

# Archaeology as Antisemitism

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Controversy continues to surround the work of Nadia Abu El-Haj and Nur-eldeen (Nur) Masalha, both of whom argue that Israeli, American, Jewish, and Christian archaeologists continue to manipulate the past to their political advantage. Their case is made all the more complicated by the 1992 unsolved murder of American archaeologist Dr. Albert Glock, director of the Institute of Palestinian Archaeology at Birzeit University. This paper will revisit these issues in all of their contemporary relevance and their decidedly strong correlation within the overall framework of Arab-Muslim antisemitism.

*Key Words: Antisemitism, Archaeology, Israel, Arab*

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*We all create our own ancient and biblical "Israels," to suit the demands of our modern situation. That is because there is no such thing as "objectivity" in archaeological, historical, or biblical studies. History is a "tale told for a specific purpose." Thus we construct the past that we need, partly out of what I have called "a nostalgia for a biblical world that never was."—William G. Dever<sup>1</sup>*

*Any historian knows that the past can be exploited politically in contemporary conflicts, but nowhere is this so obvious as in the Middle East . . . A decade ago an Israeli scholar reminded me of the basic truth that archaeology is politics in that country, and therefore I suppose it is scarcely surprising to find that in all of Israel there is only one archaeol-*

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1. William G. Dever 1998. "Archaeology, Ideology, and the Quest for an 'Ancient' or 'Biblical' Israel," *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 6(1): 40. Dara Horn makes a somewhat similar point:

For thousands of years, Jews outside the Land of Israel have developed strategies for preserving their culture absent collective political autonomy—an absence that, almost invariably, resulted in persecution, assimilation, or both. Some of these strategies, such as the establishment of separate educational systems, are common to all diaspora Jewish communities. The creation of founding legends is another example. These legends attempted to ground each community's legitimacy in Jewish terms, invariably by rooting it firmly in the grand Jewish-historical narrative. At the same time, they offered a tailored response to the specific challenges each Jewish community faced. Dara Horn 2010. "The Myth of Ellis Island and Other Tales of Origin," *Azure* 41 (Summer 5770/2010), <http://azure.org.il> (accessed October 6, 2010).

*ogist who is concerned with pre-Islamic Arab culture, and he is someone who has been made to feel very much alone.—G. W. Bowersock<sup>2</sup>*

Quite by accident and looking for a “beach read,” I stumbled upon a relatively thin little book: *Palestine Twilight: The Murder of Dr. Albert Glock and the Archaeology of the Holy Land* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002) by American-born and British-resident writer Edward Fox (b. 1958). I had already read the well-received murder mysteries by Matt Rees, the former Jerusalem bureau chief for *Time*, about the “adventures” of his Palestinian history teacher turned detective Omar Yussef, and naively assumed this book to be more of the same.<sup>3</sup> (I confess I am somewhat addicted to good murder mysteries regardless of locale!). Nothing could have been further from the truth.

At the same time, as chair of the Tenure and Promotion Committee in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Alabama, I had also been following quite closely the highly contested cases of Nadia Abu El-Haj (b. 1962), Barnard College, Columbia University, New York (awarded tenure); Norman Finkelstein (b. 1953), DePaul University, Chicago (denied tenure); and Ward Churchill (b. 1947), University of Colorado, Boulder (lost tenure). That antisemitism and “anti-antisemitism” may have played a role in all three cases is well worth exploring, but that is a paper for another conference.

To return to the topic at hand, Fox’s book and Glock’s story, as Salim Tamari, professor of sociology at Birzeit University, quite accurately describes it, is “a whodunit—a murder mystery wrapped in a theological debate on biblical textualism wrapped in a treatise on modern Palestinian nationalism.”<sup>4</sup> Glock, an American Midwesterner born in Idaho, ordained

2. G. W. Bowersock, “Palestine: Ancient History and Modern Politics” in Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens, eds., *Blaming the Victim: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (London and New York: Verso, 1986), 182, 184.

3. The titles in the series are *The Collaborator of Bethlehem* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008); *The Samaritan’s Secret* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009); *A Grave in Gaza* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2009); and *The Fourth Assassin* (New York: Soho Press, 2010).

4. Salim Tamari (2002), “Murderous Archaeology,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXXI, no. 3: 99. With relevance, Tamari also notes: “For just as Israeli archaeologists developed an obsession with biblical archaeology as a means of validating a Jewish nationalist discourse, search for a continued presence on the land, Palestinians were also interested in archaeology as a means of countering the Zionist narrative, either by focusing on the Islamic archaeology of Palestine or by uncovering the primordial putative roots of Palestinian heritage” (ibid.). Writing his own review of Fox’s book, Stephen Howe, professor in the History and Cultures of

Lutheran minister but disenchanted biblicist, objective scholar, and pioneering archaeologist of Palestine, especially the Ottoman period, then sixty-seven years old, was shot to death outside Ramallah in 1992, leaving a wife and four children. Reasons for his murder as well as the identification of his killer or killers remain murky.

An interesting observation is that Glock's major article, "Archaeology as Cultural Survival: The Future of the Palestinian Past" (*Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXIII, no. 3 [Spring 1994]: 70-84), was published posthumously—well before the current controversies. In that scholarly contribution, he raises a number of points that are foundational, I believe, to understanding the concerns raised by both Abu El-Haj and Masalha.

Glock begins by noting that "four forces have contributed to the predominant version of the Palestine story today":

First, the biblical tradition, as interpreted by Western Christian nations to educate their youth in the Judeo-Christian heritage, which has shaped the canonical Palestine story for the Anglo-American and European world.

Second, European rivalry for control of the Levant in general and Palestine in particular, which generated a considerable knowledge of the land in order to serve Western military, economic, and cultural needs; the data gathered to this end have been used to amplify the canonical story.

Third, the calculated decimation of the native Palestinian population in order to provide a home for Jewish refugees from European persecution, which has resulted in the forceful rejection by Palestinian intellectuals of the canonical story of Palestine that has served as a calculated justification for their refugee status.

Fourth, the disappearance of the Palestinian patrimony (material evidence) through the deliberate confiscation of Arab cultural resources by Israelis . . . as well as the destruction of cultural property in the form of entire villages in 1948-49.<sup>5</sup>

Two relevant insights are revealed in this passage: Glock's own West-

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Colonialism at the University of Bristol, UK, notes: "In the Middle East, nationalist and religious passions have intertwined to imbue archaeology with particular potency. Israel's very claim to existence is based in large part on ideas about ancient Jewish sovereignty. Archaeology became both a national passion, and a political tool. But for Christians as well as Jews, the search for relics of ancient Israel has a special allure . . . The archaeology that Glock sponsored at Birzeit could be seen as an indirect but powerful attack on Israel's dominant ideology, and a weapon in the hands of the Palestinians." *The Independent*, July 21, 2001, <http://license.icopyright.net> (accessed September 27, 2010).

5. Albert Glock 1994. "Archaeology as Cultural Survival: The Future of the Palestinian Past," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXIII (no. 3): 71.

ern allegiance to the place of the Bible in archaeological investigation is now suspect, and second, his allegiances lay with the Palestinians, who have been prevented from understanding their own past because of Israeli (and Western, especially British) political realities and the emergence of the Israeli state.

According to Glock, the consequences of these decisions post 1946 have been three-fold:

First, Palestinians educated in the West have adopted the Western agenda for archaeological research, where the emphasis (when not on biblical archaeology) has been on proto- and prehistory, the Bronze and Iron Ages, and sometimes on the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

A second consequence is that, in the field of Islamic archaeology, Arab scholars, following their Western instructors, have focused on its art-historical aspects.

Third, since archaeological sites can be expropriated by the government and the Palestinians have not been permitted a government, land owners fear archaeologists.<sup>6</sup>

Most stinging, however, is his indictment that “the native population of Palestine has not been in control of its own archaeological record.”<sup>7</sup> It is that very lack of control, framed by an Israeli (and, at times, American) archaeological and political agenda, that resonates well in the work of both Abu El-Haj and Masalha. We now turn to them.

#### NADIA ABU EL-HAJ AND FACTS ON THE GROUND

Nadia Abu El-Haj is an associate professor and the current chair of the Department of Anthropology at Barnard College, which she joined in 2002 after teaching at the University of Chicago. Her academic credentials are impressive: a PhD from Duke University; fellowships at Harvard and Princeton universities and the University of Pennsylvania; a Fulbright Fellow; and awards from both the McArthur Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Her 2001 text, however, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press)—which won the 2002 Middle East Studies Association Albert Hourani Annual Book Award for the best book published on the Middle East that year and generated enormous controversy—threatened to derail her 2006-2007 bid for tenure.

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6. Glock 1994, 77-78.

7. Glock 1994, 80.

An American-born Israeli, Paula Stern (Barnard '82) started a petition drive opposing Abu El-Haj's tenure and opening the door to debate on both sides of the academic spectrum, from those favoring and those opposed. Those arguing for, including both anthropologists and political scientists (e.g., Lisa Weeden, political science, The University of Chicago; Michael Dietler, anthropology, The University of Chicago), supported her scholarship; while those opposing her tenure, including religionists and archaeologists (e.g., Alan F. Segal, religion and Jewish studies, Barnard College; William G. Dever, archaeology, University of Arizona), found her scholarship lacking. (It is interesting that the anti- and pro-tenure petitions garnered 2,592 and 2,057 signatures, respectively.)

Abu El-Haj's primary claim is that Israeli/Jewish archaeology, framed by a European (and hence colonialist) perspective, is essentially a political enterprise grounded in supposedly objective scholarship, but ultimately one that serves the needs of the Israeli nation-state while denying the historical legitimacy of the Palestinian people resident in that same place and that same history. Early on, she writes:

The first generation of Israeli archaeologists—mainly immigrants from central and eastern Europe, many of whom had been trained in European universities—replicated wholesale, that cultural-historical approach to the ancient past. They produced evidence of ancient Israelite and Jewish presence in the Land of Israel, thereby supplying the very foundation, embodied in empirical form, of the modern nation's origin myth.<sup>8</sup>

It is her use of the word *myth*—not as used by scholars of religion without prejudice—that is indicative of how she reads not only the practice of Israeli archaeology, but the Hebrew Bible and Jewish history as well—as created story but with a decided contemporary political agenda.<sup>9</sup> It is, there-

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8. Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

9. Lest, however, at least initially, Abu El-Haj be accused of overt antisemitism, controversy continues to surround her—by, for example, University of Tel Aviv history professor Shlomo Sand, whose book *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London and New York: Verso, 2009) has evoked both praise and condemnation. Somewhat ironically, however, Hebrew University sociology professor Nachman Ben-Yehudah's books—*The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) and *Sacrificing Truth: Archaeology and the Myth of Masada* (Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 2002), both of which challenge both the "Masada story" of collective suicide in the face of the Roman onslaught and its leading expositor, Yigael Yadin

fore, at first read, a colonialist enterprise. As an example:

. . . the colonial dimension of Jewish settlement in Palestine cannot be sidelined if one is to understand the significance and consequence of archaeological practice or, far more fundamentally, if one is to comprehend the dynamics of Israeli nation-state building and the contours of the Jewish national imagination as it crystallized therein.<sup>10</sup>

Archaeology in Israel, then, is primarily responsible for creating “*the fact of an ancient Israelite/Jewish nation and nation-state.*”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the political purpose it serves is to legitimize the claim of the present state and its people of *having returned* to its ancient original home. For, according to Abu El-Haj, other readings of the same past and the same evidence become *contested* and ultimately *denied* readings.

Intellectually and academically, she has also argued in *Facts on the Ground* that the very Western and Jewish educational biases of the archaeologists themselves, prior to the present moment, continue to shore up the Israeli nation-state and this notion of return:

. . . the excavations did prioritize, seek, and produce evidence of a Jewish national past. They were motivated by and framed within a prior historical “theory,” which was composed of the minutiae of a Jewish national tale, a story of ancient ascendance, destruction, and an ongoing desire to return.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the archaeologists themselves are academically and professionally guilty of “putting the cart before the horse,” that is, starting with the “fact” of ancient Jewish existence and looking for material evidence with which to sustain that understanding, and, in so doing, reinforcing Israeli political hegemony and disenfranchising the Palestinian populace.

Not, however, to be fully condemnatory, Abu El-Haj *does* make the case that the geographical environs of ancient Israel, including Jerusalem, is a *shared history*, with at times Israelites/Jews in control and at other times others in control—the Romans, for example. It is, however, an uncontested argument with which no credible scholar today would disagree. At issue, however, is not that of political control primarily, but rather whether or not the historical continuity of the peoples presently living in that space can be

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(1917-1984)—seem to have largely escaped public scrutiny, especially in the United States.

10. Abu El-Haj 2001, 4.

11. Abu El-Haj 2001, 10.

12. Abu El-Haj 2001, 161.

legitimately and scientifically—archaeologically—traced back thousands upon thousands of years, *and* whether historical residence is a necessary and/or sufficient condition both to establish and to maintain present political hegemony—what she calls “a priority of right.”<sup>13</sup>

As far as Abu El-Haj is concerned—that is, as she sees it—for today’s secular Israelis,

the Bible has become a historical document. Past “events” were gleaned from its mythologica narrative, and its sacred connotations were elided within the hegemonic form of archaeological practice and modern Jewish nationhood.<sup>14</sup>

And while she is seemingly aware of the controversies surrounding the writing of an ancient Israelite history—e.g., the work of Thomas Thompson, Keith Whitlam, Philip Davies, and Niels Lemche, whom archaeologist William G. Dever negatively labels “revisionists”<sup>15</sup>—she is far too cavalier in dismissing the work of biblical scholarship and what it has brought to the table in enlarging our understanding of the ancient world.

Toward the end of her text, Abu El-Haj strongly argues the complicitousness of Israeli archaeologists in the political agenda, and thus compromising their scientific and academic integrity:

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13. Abu El-Haj 2001, 219.

14. Abu El-Haj 2001, 215.

15. See, for example, Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People from the Written and Archaeological Sources* (The Netherlands, Leiden: Brill, 1992); Keith W. Whitlam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996); Philip R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel* (Sheffield, UK: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1992), *Whose Bible Is It Anyway?* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1997), and *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); Niels P. Lemche, *The Canaanites and Their Land* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1991) and *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992) and *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994); William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (London and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), and *Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1990); and Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000-586 B.C.E.* (New York and London: Doubleday, 1990).

That commitment (a philosophical commitment to facts as being distinct from their invocation as evidence) enables [Israeli (and American and Christian)] archaeologists to fail to recognize their own complicity in a settlement project [in Jerusalem] many do not actually support . . . at least not today . . . Consider, for example, that many archaeologists have participated, since the 1967 war, in extensive survey projects in the West Bank in order to resolve the long-standing debate about the character of “Israelite settlement.” That project of fact collecting substantiated the West Bank as the biblical heartland, materializing its identity as Judea and Samaria in archaeological facts . . . *Arguing over details*—in this instance, whether or not ancient presence legitimizes contemporary rights to territory, insisting that the past should now be “detached” from present claims—cannot simply alter or efface a grammar of colonial-national practice and historical understanding that has long been operative in Palestine and Israel. Israel’s ideological commitment to being a *national and not a colonial state* was and is empowered by a historical practice that substantiates the ancient nation and its homeland in empirical form . . .

The long history of archaeological practice in Palestine/Israel has naturalized the use of the Bible in scientific practice and empirical quest, as intuition, as historical source, and as setting the range of plausible interpretations of empirical data.<sup>16</sup>

To be sure, Abu El-Haj further argues that the ancient past as modern Israelis and other Jews understand it legitimizes their claim to the land today:

That heritage conception has long been an essential component of a national grammar that reconfigured practices of colonial settlement and seizure within a language of national return. From that perspective, modern Israelis/Jews are the rightful inheritors of an ancient homeland whose own national identity is substantiated in particular archaeological sites and artifacts (even if parts of that land were now worth ceding in return for peace.)<sup>17</sup>

Abu El-Haj concludes *Facts on the Ground* in a similar fashion:

In the context of Israel and Palestine, archaeology emerged as a central scientific discipline because of the manner in which colonial settlement was configured in a language of, and a belief in, Jewish national return . . . a colonial-national history in which modern political rights have been substantiated in and expanded through the material signs of historic presence.<sup>18</sup>

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16. Abu El-Haj 2001, 236-237. Emphases in original—SLJ.

17. Abu El-Haj 2001, 247.

18. Abu El-Haj 2001, 280-281.



Before rendering judgment on whether Abu El-Haj is herself antisemitic and her work so as well, however, we turn to Nur Masalha and his own text, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine*.

#### NUR MASALHA AND *THE BIBLE AND ZIONISM*

Nur Masalha is a Galilee-born Palestinian who today is professor of religion and politics and director of the Centre for Religion and History and the Holy Land Research Project at St. Mary's University College, University of Surrey, UK. In addition to this 2007 text, he is also the editor of *Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal*. Books he has written include *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948* (Beirut and Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992); *A Land without a People: Israel, Transfer and the Palestinians, 1949-1996* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997); *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion* (London: Pluto Press, 2000); and *The Politics of Denial: Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); as well as the author of numerous articles. In addition, he is the editor of *Catastrophe Remembered: Palestine, Israel and the Internal Refugees* (London: Zed Books, 2005). Masalha holds a BA in international relations and politics and an MA in Middle East politics from Hebrew University, and a PhD in Middle East politics from the University of London.

It is interesting to note that, unlike Abu El-Haj, whose *Facts on the Ground* was published by the well-respected academic publisher The University of Chicago Press, Masalha's books have been published by Pluto Press and Zed Books, two independent, left-of-center presses known for their own radical orientations—which is not to discredit either Masalha's work or the presses themselves, but simply to raise the academic questions of how rigorous is the peer-review process in non-academic presses and whether or not the radical critique trumps the academic agenda.<sup>19</sup>

The subtitle of Masalha's book—*Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine*—is already indicative of

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19. According to Pluto Press's Web site ([www.plutobooks.com](http://www.plutobooks.com)), "Pluto Press is one of the world's leading radical publishers, specializing in progressive, critical perspectives in politics and social issues. Based in London, we have been active for 40 years and independent since 1979." According to Zed Books' Web site ([www.zedbooks.co.uk](http://www.zedbooks.co.uk)), "Zed publishes cutting-edge books from an international perspective. All our publishing has the common goal of giving voice to people, places, issues and ideas at the margins."

Masalha's own orientation to the question he asks in his introduction: "But does the Bible justify political Zionism, the military conquest and destruction of historic Palestine by the Israelis in 1948, and the current Israeli building of the separation/apartheid wall in occupied Palestine?"<sup>20</sup> and the answers he supplies in that same introduction—rather than scientifically and objectively examining the material *without* preconception (despite difficulty) and arriving at conclusions based on an accurate presentation of the material itself. As he writes in that introduction:

The claim that political Zionism expressed 2,000 years of yearning for Jewish political and religious self-determination is a modern myth—invented in Europe in the mid to late nineteenth century<sup>21</sup> . . . Central to the debate in this book about "the Hebrew Bible and Zionism" is the idea of the concoction of a new national Jewish tradition by political Zionism—an invented European colonial discourse which included the secularization, nationalization and radicalization of the Hebrew Bible and its deployment in support of the settlement and colonization of modern Palestine . . . This book explores the invention and mobilization of the ethnocentric paradigm of "promised land-chosen people"<sup>22</sup> and its link to modern Zionist myths, especially the nationalized and mythologized concept that the Hebrew Bible provides for the Jews a sacrosanct "title-deed" to the land of Palestine and beyond signed by God, for the alleged moral legitimacy of the establishment of the State of Israel, and for its policies towards the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine . . . It also explores a wide range of themes related to the biblical paradigm and its deployment in favor of political Zionism, as well as other permanent themes of politi-

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20. Nur Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2007), 1.

21. See, in response, Avi Erlich, *Ancient Zionism: The Biblical Origins of the National Idea* (New York and London: Free Press, 1999) and David Goodblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), both of which quite easily refute Masalha's claim.

22. On the subject of "chosen people," see Donald Harmon Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa and Israel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Avi Beker, *The Chosen: The History of an Idea, and the Anatomy of an Obsession* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Reuven Firestone, *Who Are the Real Chosen People? The Meaning of Chosenness in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Woodstock, NY: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008); Todd Gitlin and Liel Leibowitz, *The Chosen Peoples: America and Israel and the Ordeals of Divine Election* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010); Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007); Joel N. Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen: Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); and David Novak, *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

cal Zionism. These themes include the mythical “gift of land” to Abraham and its “conquest” by Joshua, the myth of a ubiquitous and perennial longing on the part of the Jewish diaspora to “return,” the myth of “a land without a people” . . . the invention of a new Hebraic consciousness and the historicization of the Bible as a collective national enterprise, biblical naming and the Hebraicization of Palestine’s landscape and geographical sites since 1948 and archaeology in the service of settler colonialism [NB: Masalha does, in fact, reference Abu El-Haj’s *Facts on the Ground*—SLJ]. The role of biblical archaeology (discussed in Chapters 1, 2, and 7), with its biblical paradigm of “elect people-promised land,” in privileging the narrative associated with Zionist settlers and Israelis over those of the indigenous (predominantly Muslim) inhabitants of Palestine is a major theme of this book.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, we see in Masalha’s text many of the same themes echoed in Abu El-Haj’s text—with, however, more of an emphasis on the Hebrew Bible, though archaeology, as noted, is likewise addressed. While Abu El-Haj’s language is, at times, quite strident, Masalha’s is inflammatory with his constant and repetitive use of “myth” and declaration of “concoction.”

That all peoples “mythologize” their pasts—religious communities not exempted and nation-states included—so as to present to their present generations a more positive self-image and sometimes with a decidedly political agenda has long been recognized by scholars. What is particularly disturbing in Masalha’s presentation of modern Israel’s past is a too-easily-dismissed stance regarding *any* understanding that ancient texts, to a greater or lesser degree, *do* reflect historical realities (the Hebrew Bible included!), while no recognition that Palestinian claims to both ancient and contemporary legitimacy do the same, including the “filtering process” of the Qur’an itself.<sup>24</sup>

Masalha is correct, early on, that the Hebrew Bible as it presents itself to the ancient Israelites and later Jews and still later Christians *is* a sacred text to a religio-national community that understands its possession of the land of its own historic origin as a divine mandate symbolized by the *B’rith*,

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23. Masalha 2007, 2-3.

24. In addition to note 9, see also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991); Roland Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Zev Sternell, *The Founding Myths of Israel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997). One must also note, unfortunately, the overtly antisemitic text by Roger Garaudy (b. 1913), *The Founding Myths of Israel* (Newport Beach, CA: Institute for Historical Review, 2000). This publisher is a recognized Holocaust/Shoah denialist press.

or Covenant, between the God of Israel and the people of Israel. He is also correct that this understanding has been embedded within Jewish consciousness so deeply that even secular Jews and Israelis cannot dismiss it out of hand as the primary foundational motivation that has underpinned both the historical longing for a return to Zion and a modern implementation of that longing, later embraced and supported by Christian religious traditions and much of Western civilization and the nation-states that make it up.

What he misreads, however, with his comment that “political Zionism, which originated in the conditions of late-nineteenth-century eastern and central Europe, was that of a *radical break* from 2,000 years of Jewish tradition and rabbinical Judaism”<sup>25</sup> is fully ascribing to those who participated in the modern Zionist enterprise at the close of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries secularist espousals only. The messages of Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), Ahad Ha’am (1856-1927), and many others with their call to return to Zion to alleviate the ongoing, disastrous consequences of European antisemitism resonated well with the religious Jews of Eastern Europe (e.g., the organization Hovevei Zion), who were more than willing to leave their countries of residence in exchange for the *Altneuland* (German “old-new land” and the title of Herzl’s 1902 visionary novel). To paint a portrait of modern Zionism as separate and distinct from any connection with the Jewish people’s historic past and religious traditions, as both Masalha and Abu El-Haj are wont to do, is to tell only half a story, and serves only to bolster a weaker and highly specious argument.

To further argue that “political Zionism expressed two thousand years of yearning for Jewish political and religious self-determination is an invented myth,” and that

The “land of the Bible,” or Palestine, was never a major center for Judaism during the last two thousand years. Although the Holy Land was central to the religious imagination of Jews, this was not translated into political, social, economic, demographic, cultural and intellectual realities.<sup>26</sup>

is to demonstrate no knowledge whatsoever of the *historical realities* of the Jewish experience subsequent to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE, and two thousand years of Western minority ghettoization, subjugation, and political and economic powerlessness.

And, while scholars today both inside and outside Israel, Jews and

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25. Masalha 2007, 19. Emphasis added—SLJ.

26. Masalha 2007, 34.

others, fully recognize that the poetic expression “a land without a people for a people without a land” is far more literary than accurate, the experience of the original *halutzim* (Hebrew, pioneers) in the mid- to late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was one of mixed observation: places of agricultural fecundity next to places of swamp and wasteland, with the latter waiting for reclamation.

This writer brooks no disagreement with the first half of Masalha’s statement when he writes that “Christian support for Jewish ‘Restoration to Palestine,’ on biblical, theological or political grounds, preceded Jewish Zionism by nearly four centuries *and paved the way for the latter’s rise in the late nineteenth century.*”<sup>27</sup> The religious and theological writings of the West that the Christ’s return was predicated upon the successful return of the Jews to Zion/Palestine was more spoken and written word than actual political or economic reality, and was divorced from contact with living Jews. The nation-states of the West, primarily Britain until the advent of the historic Balfour Declaration of 1917, did little if anything to translate their theological vision and understanding into concrete reality.<sup>28</sup> Jews remained “guests” in the West, largely at the mercy of the dominant power-structures and elites of Great Britain, France, and Germany, who exploited them for their own benefit until the post-World War I period dramatically changed Western reality.

Likewise, this writer also agrees with Masalha that the ongoing tragedy of Israel today is that

both peoples, the Israeli Jewish settlers and the indigenous Palestinian Arabs, not only claim the same land, but endow the same locations with different place names and religious significance. Both peoples also promote rival and contradictory nationalist histories of the 1948 events, with the Israelis celebrating their independence and the Palestinian mourning their Nakba.<sup>29</sup>

Here, at least, is a key insight—for which Masalha is to be commended and not be dismissed—i.e., that both peoples read their past differently (not only with regard to the 1948 “events” but further back as well),

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27. Masalha 2007, 85. Emphasis added—SLJ.

28. See, for example, Ronald Sanders, *The High Walls of Jerusalem: A History of the Balfour Declaration and the Birth of the British Mandate for Palestine* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983); Jonathan Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Random House, 2010), and Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999/2000).

29. Masalha 2007, 114.

and that history—however written, interpreted, and understood, and central to a people’s ongoing identity—must not be dismissed out of hand. Whatever scientific and objective truths of the past exist, they, like much of the human journey, also become merged with less than perfect recall in the telling and retelling.

For those naively unknowledgeable about the diversity that exists within both the Jewish and Christian religious traditions, Masalha’s focusing on the fundamentalist and more extreme segments of both is a distortion of reality, both in America and in Israel. Christian dispensationalist fundamentalism no more reflects the unity of the Christianities than Orthodox Judaism reflects the unity of the Judaisms—either in Israel or the United States. Nor does the political power that Masalha wants to attribute to both is at best surprisingly superficial and at worst simply wrong. Those who at times make the most noise—as both groups have historically and presently done and are doing—present the unsuspecting with a distorted view of their supposed power both in religious as well as political circles. The vast majority of American Christians are neither fundamentalist nor dispensationalist; the vast majority of American and Israeli Jews are not Orthodox. Additionally, even those Jews who perceive themselves as halakhically bound or halakhically committed reject the narrow interpretations associated with the *heredim* (Hebrew, literally “those who tremble in awe of God”), and equally reject the ongoing attempts to create in Israel a new Jewish theocracy or a nation-state governed exclusively by halakhic legislation.

In addition, by devoting too much attention to rabbis Tzvi Yehudah Kook (1891-1982), Eliezer Waldenberg (1915-2006), Ovadia Yosef (b. 1920), Mordecai Eliyahu (1929-2010), Haim Druckman (b. 1932), Meir Kahane (1932-1990), Yisroel Hess (1935-1997), Shlomo Aviner (b. 1943), Yitzhak Levy (b. 1947), Shalom Dov Wolpo (b. 1948), and others, and the “settler movement” in Israel (Hebrew *Gush Emunim*, “block of the faithful”), Masalha overstates his case and attempts to move these religious leaders and organizations to center stage. While the issue of the settler movement itself continues to remain an ongoing bone of contention between Israelis (and Americans) and Palestinians (and other Arabs), it is, to a far larger degree than Masalha indicates, a source of division within Israeli society itself, between those who support it and those who see it as the stumbling block preventing resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Equally true is that for Masalha to focus on the historical question of whether or not Jews were continuously resident in Jerusalem after the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and to slight the centrality of Jerusalem in Jewish religious thinking and the inability of Jews to leave their Western countries of origin and resettle there is extremely disin-

genuous, and thus appears to the naïve reader to bolster Masalha's highly specious arguments about Jewish foci on Jerusalem and already well articulated in the Hebrew Bible itself; Psalm 137 is among the most poetic expressions of that centrality:

Psalm 137

- <sup>1</sup>By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept  
when we remembered Zion.
- <sup>2</sup>There on the poplars  
we hung our harps,
- <sup>3</sup>for there our captors asked us for songs,  
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;  
they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
- <sup>4</sup>How can we sing the songs of the LORD  
while in a foreign land?
- <sup>5</sup>If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
may my right hand forget its skill.
- <sup>6</sup>May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth  
if I do not remember you,  
if I do not consider Jerusalem  
my highest joy.
- <sup>7</sup>Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did  
on the day Jerusalem fell.  
"Tear it down," they cried,  
"tear it down to its foundations!"
- <sup>8</sup>O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction,  
happy is he who repays you  
for what you have done to us—
- <sup>9</sup>he who seizes your infants  
and dashes them against the rocks.

While writing about the *misappropriation* of Moses Maimonides' (1135-1204) philosophy, theology, and halakhic understandings of Jewish Talmudic law by Israeli (and American) Jewish orthodox and *haredim* fundamentalists is welcome knowledge, it is, also, sociologically normative for many different kinds of groups—religious and other—to appropriate for their own agendas the past and its texts, including the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an. Could not one make the same or similar claims that those who wrought death and destruction against the United States on September 11, 2001, were *misappropriating* the Qur'an itself by both their reading of it and their subsequent behaviors? But to leave the reader with the impression that such behaviors are somehow Normative within the Israeli and/or Jewish worlds as larger entities comes uncomfortably closer to an antisemitic *Weltanschauung* (German, "world perspective") as discussed below.

(There is also an intellectual danger in attributing to Maimonides as well as the rabbis Masalha quotes more power than, in truth, they actually possessed or possess. Not every pronouncement by such authoritative figures was or is carried out to the fullest extent in the warp and woof of daily living. Even during the darkest moments of the Middle Ages in western Christian Europe, “ordinary” Jews and “ordinary” Christians had contact and both survived and, at times, prospered because of the other. How else to explain, for example, Jews rising to positions of prominence? The same can also be said in locales under Arab/Muslim hegemony, not only in Spain, where regularized contact led some Jews to achieve extraordinary positions of both authority and responsibility.)

### THREE DEFINITIONS OF ANTISEMITISM

Thus, while fully recognizing that the college/university campus and the academic community are among the current arenas where antisemitism continues to find homes, the question remains whether the controversial work of Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground*, and Nur Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism*, are themselves antisemitic, whether the authors themselves are antisemitic, and whether the claims made therein—namely, that Israeli, American, and Christian archaeology and archaeologists have been and continue to part of a political Zionist agenda to disenfranchise and dehistoricize the Palestinians and Palestinian history, and whether the Hebrew Bible as interpreted by both Orthodox and haredi Jews and fundamentalist Christians somehow represents normative Jewish and Israeli thinking and behavior—are equally antisemitic.

In this highly charged and emotionally laden discussion, the calmer place to begin is with definitions of antisemitism, specifically three: (1) that of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), (2) that of Holocaust and genocide scholar and sociologist Helen Fein (b. 1934), and (3) that of retired Princeton University professor and perhaps the leading expositor of Islam in the West Bernard Lewis (b. 1916). Others, for example Stanford University professor Gavin Langmuir (1924-2005), whose two-volume text *History, Religion and Antisemitism and Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1990), are most assuredly worthy of including, but would expand the scope of the discussion well beyond its original intention. Thus, the following:

[Faced] with rising incidents of antisemitism throughout Europe, the European Union (EU) created the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in Vienna, Austria, in 1997 with the following mandate:



to “study the extent and development of the phenomena and manifestation of racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism, analyse their causes, consequences and effects and examine examples of good practice.” To these ends, it will collect, record and analyse information communicated to it by research centres, Member States, Community institutions, non-governmental organizations and international organizations. It will also set up and coordinate a European Racism and Xenophobia Information Network (known as RAXEN).<sup>30</sup>

Out of the EUMC’s work came the following definition:

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities . . . Examples of the ways in which antisemitism manifests itself with regard to the state of Israel taking into account the overall context could include:

- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying a double standard by requiring of Israel a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

Sociologist Helen Fein, whose book *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) remains a classic, posits the following:

A persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs toward Jews as a collective manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore and imagery, and in actions—social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against the Jews, and collective or state violence—which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews.

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30. [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/other/c10411\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/other/c10411_en.htm) (accessed October 1, 2010).

Historian Bernard Lewis, whose latest book is *Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), has suggested that antisemitism is a special case of prejudice, hatred, or persecution directed against a people who are in some way different from the rest, and is marked by two distinct features: Jews are judged according to a standard different from that applied to others, and they are accused of “cosmic evil.”

#### CONCLUSIONS

Collectively, it seems to this writer, that all three definitions weigh in on this discussion; that “Yes!” Abu El-Haj *is* antisemitic, her work argumentatively skewed with accusations of academic malfeasance and dishonesty on the part of the archaeological community of scholars and that outright collusion and collaboration in the political agendas of Israel *is* likewise antisemitic in its painting with far too broad a brush the many instead of the few for whom her critique *is* justified. Even more significant, Nur Masalha, who, with an equally skewed presentation, would have his readers understand the extremist Jewish (and Christian) fundamentalists as somehow representative of the larger communities and supported, if even silently, by them. In addition, his minimization of the role, place, and function of the Hebrew Bible within all Jewish religious communities and his very real and evident disregard for its centrality coupled with his lack of attention to the Western Jewish historical experiences thus nullifies his contention that the Jews only claim the land’s importance and Jerusalem as well as the result of the modern eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Zionist enterprise and work backward to lay claim to the land and a Jewish historic past as well. This, too, smacks of antisemitism. An additional concern vis-à-vis this discussion of antisemitism is the recognition that both Abu El-Haj and Masalha are seemingly well-respected scholars who continue to teach the naïve and unsuspecting and use their own biased and politically charged writings to further inculcate their students and others to whom they present their views. This writer, for example, even in a cursory survey of various media, has encountered no challenges to their work either on campuses where they continue to teach or at conferences in which they continue to attend and present. The challenge, therefore, is twofold: (1) to take seriously their work by detailed examination of their texts and the arguments they present, and (2) to expose their own lack of scholarly integrity and decisively flawed argumentation—not only in sophisticated scholarly venues but also in wider public arenas. The battles against antisemitism have arrived on college and university campuses. Here is one place where the historic town-gown separation weakens both in the fight itself. Without

attempting to appear overly dramatic, both Israeli and Jewish survival is at stake; neither goal can succeed without the support of others who are neither Jews nor Israelis. Intellectual challenges to the very existence of the State of Israel by challenging its historical legitimacy in Jewish religious and historical traditions as manifest in both the Hebrew Bible and subsequent Jewish literatures, dressed up in the guise of seemingly objective academic discourse, as well as attributing overtly political agendas to the totality of the archaeological scholarly community specifically in Israel, are both a frontal assault on the long historical evolution of Western scholarship and those committed to it as well.<sup>31</sup> In addition, it is transparently ironic that both Abu El-Haj and Masalha benefit from the very institutions that provide them the environments and opportunities to present their arguments and that respect and defend their right to be wrong.

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31. Ironically, as reported by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, the president of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas (b. 1935) reaffirmed the Jewish historical presence this past August: "Nobody denies the Jewish history in the Middle East. A third of our Holy Koran talks about Jews in the Middle East, in this area. Nobody from our side at least denies that the Jews were in Palestine, were in the Middle East." As reported, though, it was not intended to establish any claims to Jewish exclusive legitimacy. [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org) (accessed August 23, 2010). As reported by Marcus and Crook, however, denial of historical legitimacy was part of an academic agenda more than a decade ago:

In 1998, PA historians held a conference in which they devised a policy of historical revisionism. The developing PA educational system would not aim to teach historical truth but rather to convey a political history aimed at denying Israel's right to exist in the Land of Israel. Palestinian academics, recognizing the futility of attempting to erase the documented history of the Jews, instead adopted a different solution of literally stealing the identity of the Jews by identifying ancient Hebrews as both Arabs and Muslims and denying their connection to today's Jews of the state of Israel. Another component of the negation of Jewish history is the denial of modern Jewish experience—including the horrors of the Holocaust. Itamar Marcus and Barbara Crook (2008). "Anti-Semitism among Palestinian Authority Academics," *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, 69(1), [www.jcpa.org](http://www.jcpa.org) (accessed September 22, 2010).