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Nadia Abu El-Haj. *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. xiii + 352 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-00194-4; $24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-00195-1.

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The Issue of the Nation in Scientific Practices

The contested nature of material culture and their national(ist) significance should not be a surprise when once more a wall was built to divide people and mark ownership and borders in the Middle East. But probably walls and other material objects have had several, diverse, and not always nationalistic meanings in other times. Most likely ancient remains were not unique symbols of national or ethnic groups, and yet archaeologists have often associated cultural remains to national identities. Readers of *Facts on the Ground*, by Nadia Abu El-Haj, will enjoy this suggestive and comprehensive examination of how material remains have been furnished with national and ethnic meanings, and how archaeology has furnished with materiality nationalist discourses. This book is both a historical and ethnographic account of archaeological practices. The combination of archival and ethnographic research is probably one of the strengths of this book that will be of great interest to multiple disciplines. During the last two decades, a number of books and articles examining the relationship between archaeology and nationalism have been published. Those works have exposed archaeology's "loss of innocence" and its proximity with politics. Some areas of the world have been more studied than others, because the link between the past and politics is more evident in some areas than in others. In this sense Abu El-Haj's task showing the political uses of archaeology is somehow "easy," as it is obvious that in Israel the land and cultural remains are violently contested everyday. That is, the archaeological meanings ascribed to space and time in the Near East are a constant source of violent conflict. The main question for scholars interested in issues of nationalism is not to unveil the political uses and abuses of archaeology, but to explain how archaeology has developed in a discipline closely related to nationalism. This is still an unresolved challenge in many studies that mostly examine ideological discourses and scientific theories. Abu El-Haj has brilliantly confronted this question showing with enormous detail how archaeology has historically become closely invested with nationalistic meanings. That is, she scrutinizes archaeology and nationalism at the same time. For the author, the issue of nationalism in archaeology is not a question of how a political ideology (nationalism) uses archaeological discourses. She moves a step forward and examines how the issue of the nation enters the arena of scientific practices. This is probably the primary contribution of the book in relation to other studies of nationalism and archaeology: the focus on archaeological practices as the main object of study. Inspired by cultural and social studies of science, Abu El-Haj puts archaeology under the ethnographic lenses and examines its practices: excavating, surveying, cataloguing, naming, mapping, and exhibiting. This methodological decision has clear theoretical consequences.

By examining the archaeological practices used during colonial and national times in Palestine and Israel, the author argues that there was not the "necessary relationship, between archaeology and the colonial project, nor, for that matter between archaeology and the nation. The power and salience archaeology gained in Israeli society was contingent upon a specific set of conjunctures and elective affinities" (p. 6). In fact, this book illustrates the contingency of the making of archaeological facts. Ceramic pots, mounds, palaces, stones, or figurines are not archaeological data per se, but they became facts in a specific historical context of colonial and settler mentality. If the focus on archaeological practices in this book represents a point of departure from other studies of archaeology and nationalism, the historical and ethnographic approach also clarifies the links between colonial and national projects, and the pervasive power of archaeology in those projects. *Facts on the Ground* has a chronological sequence, beginning with what Abu El-Haj calls "scientific beginnings," which is the period of the Palestine

Exploration Fund and its interests in transforming Palestine into a space that incarnates a biblical past. At that time, archaeological and geographical expeditions produced maps that charted ancient sites as places in modern landscapes. While surface expeditions plotted and charted ancient sites as significant places in modern landscapes, excavations were "believed to be capable of producing indisputable, observable facts" (p. 39). That is, in the practices of excavation themselves there was an inherent notion of unearthing "facts on the ground." Thus the scientific beginnings in the late-nineteenth century were later legitimated by the institutionalization of archaeology as a discipline as well as by the creation of a legislation to protect antiquities, remove them from the everyday practices of local amateurs.

Nadia Abu El-Haj highlights the continuities between the colonial and the national periods in terms of archaeological reasoning, and claims that there is a "dynamic relationship between empiricism and nationalism ... and the former gave credible form to the latter, not just in narrative, but, even more powerfully, in material cast" (p. 100). If explorations furnished a colonial imaginary that was interested in proving Biblical history with data, more recently Israeli archaeologists have used an already established archaeological reasoning to prove the existence of Israelites as an "ethnic group that presumably entered Palestine in the transition from the late-Bronze Age to the Early-Iron Age" (p. 99). Crucial to that project were scientific practices such as typology, chronological sequencing, and naming objects with ethnic labels. Through the book we learn how important archaeology was for the territorial expansion of the Israeli nation-state. Abu el-Haj examines how archaeological debates during the 1950s and 1960s regarding the question of Israelite settlement in the upper Galilee region were clearly entangled with ongoing practices of nation-state building and territorial expansion. The mapping of archaeological sites aimed to give spatial dimension to the nation, at the same time that the chronological typology and cultural sequencing gave historical depth to it. But those practices also played an important role at a more local level, namely the excavations in Jerusalem's Old City after the 1967 war. At the same time that the Jewish state extended its territory, it also reproduced a similar idea of Jewishness in a specific location in the nation: the Jewish Quarter. The last chapters of the book turn to ethnography to examine the specific practices and archaeological and architecture principles that guided the rebuilding of the Old City and the transformation of material culture in heritage.

Facts on the Ground offers a unique and pioneering approach to examine the politics of archaeological research. This book should be a reference for scholars of the Middle East as well as for a larger body of scholars interested in science and politics.

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