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BOOK REVIEW

Raphael Greenberg and Yannis Hamilakis Archaeology, Nation, and Race Confronting the Past, Decolonizing the Future in Greece and Israel Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xvi + 218. 25 figures. Paperback, £19.99.

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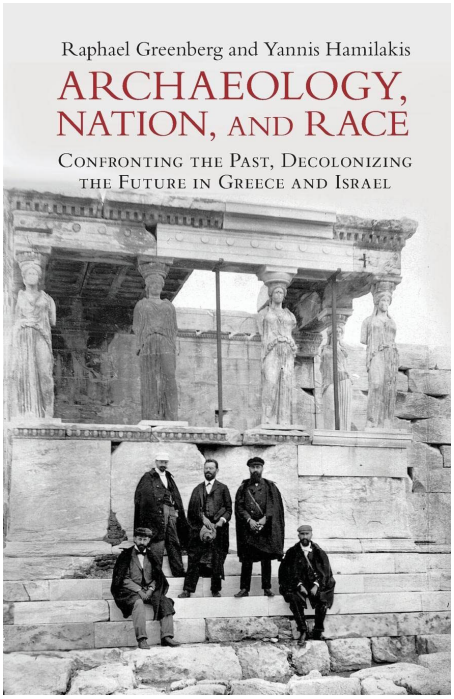

This is a fascinating comparative study of the relations between archaeological practice and the development of nation states and political identities. The book is a conversation between the two authors, founded in a joint seminar in 2020, followed by online conversations in the following global lockdowns. What emerges is a lucid and readable dialogue across two national histories – of Greece and Israel – that prompt a heuristic relation of counterpoints. These regard the implication of archaeology in the making of modernity; the production of mythic nation states that assert themselves as political realities based on carefully controlled and negotiated backstories; the development of canons and identities; and the colonisation of peoples and mentalities.

There are conspicuous differences between the archaeological heritages of Greece and Israel and the nation-building projects to which they were and are linked. Greenberg indicates his hesitation about this early in the book, noting that a Greek national sentiment that enlisted (selected) archaeological heritage predated political Zionism by several decades, which only secondarily incorporated interest in the archaeological past (itself built on a northern-European attention to the 'Holy Land' founded on Christianity). Another difference is material and visual. The ruins of the Acropolis in Athens and countless other remnants of antiquity were there to be seen, albeit in overwritten or whitened form or after plunder, as material surfaces on which to project European fantasies of Hellenism. The antiquities of the Holy Land were, on the other hand, frustratingly invisible to the eager gaze of those who were looking for material realities and validations of biblical cultures: submerged, decayed away, built-over, contaminated by the present and by (Palestinian) people's presence, only to be glimpsed at night as if some kind of essence. The authors draw on Bruno Latour's thought to explore how the putatively apolitical purpose of archaeology has been to purify, to clean up, to demarcate and categorise. A

case in point is Silwan's al-Bustan neighbourhood, where makeshift houses were built because of overcrowding in an enclosed Palestinian Jerusalem after the Oslo Accords in the 1990s and the al-Aqsa uprising in the early 2000s. Believing the area to be the location of the biblical King's Gardens, the municipality enlists archaeology to expropriate people's homes and 'restore' the site to a 'pre-Palestinian' state. This is the reproduction of a canon in which the 'past' means more than the 'present' (a distinction consistently challenged by both authors), particularly when that past is biblical, with the ability to ground national and Judeo-Christian religious imaginations and attract tourists. Greenberg argues that the displacement of inhabitants is the undeclared political convenience of this for the municipality. As one poster in an image of a protest tent in the neighbourhood calls out, this is 'expulsion disguised as archaeology' in what is an ever-more fraught situation of co-presence (more on this later).

Differences across the two (now-) national settings are tempered by resonances, such as the Ottoman histories in both lands and, above all, the powerful symbolic interaction between Hellenism and Judaism (including in its elision with Christianity) as the coupled beacons of western civilisation. This is not a civilisation celebrated by the authors (I put it mildly), as the imbrication of these pasts makes for a 'ground zero' of modernity that supports colonial, nationalist, and racialised socio-political orders that inevitably deal in power, violence (figuratively and literally), and inequalities.

In both countries this has involved projects of whitening. The book tracks this through multiple cultural sites. One focus is the purifying gaze of classicism and conservation that has overlooked or erased polychromy in built and artistic heritage. A parallel common theme is the effacing, destruction, or ruination of Islamic built heritage. Meanwhile, each author tracks the little-studied but longstanding presence of black people in Greece and Palestine as another silence. In each context, visual cultures have worked through strategic racialisation, such as Moses Lilien's early 20th-century vitalist Jewish heroes, modelled on the muscular bodies of Hellenistic ones, or Eugène Delacroix's association of Greece with white female beauty threatened by the (male, dark-skinned) Turk in his 1826 oil painting *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi.* Finally, both authors are horrified at the pernicious threat of recent macro-scale archaeogenetics research. This is to return us to a bounded, static, and homogenous notion of ethnic 'identity', that is necessarily subject to threats of corruption by mass migrations and miscegenation. This misinformed trope lends itself to essentialisms and vicious theories about 'replacement', overshadowing the potentials of genetic research for subtle understandings of ordinary and ubiquitous human mobilities and interactions over time. Indeed, we read how a research paper published in *Nature* on the genetic origins of Minoans and Mycenaeans was appropriated by Golden Dawn to assert beyond doubt the 4000-year racial continuity of the Greeks. Hamilakis is quick to point out that 'Minoans and Mycenaeans' are not ethnic categories of groups who identified as such, but 19th- and 20th-century archaeological constructs.

One of the most compelling comparisons in the book focuses on forms of colonisation, working with Michael Herzfeld's notion of the 'crypto-colony' (2002: 900-901). Crypto-colonies lie between colonised territory and an untamed beyond; they achieve political independence only at the expense of economic dependence on others, for example through massive and long-term financial debt. This relationship is articulated through aggressive nationalisms that both resemble foreign models and suit the purposes of the dominant foreign states (including 'creditor' countries) who wish to maintain advantageous asymmetries of power. Hamilakis finds a common denomination in the romantic nationalist writings of Byron, who viewed Greeks, and, indeed, proto-Zionist Jews, not as 'independent' but as 'subjects without being slaves', as 'vile' but pitiable and – ideally – pliant. This characterises an extreme end of a persistent, necessarily *implicit* crypto-colonial project to control geopolitical buffer zones and assert forms of symbolic ownership over their

heritages. With supervision, guidance, civilising influence, and paternalistic control from Northern Europe, crypto-colonies become strategically and tactically useful zones to mitigate threats and to keep otherness at a distance, whether this is the late Ottoman 'East' of the nineteenth century or the Soviet 'East' of the Cold War.

Crypto-colonialism operates through a perpetual form of self-colonisation, in which a double-consciousness (an idea borrowed from W.E.B. Du Bois) of seeing oneself through the eyes of the other becomes the constant anxiety of the national crypto-colonial subject: it is evident in Hamilakis' reference to the Greek self-regulatory refrain of 'what would foreigners say?' For the authors, it operates also through the modelling and institutions of government, through law, through education, and the maintenance and reproduction of disciplines such as archaeology, whose norms, rules, and assumptions naturalise systems of value. It works through the accommodation of foreign interests, most clearly evident in the presence of foreign archaeological actors, missions, and institutes. This is not a reductive colonial relationship of one-way control and domination, but one in which the crypto-colonised subjects themselves co-opt the norms and tactics of colonisation for their own projects, more or less unconsciously.

In the case of Greece, crypto-colonialism cannot be facilely equated with the European colonial project of appropriating and occupying foreign lands, enslaving and trading people, and extracting natural resources for wealth. The 'crypto-' refers obviously to more insidious, hard-to-track and hard-to-judge sets of processes that include 'extraction' and appropriations of different kinds, such as the northern European symbolic (and – obviously – sometimes actual) ownership of Hellenistic antiquity. While illuminating, the scholarly management and deployment of crypto-colonialism as a concept runs the risk of crass equivalences across geographies and histories. This is especially important – as the authors point out – in the context of multiple horrific current events that are legacies and markers of the persistence of colonial relations. These came to a head in the Black Lives Matter movement in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd in 2020, just two years before the publication of *Archaeology, Nation, and Race*. Although more could be said, the authors are delicate in their awareness of this distinction between crypto-colonialism and what, at one point, Hamilakis calls 'colonies proper' (153). He also notes that although subjected to crypto-colonizing processes, we should not consider Greece and Israel as 'victims' (indeed, he reports, many in Greece would prefer an exceptionalist nationalism of 'neither colonised nor colonisers'). In fact, the crypto-colonial state is one that has absorbed colonisation to the extent that reproducing it becomes second-nature, for example in the Greek 20th-century expansion into ethnically, linguistically, and culturally heterogeneous territories Macedonia, Northern Epirus, and Thrace. Here, archaeology departments and excavations were established as part of a nationalising process that is, for the authors, essentially a derivate ideology of colonialism in its projects of homogenising land and people, superimposing identity, and erasing difference.

These issues of typology in definitions of colonisation and the affective charge of the topic are particularly acute in the Israeli context of a settler-colonial project informed by the language, laws and public structures inherited from the British administration. Indeed, a key difference between Greece and Israel emerges for Greenberg. In the Greek case, a decolonised archaeology implies a professional community recognition of the 'colony in the mind' as a matter of solidarity between equal actors who can consciously and collectively decolonise their mentalities to make change. Conversely for Greenberg, who speaks personally and candidly, in the Israel-Palestine context he understands himself as 'colonised in the mind' while simultaneously and unavoidably being part of the historic group that oppresses others. This condition prompts hard questions about the real possibility of a truly decolonised archaeology in Israel/Palestine. Some answers to these questions relate to the valorisation of alternative Palestinian archaeologies, such

as Tawfiq Da'adli's study of early 20th-century Al-Ludd, that resist geopolitical and identitarian instrumentalisation, or the need for Israeli-Palestinian archaeological collaboration.

Of course, these statements, and the book itself, predate the current conflict (at the time of writing) precipitated by the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023. Reading Greenberg's words now can be discomforting, for they are infused with the dreadful knowledge of subsequent violence and the exponential, prismatic politicisation of the conflict far from Gaza itself. (As I write, I hear the chanting of students protesting against Israel's war on Gaza, encamped on one of the lawns of my own university.) Greenberg himself, writing with Alon Arad, has subsequently been vocal about the targeting of Palestinian sites, citing the South African case filed against Israel in the International Court for Justice (2023, 56: articles 91-3) to suggest that military objectives were secondary to the attempt to deprive Palestinians of the memory of their home, helping to deny their attachment to the land and their right to continued presence (Greenberg and Arad 2024).

To be sure, this is not part of a new process. Greenberg's discussions in *Archaeology, Nation, and Race* plot this historically, but what we see now is its drastic, dizzying intensification in an opportunity for final erasures that will have permanent consequences for the historical record, for society, community, for chances of peace and cohabitation, and for geopolitics. Something positive to draw from this is that while archaeology can be politically instrumentalised, it can also do good, in showing the historical complexities and interrelationalities between cultures and groups and exposing, rather than ignoring or targeting, the material legacies of historical diversity that problematise any exclusive or *a priori* claim to place. However, this emancipatory potential is hard to harness in wartime.

At the heart of this book is an existential quandary about the historical and future responsibilities of archaeology as a discipline, and the need to challenge and rethink – even 'unlearn' – fundamental archaeological precepts and the cultural-historical concepts that inform them. This is predicated on what Hamilakis calls a 'loss of innocence', which is a coming-to-terms with the historic implication of archaeology in political processes of power and domination, the constitution of myths (e.g. racial continuity and superiority), the construction of nation states, teleological narratives of civilisation, and other discursive phenomena that have real-world consequences for people's situated ability to survive and thrive. It is also about the fact that certain elite social groups and institutions have – in-country – positively benefited from crypto-colonialism, returning us to the issues around non-victimhood mentioned earlier. However, the authors do not mention that the term 'loss of innocence' echoes precisely the title of David Clarke's influential essay in *Antiquity* (1973), prompting me to ask how many times (or, perhaps, in how many ways, locations, and moments) does a discipline lose its innocence?

Some of these ideas have been revisited in a recent response by Greenberg and Hamilakis (2023) to interlocutors, colleagues, and critics. For some (reportedly) there is discomfort with the very idea that there is any other possible state than innocence, and that archaeologists would do well to 'stay in their lane', dig, and tell stories about the past rather than indulging in 'half-baked meditations' on political complicity (Greenberg and Hamilakis 2023, 148). For others, there is relative consensus that 'the old ways of doing archaeology will not long be tolerated' (ibid), but not about what new ways should take the place of the old. This links also to divisions in archaeology between siloed groups: a 'theory crowd' working on ontology, assemblages, and the Anthropocene, and a 'politics crowd' working on decolonisation, whiteness, and white supremacy. Hamilakis notes that *Archaeology, Nation, and Race* is an attempt to bridge these concerns by bringing together the examination of colonial regimes and the ontological struggle they catalyse in 'decentering the Anthropos of racialised modernity'. This, he notes, requires new sensory and affective attentions in the discipline that are – for now – difficult for me to imagine beyond

the abstract, or for the authors to articulate in ways that align with the imperative to preserve what Greenberg calls 'our craft'.

I write this review from outside of the discipline of archaeology – indeed, from the ambiguous position of a museum and heritage studies scholar, to which I arrived via a different disciplinary route. I see museum and heritage studies as eclectic fields without a particular 'craft' to protect or to reconcile with a new politics of practice, although one could argue (with tongue only slightly in cheek) that navigating and adequately knowing the vast international technical-epistemological infrastructure and policy frameworks of museums and heritage, from preventive conservation to heritage listing processes, is a craft skill. Nevertheless, my position means that I find sonorous resonances between *Archaeology, Nation, and Race* and many strands of critical heritage studies (CHS - which it is probably fair to say was born without innocence), as well as some of the formative influences of CHS from the 1980s and 1990s (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Lowenthal 1985, Samuel 1994). These are, on the one hand, satisfying, and it is particularly helpful to see the close historical mapping of interactions between imaginations and materialisations of the past, disciplinary formation, and political projects of nation and society. On the other hand, both critical heritage studies and memory studies (that can also be unhelpfully siloed from one another) have consistently attended to the political in our engagements with the past, meaning that the call to action of the book and the revelation that archaeology is enlisted for the purposes of building nations, canons, identities, and power differentials feels less than novel or radical.

While the authors use an admirable range of critical references outside of archaeology to help them think on the hoof in their dialogues (variously: Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze, Geraldine Heng, Rosi Braidotti, Achille Mbembe, Walter Mignolo…), these are fleeting presences, and a chunkier, richer, more connected book might have been produced via (*inter alia*) a more careful interface with museum, heritage, and memory studies and the broader, multidisciplinary inspirations which fuel these fields. This would have enabled the authors to tackle more closely issues around (just as obvious examples) silenced histories and heritages; victimhood; relationalities with colonial heritages 'proper', and with post- and decolonial practice; and, indeed, the multidirectional memory dynamics of the Holocaust in the formation and reiteration of Israel as nation state, which is never discussed in the book. An even more surprising omission is the relative inattention to longstanding debates in archaeology about relations between the discipline, power, ideology, inequalities, and responsibility, including those initiated through World Archaeological Congress from its 1986 origins in anti-apartheid politics, and the various One World Archaeology volumes that concern these themes. While the authors trace nuanced longer histories of the conjoined development of archaeology and nation in Greece and Israel, the wider, global disciplinary debates of the last fifty years and what they mean in the two national contexts are underserved.

Stepping outside of the immediate confines of Greece and Israel, some of the issues (although not all) bear useful comparison with other contexts, such as the nineteenth-century habit of northern-Europeans to revere, steward, and collect the achievements of the Italian High Renaissance while disparaging modern Italians; or the status of Islamic heritage in Andalusia, especially in cases such as the Great Mosque of Cordoba, where archaeology is also instrumentalised to demonstrate the prior presence of Christian heritages. Many of the book's themes transported my mind to other places and histories. On the other hand, the tight focus on two national contexts allows for a refreshingly short, lively, and conversational book that breaks the mould and is fleet of foot. What it has given to me is a sustained, acute historical politics of discipline, nation, and identity. I hope it opens the way for new objects and practices of study and wider, more responsible thinking about the political operation of our disciplinary and practical management of the past.

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