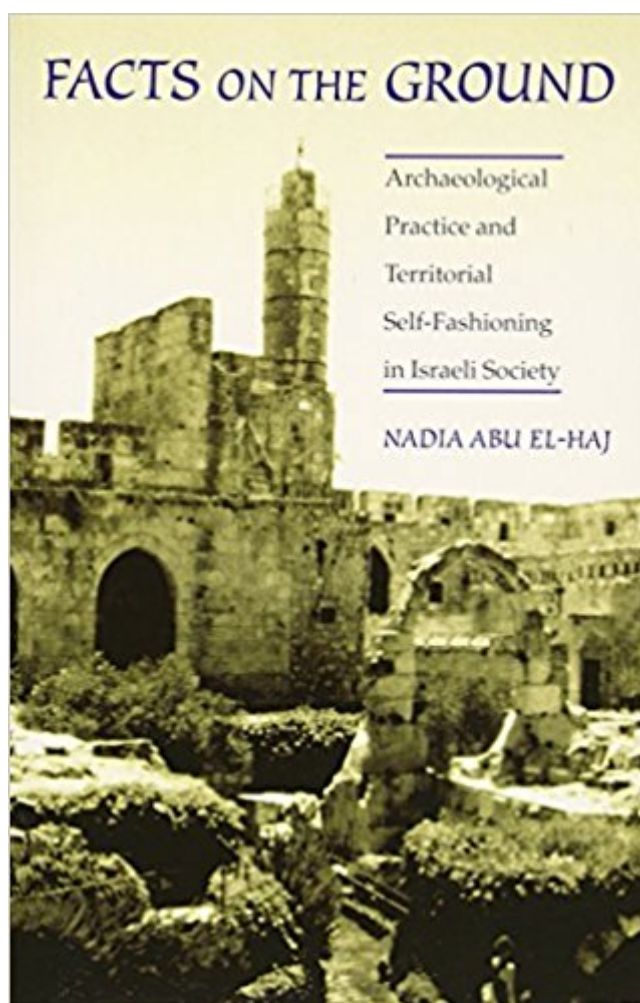


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# Facts On The Ground: Archaeological Practice And Territorial Self-Fashioning In Israeli Society



## Synopsis

Archaeology in Israel is truly a national obsession, a practice through which national identity and national rights have long been asserted. But how and why did archaeology emerge as such a pervasive force there? How can the practices of archaeology help answer those questions? In this stirring book, Nadia Abu El-Haj addresses these questions and specifies for the first time the relationship between national ideology, colonial settlement, and the production of historical knowledge. She analyzes particular instances of history, artifacts, and landscapes in the making to show how archaeology helped not only to legitimize cultural and political visions but, far more powerfully, to reshape them. Moreover, she places Israeli archaeology in the context of the broader discipline to determine what unites the field across its disparate local traditions and locations. Boldly uncovering an Israel in which science and politics are mutually constituted, this book shows the ongoing role that archaeology plays in defining the past, present, and future of Palestine and Israel.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Al-Haj's analysis of the political nature of archaeological practice is an incisive, penetrating, and persuasive discussion of how the past has been instrumental in the shaping of modern Israeli identity." (Antiquity) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

In this incisive book, Nadia Abu El-Haj demonstrates the role that archaeology has played in Israeli society, examining how it emerged as a pervasive force that has shaped the region's social and political imaginations and has inspired violently contested territorial and national-cultural struggles.

Based on archival research and ethnographic work among archaeologists, tour guides, and politicians, she presents the first critical account of Israeli archaeological practice while tracing the dynamic relationships among science, colonization, nation-state building, and territorial expansion.

Finally got through this after many months of stopping and starting. It's quite tough and pretty dense in parts, being essentially a doctoral dissertation converted into book form. It is also extremely challenging to rank this work from a purely literary or even societal perspective, since the topic is so fraught with politics. El Haj is essentially making the case that Israeli archaeologists have systematically used their science as a means not so much of advancing the field as of fabricating a foundation for the history and present right to exist of the Jewish state. Needless to say, many are not comfortable with this assertion or the arguments she makes to support it. In fact, if you look at all of the other ratings on , what you find is a pretty much equal number of 1's (pro-Israelis who can't stand anything negative being said about Israel or Judaism) and 5's (pro-Arabs who think that anything that undermines Israel is just swell). All this said, it is certainly a thought provoking work and one that raises numerous valid issues to think about, irrespective of your politics or views on Middle-East affairs.

Scholarly, unbiased, thoughtful argument touching on a highly explosive, emotionally charged issue, nationhood. Insightful and courageous thinking. Explores how groups come to define themselves and suggests how distinctions and divisions among "tribes" of humans are created and promoted. Very interesting!

As an avid amateur archeologist, I read this book to gain insight into the current situation of unearthing the past in Palestine. The author presented several intriguing ideas, such as the desire of immigrants who never had any contact with this "new-old land" to establish a legitimacy entitling them to be part of the region. Such insights as the naming of Tel Aviv (from Arabic words for "mound" and "spring") and the excavations of the Temple site shed light on the process of the creation of the myth of a new nation. Indeed, the immigrants, mainly from Central and Eastern Europe, had been schooled in the process of using the past to justify their nationhood. I highly recommend this text for anyone interested in a new and daring view of the material. There are some critics who have launched a campaign to discredit the author because of her temerity in analyzing most objectively the politics of mythification via archeology. No one should be discouraged from reading "Facts on the Ground" by such obvious would-be-silencers of what they consider to be a

taboo topic.

El-Haj's thesis is on the mark. The ways in which nation states reformulate their own archaeological record and national landscape to generate a primordial national identity is a process we can observe in many parts of the planet. The fact that she examines Israel where the current political climate is tense to say the least, makes her an easy target for writers who instinctually back Israel and support outsiders' "imperial" interests in the region. The previous critique (below) seems critical of Anthropology as an entire discipline. The writer is correct to point out that El-Haj is indebted to Anderson, Said and even Thomas Kuhn, but I am not quite sure why this is damning, as these writers are in many ways foundational to the very study of anthropology and history of science--they question inherent power structures in state, labor class and scientific institutions and dissect how power structures mask and reformulate what we perceive to be "Truth". Anthropology is certainly well suited to "building and interpreting social and intellectual history" as the previous critic claims it is not. This is called historical anthropology and is well-outlined in the "Journal of Ethnohistory" published out of Wisconsin. Admittedly, 'Facts on the Ground' could be written better, and towards the middle of the book you feel like throwing it down because El-Haj repeats herself for the length of about three chapters. There is a feeling that the book was meant to be a journal article that was expanded into a full length book in pursuit of a tenure track position. But, most importantly, her content is on track. I recommend this book for those interested in the present Israel/Palestine conflict and are looking to search various sources (and biases) on the matter.

This is an amazing book that should be taught in every relevant course! As an archaeologist, I found it impeccably researched, well-written and indispensable. A must-read for those who are committed to rigorous scholarship as opposed to political agendas. What is most remarkable about this eye-opening book is the disciplined and highly sophisticated methodology in utilizing original sources in order to interrogate the construction of historical identity. The author masterfully examines the process of legitimization and transformation of land attachment into an ideological or religious attachment. This book will be required reading for my graduate and also advanced undergraduate students.

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