

Introduction

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Introduction

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Archaeology, Nation, and Race: Confronting the Past, Decolonizing the Future in Greece and Israel (Cambridge University Press, 2022; henceforth *ANR*) was conceived in the wake of an undergraduate seminar conducted jointly by the authors at Brown University in 2020. Our initial, recorded conversations at the end of the course were transcribed and formed the basis of a manuscript which was expanded, incorporating new research and ideas. Emerging from the dialogue between ourselves and with our students, the published work, also in dialogic form, is intended primarily as a stimulus to further discussion among archaeologists, anthropologists, classicists and anyone concerned with the way archaeology impacts the public imagination.

From the outset, we sought to go beyond what each of us had done individually in our critique of the two national imaginaries of Greece and Israel (e.g. Brown and Hamilakis 2003; Greenberg and Keinan 2007; Hamilakis 2007, 2008; Greenberg 2009, 2015; Hamilakis and Ifantidis 2016), and take the discussion to areas neither covered by previous writing on the social and political contexts of archaeology in Greece and in Palestine/Israel nor included in the burgeoning literature on decolonial archaeology in the region and across the globe. We therefore pursued a comparative approach that would highlight commonalities and differences between two “Holy Lands” which, we argue, should be recognized both as “ground zero” for imperial and colonial archaeologies and as fundamental building blocks of Western moral, cultural and political entitlement (i.e., “birthplaces” of democracy and the Judeo-Christian ethos). Alongside conceptions of nationhood, the two other crucial threads were coloniality (viewed both as an epistemic and as a political project) and race, both instrumental in bringing about and shaping racialized, capitalist modernity.

Viewing both cases from within, as engaged members of Greek and Israeli collectives, but also as partial “outsiders” based in universities abroad and/or actively participating in the international discussion, our first dialogue focuses on the forging of the two modern national projects and their ancient imaginaries within the 19th and 20th century colonial matrix. The second dialogue treats the extent to which the two nations and their archaeologies remain in the thrall of a crypto-colonial narrative, which establishes each country as a western outpost and as a buffer between Judeo-Christian Europe and an Islamic East. Our third dialogue dwells on modernist archaeology as a logic of purification and on the practical archaeological measures taken to ensure the delivery of purified pasts for the modern nation-state and our fourth on the racial implications of the cooptation of Greece and Israel by narratives of whiteness and indigenous exceptionalism. These narratives are often supported by the terms in which ancient DNA research is conducted and presented to the public. Our concluding dialogue dwells on the possibility and potential for pursuing decolonial archaeologies in each setting, drawing on our current and on-going projects of the contemporary archaeology of border-crossing and refugee camps (e.g. Hamilakis 2022) and of destroyed Palestinian villages (Greenberg 2022; Greenberg and Sulimani 2023).

The timing of this discussion is, of course, not accidental: we have both been engaged in the discipline-wide discussion and critique of archaeological complicity in national and trans-national instances of oppression and injustice and in field-projects that question the core values of archaeological practice in the contemporary world (e.g. Hamilakis 1999, 2009; Hamilakis and Duke 2007; Greenberg 2021a, 2021b). Moreover, in the year of massive Black Lives Matter protests and the coronavirus pandemic, we were both deeply affected by the vigorous, profound discussion and exposure of the reach and impact of racism and of white supremacy within our discipline (Blakey 2020; Carruthers et al. 2021; Flewellen et al. 2021; Jurman 2022; Reilly 2022). *ANR* is thus a response to the call of many colleagues for self-reflection, for epistemic reorientation, and for archaeological un-disciplining (sensu Haber 2012). It is also call to archaeologists who have been constructed as white to problematize the processes of racialization that constituted their scholarly apparatus and their disciplinary identities and to confront the privileges that such an acquired status has conferred on them. It is even, we would like to hope, a tentative step toward reparation and epistemic, if not social, justice.

As our dialogue covers a broad field of archaeological entanglements in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, and with each of us drawing on their own set of historical, aesthetic, and political-philosophical sources, it was clear to us from the get-go that *ANR* would be an open-ended product, with many strands that could be taken up with a wide range of interlocutors. Our engagement with colleagues thus began, even as we wrote, in conferences, round tables, and virtual meetings conducted with colleagues from Europe and North America, as well as Greece and Israel; and it has continued after the book's publication, first in English and then in Greek (Hamilakis and Greenberg 2022; a Hebrew version is contracted for publication as well). These engagements revealed to us the extent of the need for a reckoning felt by archaeologists across the Global North, as well as the anxieties induced by a questioning of bedrock assumptions in the discipline.

In the Fall of 2022, two incisive discussions of *ANR* and the issues that it foregrounds took place, the first in the Graduate Center at City University of New York (CUNY), and the second at the Annual Meeting of the American Society for Overseas Research (ASOR) in Boston MA. These form the core of this special section. Between the two venues, our conversation with colleagues from the worlds of classics, literary and political theory, anthropological archaeology, art history, and West Asian archaeology ranged across many of the matters covered in our book, while delving deeply into a few and forcing us to confront some of their contradictions. At the same time, it expanded the discussion into new areas that need to be tackled more systematically in the future.¹

In the essays that follow, historical sociologist Despina Lalaki and literary and political theorist Bruce Robbins take contrasting approaches to the values at stake in the discourse on modernity and our critique of archaeology's contribution to it, the former calling for the adoption of a "southern standpoint" characterized by "a critical engagement with the dominant knowledges", and the latter querying whether we are justified in making modernity, and the prestige it confers on the past, "the villain in the piece". Matthew Reilly, an anthropologist and archaeologist of the Atlantic world, questions whether archaeology can or should be completely detached from post-colonial nation-building, where it often serves a purpose that we would otherwise view as laudable. Allison Mickel and Lynn Swartz Dodd, anthropological archaeologists who have worked in West Asia, expand on the de-centering of Western conceptions of purity and anthropocentrism in archaeology, with Mickel exploring the various kinds of "messiness" inherent in archaeological work and Dodd reflecting on how an illusion of purity can be used to mask ongoing injustices in ancient Jerusalem/Silwan. Art historian Erhan Tamur underscores the imperial endurances in archaeological scholarship, particularly calling into question the Western notion of "discovery", and lastly, south Levantine archaeologist Ido Koch illustrates possible avenues of decolonial archaeological practice in Iron Age Israel and a 20th century Palestinian village. Following up on these matters and more, we respond with further thoughts and questions of our own.

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1 The essays were submitted in March–April 2023, with final revisions completed in September 2023.

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