they are subordinate to the political program of the settlers and their supporters.

The deployment of national-religious pathos accompanied by kitsch – the triggering of popular sentiment through readily familiar objects, images, and sensory stimuli (“simulacra of genuine culture”, in Clement Greenberg’s [1939] formulation) – is relentless in Israeli national culture. In the ceremonies I have just described, kitsch takes various forms: the “biblical” décor serving as backdrop to the speeches, the allusions to both Jewish victimhood and to IDF military might, the sentimental musical interludes, and the demolition of the false brick wall. American kitsch, exemplified by the bombastic bronze plaque and the ambassador’s invocation of the “monuments [that] inspired our founding fathers” (resonating with the Trumpian fixation on statues and dramatic tableaux of power; Hock 2020) is also on display. Reflecting on the relations between kitsch, the political, and the past, Eli Friedlander (1997) suggests that the most troubling forms of political kitsch can be understood in terms of their presumption to the transcendent, which he terms false sublimity, or “sentimentality that does not renounce the pathos of redemption and the sense of power associated with it” (Friedlander 1997: 383). This results in political action that acquires authenticity by relating to a lost, glorious, and traumatic past. “Resolving to act in accordance with such a mythical self-consciousness thus entails the belief that a lost past can be recovered through action. This movement of recovery takes the form of repetition” (Friedlander 1997: 389); it is a repetition enacted as if in cyclical, ritual, or messianic time, but with real-world, predictably violent, results. In the “City of David,” archaeological remains and artifacts are immediately absorbed into already extant narratives and images that are easily packaged as both familiar and sublime; once the stepped street uncovered by archaeologists is seemingly identified in the writings of Flavius Josephus, once it has been populated with “prophets and kings”, Roman legionaries and Jewish victims, the task of the archaeologists, the “secular scientists” is done. They have borne witness to the presence of the transcendent that now exists not in the linear time of archaeology, but in a collapsed, cyclical time of ritual repetition and redemption.

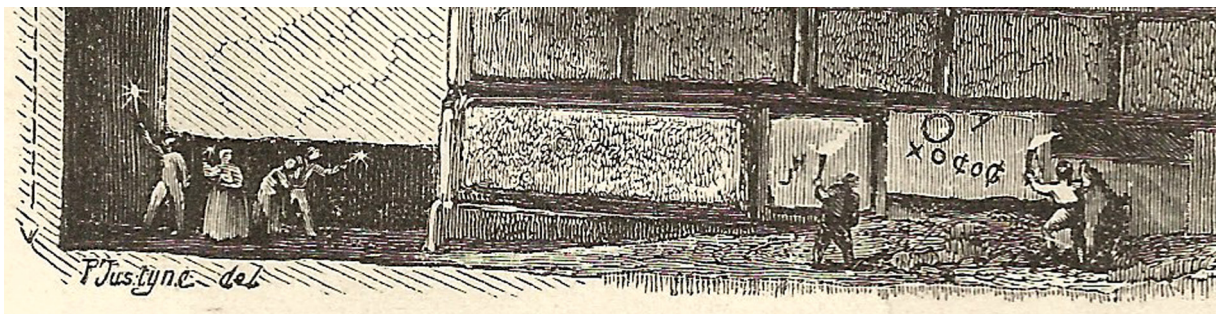


Figure 4. Detail of the tunnel in Figure 3.

As for the Judeo-Christian terminology, which crops up so frequently in the rhetoric of the American sponsors of the event: while there are grounds to ascribe the original formulation of a Judeo-Christian ethic to Protestant interest in the Hebrew Bible and the adoption of a scriptural basis for enlightenment by 17th-18th century political philosophers (Lambropoulos 1993; Nathan and Topolski 2016), the current widespread use of the term “Judeo-Christian,” particularly in American political speech, is closely aligned with post-WW II geopolitics, where it is used in an Orwellian way to define ideological allies and rivals of the moment. Mark Silk (1984) and Warren Zev Harvey (2016) show how, at first, in the 1940s and early 50s, the term was used to promote interfaith tolerance in the face of overt or covert Christian antisemitism; at the height of the Cold War and into the 1970s, it was used primarily as a counter to the atheism of the Communist bloc (this was also the context of the establishment, under the Reagan administration, of the Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad – co-sponsors of Friedman’s plaque – which was devoted to preserving Jewish heritage in Eastern Bloc countries). Notably, one of the key figures promoting the concept of Judeo-Christian heritage in Protestant circles was the famed archaeologist William F. Albright. Defending the veracity of biblical history through his scholarship, Albright found ready allies in the Israeli political and archaeological establishment of the 1950s and 60s, for whom a literal, lay (non-rabbinic) reading of the Bible was an important tool of modern nation-building (Hummel 2019). This was a marriage of interests based on widely divergent ideologies that became a model for later, less scholarly and more overtly political collaborations. Since the 1980s, and especially in recent decades, “Judeo-Christian” has been used by the American right to highlight its support of right-wing activism in Israel and its opposition to “secular liberals” and the Islamic Other. In the context of the Jerusalem tunnels, it is a most convenient euphemism, allowing Christian

nationalists to express solidarity with Jewish nationalists – and vice-versa – in their antagonism to Islam, without having to detail their widely divergent understandings of the nature of the Israel’s covenant with God and of the messianic future itself (the Rapture of evangelical Christians vs. the Third Temple of the Jewish national-religious right). And while Israeli government spokespersons and Ambassador Friedman have no trouble with the term, it does seem significant that it does not appear in any El’ad texts, nor does it have an idiomatic Hebrew equivalent (Ambassador Friedman’s “Judeo-Christian values” are translated in the local press as “values related to Jews and to Christians”).

The political expediency of the term is underscored by its ham-fisted coupling to the archaeological setting, to the dedication of the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem, and to the naturalization of American intervention across the globe. For El’ad spokesman Spielman, the branding of archaeological remains in Jerusalem as American and western heritage requires no justification or explanation: “The people of Israel have returned to Jerusalem, and the City of David has also returned as an anchor of Western civilization” (Spielman 2019). This statement resonates both with Ambassador Friedman’s odd reference, cited above, to ancient Jerusalem “monuments” that “inspired” the founders of the American polity and with unapologetic 19th and 20th century imperial claims by Western nations of the antiquities of the Orient as their “birthright and sacred inheritance” (James Henry Breasted, cited in Emberling 2010: 11). It also expresses a strong desire by the settler leadership to foster the perception that they are associated with “the West.” In many senses, the Pompeo-El’ad paradigm can be characterized as a prime instance of “imperial durability” (Stoler 2016), where 21st century local nation-state actors cling to the legacy of 19th-century colonialism: the inevitable, scripturally and scientifically sanctioned exercise of western (white) supremacy by means of colonizing settlement. Archaeology, then, reprises its role as a prop to western historical teleology and justification for its civilizing project (Silberman 1982; Díaz-Andreu 2007).

Underpinning the settler-colonial and imperial project in Jerusalem and serving as a core precept of the Trump-Pompeo doctrine, is the persistent exclusion of the Palestinian community of Silwan, whose homes and subsurface are the backdrop to the archaeological-political performances just described. It is not merely that Palestinians were not invited to the festivities, nor even mentioned in them (except obliquely, as those who would deny Jewish continuity); they are expressly called out as the Islamic Other that is to be confronted by “the Judeo-Christian tradition.” Despite making up 95% of the inhabitants of Wadi Hilweh and close to 40% of the population of greater Jerusalem, they are virtually invisible to the participants in the American-Israeli ceremonies and, by extension, to the consumers of the multiple media presentations and prospective tourists. The structural harm done to houses along the route of the tunnel excavations, including fissures and partial collapse, is, of course, ignored (Emek Shaveh 2020).

As has been the case since 1867, archaeology remains a physical and cultural threat to Palestinian Arab communities. It is used as a medium of ethnic erasure, prioritizing certain periods of history and dematerializing the rest. In terms of the Israeli project, Palestinians are place-holders (Meister 2011); Arab lives, homes, and places are to be reimagined as ruined or spectral (Leshem 2013; Mbembe 2019); something to be seen through or peeled away. This spectralization is enhanced by its contrast to the archaeological project: houses built upon ancient sites are candidates for demolition; their inhabitants are policed as trespassers; they are citizens of nowhere. They remain outside the pale of the “Judeo-Christian” messianic plan.

The Complicity of Archaeologists

The progression from “archaeological” to “political” excavation in Bronze and Iron Age Jerusalem (widely known as the City of David since it was first excavated in the early 20th century), has been chronicled and critiqued by numerous authors. The frequent “value-neutral” characterization of the first decades of excavations in Jerusalem has been exposed as disingenuous and steeped in assumptions of western supremacy (Greenberg 2018; Melman 2020); archaeology’s more recent undisguised recruitment for the Israeli nationalist cause has been deconstructed and pilloried in academic and popular publications (e.g., Abu el-Haj 2001; Ricca 2007; Starzmann 2013; Greenberg 2014; Paz 2014; Kletter 2020). But neither this exposure nor the more direct resistance practiced by Palestinian residents and activist allies has had much of an effect on the ground or beneath it: The Israeli archaeology and heritage establishment – the Nature and National Parks Authority, the Antiquities Authority, the Heritage program in the Prime Minister’s Office, the Jerusalem Municipality, and even the Tel Aviv University Institute of Archaeology – remains committed to the archaeological component of the Israeli settler agenda. I suspect that many of my

peers, here or abroad, are inclined to brush off any attribution of archaeologists' complicity as misguided or politically motivated; archaeologists, they might say, should be judged solely on the scientific merits of their work, not on the deplorable, but unavoidable, cherry-picking of finds by politicians or tourist organizations. Nonetheless, I suggest that in a context of structural inequality, settler violence, and enduring western "Judeo-Christian" claims to historic priority, where archaeology can either be practiced in support of the forces of oppression and destruction and under their constraints, or refused as a form of resistance to them, my colleagues in the "City of David" have chosen their side.

In fact, while politicians and settlers were most visibly cashing in on the heritage bonanza, it may reasonably be claimed that the enablers and chief architects of the scenes enacted in 2019 and 2021 were archaeologists. It was they who agreed to return to 19th century standards of tunnel-excavation in Jerusalem. It is they who, in the promotional film that preceded the tunnel ceremony, proclaimed their excitement on being awarded the opportunity to retrace the path of the ancient Jewish pilgrims. Above all, it is they who abdicated their archaeological integrity by flattening time and space to the two dimensions of the stepped stone street surface: Soil sediments above and beneath the street, the very matrix of archaeological interpretive work, barely merited attention, and by conducting their excavation in a steel and concrete tunnel sheathe, they forsook its spatial context – what exists to its right or left – as well.

To illustrate the extent of this abdication, let's take a closer look at one of the central elements of the tale told by both settlers and politicians, and note how it was enabled by archaeologists' reductive, self-effacing presentation of their own evidence. In the mid-aughts, excavations were conducted at different points along the route of the stepped street, now marketed as the Pilgrims' road. The excavations were awarded brief mention in a single peer-reviewed publication (Reich et al. 2007). In that report, the excavation of a drain, climbing up the slope from a point somewhat north of the Siloam pool, is described. Said to be of "varied" dimensions, the drain is reported to have contained (at an undisclosed location) the remains of complete Roman-period cooking pots. Later excavations, which tunneled through the debris above the stepped street, uncovered several points where the paving slabs had been broken and removed, allowing access to the drain, which is, judging by a single published photograph, about 40 cm wide and perhaps as deep. Seeking a literary reference to the drains in Josephus' description of the final battle for Jerusalem, the excavators found several mentions of "caverns" or "mines", beneath and adjacent to the city, into which hundreds of rebel fighters escaped in a bid to outwait the Roman assault and re-emerge when it was completed. Josephus describes the Roman discovery of the treasure-filled caverns, "tearing up the ground" above them and discovering "upwards of two thousand dead". Setting aside the particulars of their specific excavation contexts and conflating the narrow, excavated drain with a separate system of large sewers discovered nearby, Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron established a connection between their discoveries and Josephus' "caverns," intimating – without evidence – that the slabs in their excavation are the very same as those "torn up" by the Roman soldiers. By eliminating doubt and avoiding cardinal archaeological issues such as precise measurement, sedimentation or stratification, they enabled all future narrators of the "Pilgrimage road" excavations to do the same, thus laying the groundwork for the settler tale of tragedy and redemption, "proven by archaeologists." The restored cooking pots, glibly attributed to refugees hiding out in the drains, have been placed beneath the broken slabs, and are now one of the highlights of the "Pilgrimage Road" tours, whether attended in person or online (Anonymous 2020).

Archaeology and the Apocalypse

There is ample evidence that Pompeo and the Christian right viewed their political work in general, and the elevation of Donald Trump to the presidency in particular, as part of God's plan. In the words of Mike Evans, a prolific author and evangelical advisor to President Trump, "Israel has received a gift from God in an evangelical Secretary of State, an evangelical Vice President and a President who is the most pro-Israel, pro-evangelical President in American history" (RNS 2020). Pompeo himself was part of a White House bible study group that approached international affairs in the spirit of "historical evangelism" and in the belief in everyday manifestations of divine intervention (Timmons 2018; Wong 2019).

Several scholars and commentators have noted a deep connection between many of those who tried to overthrow American democracy on January 6th, 2021 and this brand of evangelical Christianity, espoused by the Trump-Pompeo administration and promoted in the tunnels of ancient Jerusalem. Thomas Edsall of the *New York Times* cites Yale sociologist Philip Gorski, who attributes to Christian nationalists a narrative about American history that postulates that “America was founded as a Christian nation; the Founding Fathers were evangelical Christians; the Nation’s laws and founding documents were indirectly based on “biblical” principles, or even directly inspired by God, Himself.” “Christian nationalists,” he continues, “use a language of blood and apocalypse. They talk about blood conquest, blood sacrifice, and blood belonging, and also about cosmic battles between good and evil. The blood talk comes from the Old Testament; the apocalyptic talk from the Book of Revelation” (Edsall 2021). These concepts apply to nationalist visions of Jerusalem as well.

Observers of evangelical involvement in the Israel conflict have pointed to the Temple Mount as the primary focus and meeting point for the Christian and Jewish-Israeli radical religious right (Gorenberg 2002; Inbari 2009). Given the violent history of the conflict around the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and al-Aqsa Mosque in the last two decades alone, it is not too much of a stretch to assume that the application of continuous pressure on the Haram by means of an ever-expanding network of “archaeological” tunnels is predicated on the belief that violence is inevitable and that a serious outbreak could be an opportunity for drastic change in the religious status quo. Violence is thus not a bug, but a feature of both the Christian right and settler movements.

The repeated visits of members of the Trump administration to the heart of ancient Jerusalem show how central the antiquities themselves are to the Christian nationalist playbook, no less than they were to the British Empire in Victorian times. But where the Victorian-era empire envisioned Jerusalem as the crucible of a proselytizing Christian civilization (Bar-Yosef 2003, 2005), contemporary Christian (and Jewish) nationalism seems to be motivated by desperation and offers (in its own terms) little beyond the prospect of conflict and apocalyptic doom.

Conclusion: Where Do We Go from Here?

On his way out the State Department door, Secretary Pompeo reaffirmed that Christian Zionism and Israeli nationalism are joined at the hip, and that both are anchored in the same fundamental premise: that colonizing Jerusalem with Jewish settlers brings us closer to redemption (even if accompanied by massive violence) and that the presence of Palestinian Arabs in Palestine is ephemeral – particularly if they are Muslim. Remarkably, the repeated locus of this affirmation has been archaeological tunnels excavated in Jerusalem. The “recovery” of a “true” Jerusalem, purified of any Islamic content, beneath the contested, chaotic surface of Palestinian and Israeli Jerusalem has been delegated to archaeologists, who have for the most part accepted their task.

For many years, Christian evangelical interest and zeal in the archaeology of Jerusalem was seemingly uncontroversial, part of a multivocal chorus expressing different ways of imagining the city. Judeo-Christianity could be understood as a relatively benign expression of moral aspirations shared by Christian and Jewish Americans (and, by extension, Israelis). This fiction can now be dispelled: the evangelical program espoused by the Trump administration in Jerusalem is directly linked to a politics of moral superiority coupled with white Christian supremacy, leading to an inevitable clash of cultures. We might thank Pompeo and his envoys for making that, and the stark choices facing Jerusalem’s archaeologists, clear.

With Trump and Pompeo out of power (perhaps only temporarily), it might be tempting to think that some of the urgency has been relieved and that archaeologists might resume their scientific work under less partisan conditions. That would be dangerously naïve: the El’ad settlers have never put all their eggs in a single basket. They continue to enjoy the sponsorship of the Israeli mainstream political parties and monetary support from American Jewish and Christian conservative circles, while archaeologists build up the academic bona fides of their brand. Even as I was writing this note, an email announcing fellowships awarded by a new center for biblical archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, funded by a staunch ally of Israeli settlements and the American Trump conservatives, landed in my inbox; and as I revised it, settler and police activities instigated a new round of violence in East Jerusalem and across Israel and Palestine. These academic programs, among many others that dot the archaeological landscape, are poisoned gifts that ensure that the miseducation of young Israeli archaeologists

is not about to end and that their labor and reputation will be used to promote American and Israeli nationalist, imperial, and apocalyptic agendas. The violence that engulfs us is a tragic reminder of the real-world consequences of symbolic actions.

References

- Abu El-Haj, Nadia. 2001. *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Anonymous. 2020. The Journey along the Pilgrimage Road in the City of David, the Heart of Ancient Jerusalem. https://consent.youtube.com/m?continue=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DA1XPG2856fI%26ab_channel%3DCityofDavid&gl=DE&m=0&pc=yt&uxe=23983172&hl=de&src=1, viewed 13.5.2021.
- Bar-Yosef, Eitan. 2003. Christian Zionism and Victorian Culture. *Israel Studies* 8(2): 18–44.
- Bar-Yosef, Eitan. 2005. *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799–1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- BBC 2020. Donald Trump Orders Creation of ‘National Heroes’ Garden. 5 July 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53292585>; viewed 13.05.2021.
- City of David. 2019. Senior American and Israeli Officials Attend Inauguration of Second Temple Period Pilgrimage Road in the City of David. <https://www.cityofdavid.org.il/en/news/senior-american-and-israeli-officials-attend-inauguration-second-temple-period-pilgrimage-road->; viewed 13.05.2021.
- Díaz-Andreu, Margarita. 2007. *A World History of Nineteenth-Century Archaeology: Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Edsall, Thomas. 2021. “The Capitol Insurrection Was as Christian Nationalist as It Gets.” *New York Times*, January 28, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/28/opinion/christian-nationalists-capitol-attack.html>; viewed 13.05.2021.
- Emberling, Geoff. 2010. *Pioneers to the Past: American Archaeologists in the Middle East, 1919–1920*. Chicago: Oriental Institute Museum.
- Emek Shaveh. 2020. “Fissures and Cracks – Damage to Homes in the Wadi Hilweh Neighborhood of Silwan.” <https://emekshaveh.org/en/fissures-and-cracks/>; viewed 13.05.2021.
- Friedlander, Eli. 1997. Some Thoughts on Kitsch. *History and Memory* 9(1/2): 376–392.
- Gorenberg, Gershom. 2002. *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Greenberg, Clement. 1939. Avant-Garde and Kitsch. *Partisan Review* 6(Fall 1939): 34–49.
- Greenberg, Raphael. 2014. *A Privatized Heritage: How the Israel Antiquities Authority Relinquished Jerusalem’s Past*. Jerusalem: Emek Shaveh.
- Greenberg, Raphael. 2018. One Hundred and Fifty Years of Archaeology and Controversy in Jerusalem. In Suleiman A. Mourad, Naomi Koltun-Fromm and Bedross Der Matossian, eds.: *Routledge Handbook on Jerusalem*, pp. 363–376. London and New York: Routledge.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. 2016. The Judeo-Christian Tradition’s Five Others. In Emmanuel Nathan and Anya Topolski, eds.: *Is There a Judeo-Christian Tradition? A European Perspective*, pp. 211–224. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter.

- Hock, Stephen. 2020. Memorializing the Future of Donald Trump in Amy Waldman's *The Submission*. In Stephen Hock, ed.: *Trump Fiction: Essays on Donald Trump in Literature, Film and Television*, pp. 79–96. London: Rowan and Littlefield.
- Hummel, Daniel G. 2019. *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S.-Israeli Relations*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Inbari, Motti. 2009. *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Kempinski, Yoni. 2020. "Pompeo Walked through the Ancient City of David", November 19, 2020. <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/291581>; viewed 13.05.2021.
- Kletter, Raz. 2020. *Archaeology, Heritage and Ethics in the Western Wall Plaza, Jerusalem: Darkness at the End of the Tunnel*. London and New York: Routledge
- Lambropoulos, Vassilis. 1993. *The Rise of Eurocentrism: Anatomy of Interpretation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Leshem, Noam. 2013. Repopulating the Emptiness: A Spatial Critique of Ruination in Israel/Palestine. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31: 522–537.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2019. *Necropolitics*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Meister, Robert. 2011. *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Melman, Billie. 2020. *Empires of Antiquities: Modernity and the Rediscovery of the Ancient Near East, 1914–1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nathan, Emmanuel and Anya Topolski. 2016. The Myth of a Judeo-Christian Tradition: Introducing a European Perspective. In Emmanuel Nathan and Anya Topolski, eds.: *Is There a "Judeo-Christian Tradition? A European Perspective*, pp. 1–16. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter.
- Paz, Alejandro I. 2014. Guiding Settler Jerusalem: Voice and the Transpositions of History in Religious Zionist Pilgrimage. *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 5: 128–142.
- Reich, Ronny., Shukron, Eli. and Lernau, Omri. 2007. Recent Discoveries in the City of David. *Israel Exploration Journal* 57(2): 153–169.
- Ricca, Simone. 2007. *Reinventing Jerusalem: Israel's Reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter after 1967*. London: J.B. Tauris.
- RNS. 2020. "Secretary of State Mike Pompeo Receives Friends of Zion Award." Religion News Service, June 30, 2020. <https://religionnews.com/2020/06/30/secretary-of-state-mike-pompeo-receives-friends-of-zion-award/>; viewed 13.05.2021.
- Silberman, Neil Asher. 1982. *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archaeology and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1700-1917*. New York: Random House.
- Silk, Mark. 1984. Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America. *American Quarterly* 36(1): 65–85.
- Spielman, Doron. 2019. "Israeli and American Dignitaries Unveil the Pilgrimage Road." The Times of Israel, June 30, 2019. <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/israeli-and-american-dignitaries-unveil-pilgrimage-road/>; viewed 13.05.2021.
- Starzmann, Maria Theresia. 2013. Occupying the Past: Colonial Rule and Archaeological Practice in Israel/Palestine. *Archaeologies* 9: 546–570.
- Stoler, Ann L. 2016. *Duress. Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Timmons, Heather. 2018. "Trump's Foreign Policy Looks A Lot Like Rapture Christians' Plan to Trigger Apocalypse". *Quartz*, May 15, 2018. <https://qz.com/1270516/jerusalem-embassy-trumps-foreign-policy-looks-like-rapture-christians-plan-to-trigger-apocalypse/>; viewed 13.05.2021.
- US Embassy in Israel. 2021. Recognizing the City of David as a Testament to America's Judeo-Christian Heritage and Founding Principles. Press release, January 18, 2021. <https://il.usembassy.gov/recognizing-the-city-of-david-as-a-testament-to-americas-judeo-christian-heritage-and-founding-principles/>; viewed 13.05.2021.
- Wilson, Charles. Wilson and Charles Warren. 1871. *The Recovery of Jerusalem: A Narrative of Exploration and Discovery in the City and the Holy Land*. New York: D. Appleton & Co.
- Wong, Edward. 2019. "The Rapture and the Real World: Mike Pompeo Blends Belief and Policy." *New York Times* March 30, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/politics/pompeo-christian-policy.html>; viewed 13.05.2021.