In Centro

Collected Papers
Volume II

Memory

Editors:
Guy D. Stiebel
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רשות העתיקות
ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

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Central Region

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY
The Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology
The Jacob M. Alkow Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures
The Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies and Archaeology
The Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities

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Bridging the Gap: Preservation of Contested Narratives of Archaeological Sites

Chemi Shiff | Tel Aviv University

Introduction

This paper examines archaeology as a symbolic means for the construction of a national identity through the utilization of conservation methods. I focus on two case studies in which the implementation of different conservation practices reflected an attempt to contend with competing historic narratives. The first case study is the conservation of the Cardo in the Old City of Jerusalem. The second is the conservation of the New Saraya building in Clock Tower Square in Tel Aviv–Jaffa. It is my contention that both cases illuminate how hegemonic identity groups in society utilize conservation methods to exclude minority groups from any shared discourse regarding the past and its ideological importance.

Traditionally, conservation is perceived as illuminating the authentic essence of a given site. As such, it ostensibly enables the perpetuation of the physical, ideological and political heritage of ancient societies (Glendinning 2013: 63–65; Jokilehto 2002: 296–298). However, in recent years, this perception of conservation is frequently and increasingly being challenged (Dawdy 2010; DeSilvey and Edensor 2012; Parish 2009). Various researchers have proposed that conservation should rather be conceptualized as a negotiable, dynamic process that changes according to the changing power relations between

contested identity groups in society (Dawdy 2010: 767–769; Gordillo 2014; Kohl, Kozelsky and Ben-Yehuda 2007; Tilley 2006).

To discern how the utilization of conservation methods reflects these changing relations, this paper relies on the concept defined by Rodney Harrison (2013) as "absent heritage." According to this concept, the decision to preserve one stratum in a given site does not remove or erase the symbolic importance attached to the strata that were dismantled as part of the conservation of the site. Rather, the decision to preserve one specific narrative emphasizes its connection to the competing suppressed narratives that are represented by other strata of the same site. Consequently, it allows competing identity groups to challenge what they see as a biased conservation process (Harrison 2013). Thus, different ideologies and changing power relations may alter the definition of which remains are worthy of conservation and which are not (Marshall *et al.* 2017).

The examination of the conservation of the Cardo in Jerusalem and the New Saraya in Jaffa reveals that in addition to the pattern of absent heritage, there is a need to discuss a second pattern, one that I define as "nullifying heritage." Rather than erasing some of the strata at a given site, this pattern of conservation strives to nullify all historical narratives referring to the symbolic, ideological, or political heritage of the site. It serves as a means to imbue external narratives that negate and replace the dominant intrinsic characterization of the site undergoing conservation (Breglia 2006; Shiff 2020).

Utilizing the two patterns of "absent heritage" and "nullifying heritage" to examine the conservation practices implemented in the Cardo and the New Saraya may enable a new understanding of the assumedly contested symbolic roles of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv–Jaffa within Israeli society. While Jerusalem symbolizes the aspiration to emphasize Israel's Jewish identity, Tel Aviv–Jaffa symbolizes its aspiration to perceive itself as a modern, democratic and multicultural society (Alfasi and Fenster 2005; Ram 2005). However, as I attempt to demonstrate, the utilization of the conservation practices reflecting absent heritage and nullifying heritage in the Cardo and the New Saraya present the

two supposedly opposite aspirations represented by the symbolic roles of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv as two parallel ways through which the Jewish Israeli hegemonic identity groups attempt to delegitimize the participation of non-hegemonic identity groups in an open discourse regarding Israel's collective identity (Vinitzky-Saroussy 1998).

Absent Heritage and Nullifying Heritage

In recent years, there have been many who have questioned the existence of one universal definition of authenticity (Lindholm 2008: 1–10; Parish 2009), as well as the ability to utilize conservation to uncover the authentic nature of a given site (Fenster 2007; DeSilvey and Edensor 2012; Muñoz-Viñas 2002). Instead, the implementation of conservation methods is increasingly being understood as part of a cycle of ruination through which the shared public space is continuously being recycled and rebranded according to changing political, ideological and economic circumstances (Dawdy 2010; Muñoz-Viñas 2002; Scott 2015). This process is clearly being demonstrated by the examination of the conservation practices of absent heritage and nullifying heritage that are implemented in the Cardo and the New Saraya.

Strategies reflecting absent heritage emphasize the inherent ties existing between the strata comprising a site: the creation of one stratum—and its symbolic interpretations—is directly dependent on previous strata and their competing interpretations (Harrison 2013: 172–177; Mitroiu 2016). These interpretations are stored in society's collective memory in what Aleida Assmann (2008) called an archive that stores all memories and symbolic interpretations in a passive manner until a particular political or economic incentive allows a contested suppressed narrative to take precedence over previously dominant narratives (Breglia 2006). Accordingly, one must examine the preservation and presentation of the past as the reflection of continued political struggles between contested narratives and perceptions of authenticity (Assmann 2008: 102–104; DeSilvey and Edensor 2012; Fibiger 2015).

The conservation method of "nullifying heritage" offers another understanding of the goals and struggles represented by the conservation process. This strategy strives to empty a given site of any historic, political, or ideological context, thus preventing any discourse regarding their intrinsic symbolic importance (Shiff 2020: 50–54).

Conservation strategies reflecting nullifying heritage are congruent with postmodern claims that challenge the very existence of the authentic. In this vein, one may understand the conservation practice of nullifying heritage as a strategy attempting to disconnect the process of conservation from any political or ideological context and instead subordinate them to ostensibly ideologically neutral professional or economic interests (Baudrillard 1994; Harvey 2001; Muñoz-Viñas 2002). The annulment of any discourse regarding the political and ideological interests reflected by the implementation of specific conservation methods transforms the authentic into an empty signifier that prevents any open discourse regarding the competing historic narratives held by contested identity groups in society (Assmann and Conrad 2010; Bolton and Muzurović 2010).

The Symbolic Role of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv–Jaffa in Israeli Society

Jerusalem and Tel Aviv–Jaffa reflect two contested perceptions regarding Israel's national identity. On the one hand, Jerusalem serves as a symbol of the aspiration to emphasize Israeli society's Jewish roots (Alfasi and Fenster 2009; Ram 2005; Vinitzky-Saroussy 1998). In this vein, the conservation of archaeological sites in Jerusalem focuses on strata that demonstrate the city's Jewish roots while ignoring and erasing other strata that represent competing heritage (Greenberg 2018). On the other hand, Tel Aviv is perceived as the fulfillment of the secular Zionist aspiration to establish a modern, democratic and multi-cultural society in a region that, until the arrival of Zionism, was supposedly desolate and barren. In this vein, Tel Aviv is often portrayed as

the negation of the neighboring city of Jaffa. While Jaffa is thought of as a city riddled with stagnation and poverty, Tel Aviv is perceived as a city that was "born from the sand"—literally from scratch—into the harbinger of modernity to the region (Shoham 2012). As such, the implementation of conservation methods in Tel Aviv–Jaffa exemplifies the negated character of the two cities. For example, while conservation is often used in Tel Aviv to emphasize the abundance of modernist architecture existing in the city, there is no parallel conservation effort regarding the equally impressive modernist architecture of Jaffa.

In this context, it is important to examine two important narratives that are represented by the archaeological remains of the Cardo and the New Saraya—which potentially challenge the hegemonic narratives represented by Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The Cardo was first built following the debacle of the Great Revolt of Judea against Rome between 66–73 CE (Ben-Zeev 2018; Goodman 2007), symbolizing a long period with no Jewish settlement in the city, and the termination of Jewish sovereignty until 1948. Potentially, the great efforts invested in the preservation of the Cardo and its heritage may thus challenge the frequent attempts to emphasize the Jewish roots and characteristics of Jerusalem, and to give precedence to their preservation.

Equally, the preservation of the New Saraya may challenge the hegemonic narratives regarding the depiction of Tel Aviv–Jaffa as the sole harbinger of modernity in the region. The New Saraya was built at the end of the 19th century as part of the construction of a new entrance to the city—now known as Clock Tower Square—due to the city's intense expansion and transformation into a multi-cultural modernized urban center that served as one of the political, cultural and economic centers in Palestine (Kark 2011; LeVine 2005). This expansion included the foundation of many new neighborhoods that were built according to modernist town-planning schemes—one of them being Tel Aviv (LeVine 2005).

Thus, the Cardo and the New Saraya challenge the hegemonic Jewish and Israeli narrative represented by Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The examination of the

conservation methods that were implemented at both sites may demonstrate how hegemonic groups in Israeli society contended with contested non-hegemonic and non-Jewish narratives.

The Cardo: Nullifying Non-Jewish Heritage, Emphasizing Jerusalem's Historical Jewish Ties

The Cardo was originally constructed as part of a decision to rebuild Jerusalem according to Roman town-planning schemes and rename it "Aelia Capitolina." It spanned the length of the city from north to south—connecting what are known today as the Damascus Gate and Zion Gate. At its height—during the Byzantine period—the Cardo spanned a width of 24 m and included two lanes for carts separated by a roofed sidewalk. Shops were built on each side of the Cardo for merchants and it functioned as the city's central commercial road (Gutfeld 2012; Niv-Krendel and Bogod 1986). Over the years, the Cardo became narrower. However, it continues to function as the city's central market to this day.

After the Old City was captured by Israeli forces in 1967, plans were made to repopulate the Jewish Quarter with Jewish residents. The considerable damage the quarter's houses sustained during the 1948 and 1967 wars enabled Israel to reconstruct most of the Jewish Quarter (Galor 2017: 64–65; Slae and Kark 2018). The reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter was preceded by archaeological excavations spanning most of the Jewish Quarter and took place between 1969–1982 (Geva 2010).

These excavations presented a rare opportunity to shed light on the history of an area that was previously densely populated and therefore out of reach for archaeologists (Geva 2009: 360). The excavations uncovered important sites from various periods and illuminated the Jewish Quarter's multicultural heritage (Galor 2017: 65). However, only sites that could be connected to the ancient presence of Jews in this area were preserved and eventually opened to the public (Ricca 2007: 66–69; Shiff 2020: 168–

176). Together with the decision to preserve many of the synagogues that functioned in the Jewish Quarter until 1948, the emphasis given to the preservation of those sites that were connected with Jewish history depicted the heritage of the Jewish Quarter as exclusively Jewish (Bar and Rubin 2011). The decision to emphasize the Jewish heritage of the Jewish Quarter and ignore its non-Jewish heritage is congruent with strategies of absent heritage. In this context, one may see the remains that illuminate the Jewish Quarter's non-Jewish heritage as creating an ambivalent atmosphere which allows non-hegemonic narratives to resurface from the collective archive (Assmann 2008; Breglia 2006). An example for this potential challenge could be seen in the 2019 calls to open the Nea Church (Horodnichano 2019), which was built during the 6th century and functioned as one of the most important churches in the Christian world throughout the Byzantine era (Ben-Zeev 2018). In the same year, a similar challenge was presented by the reopening for worship of a mosque located at the center of the Jewish Quarter, in proximity to the Cardo (Friedson 2019).

In contrast to most archaeological excavations in the Jewish Quarter, the excavations in the Cardo uncovered no strata representing periods in which Jewish sovereignty existed (Goodman 2007; Gutfeld 2012). Nevertheless, due to its historic importance, after it was uncovered, previous plans to build residential buildings on its route were changed and the decision was made to integrate the 180 m long excavated area into the reconstructed quarter (Niv-Krendel and Bogod 1986: 142; Ricca 2007: 118; Seelig and Seelig 1985). The Cardo was divided into three sections that are separated from each other by a passageway (Ritmeyer 2012). Each of these sections are designed differently. In the northernmost section, nearly intact shops from the Crusader period were opened as a "Crusaders' Bazaar" (Fig. 1) (Bahat 2012). In the central section of the Cardo, a reconstruction of the full width of the Byzantine Cardo was built (Fig. 2) (Ritmeyer 2012: 112–116). In the third, southernmost section, five columns were reconstructed that served as the separation line between the lanes of the Cardo. Remains of shops that were built beside the Cardo

Fig. 1: The Crusaders' Bazaar (photo by Chemi Shiff)

during the Early Islamic period were also preserved (Fig. 3) (Ritmeyer 2012: 117–121).

Ostensibly, the transformation of the Cardo into one of the Jewish Quarter's central symbols refutes the argument that the conservation methods utilized in the Jewish Quarter serve only to emphasize its Jewish heritage. However, it is my contention that the conservation methods utilized in the Cardo demonstrate an effort to overcome the potential challenge presented by the non-Jewish heritage of the Cardo, nullifying all historical or symbolic contexts of the site, thus reflecting strategies of nullifying heritage.

A first component of this attempt was the decision to physically separate the Cardo into three different sections, thus not allowing visitors to grasp how the Cardo functioned as a central thoroughfare that connected the city in the past (Coleman 2000; Jones 2013). Second, explanation signs dispersed

Fig. 2: The central section (photo by Chemi Shiff)

Fig. 3: The southern section (photo by Chemi Shiff)

throughout the Cardo do not supply information regarding the Cardo's historic or symbolic importance. Rather they only supply basic information regarding the physical features of the area. Thus, it is not possible for visitors to the Cardo to gain any knowledge regarding the periods that are represented in the Cardo.

Instead, the visual aids that were situated in the Cardo create a direct connection between the Cardo and the ancient and modern Jewish history of the Jewish Quarter. Thus, the conservation and presentation of the Cardo reflects strategies of nullifying heritage that exemplify the external historic narrative of the Jewish Quarter as an area that had an exclusively Jewish history. For example, during the first years of the 2000s, a model of the Menorah that was located in the Second Temple was situated at the center of the middle section of the Cardo. More recent plans for the development of the Cardo further illuminate the process of the nullification of the Cardo's historic and symbolic contexts. In recent years, attempts were made to transform the Cardo into a tourist attraction. To this end, it was decided that the central section of the Cardo would host temporary exhibitions that relate to life in Jerusalem. These exhibitions focus only on the lives of the Jews living in the Old City. During the period in which this research was conducted, the exhibition that was presented comprised pictures of distinctly Jewish experiences in Jerusalem: Orthodox Jews praying at the Western Wall and soldiers posted at stations throughout the city.

Thus, while the utilization of strategies of absent heritage in the Jewish Quarter transformed the non-Jewish remains scattered throughout the Jewish Quarter into what Assmann (2008) defined as "archives," the Cardo was emptied of any physical or symbolic reference of the non-Jewish heritage represented by its remains. It therefore comes as no surprise that in a visit to the Cardo in 2016, Israeli Minister of Construction and Housing Yoav Galant was perhaps not fully aware that the Cardo was built after the demise of Jerusalem as a Jewish city. He declared that when he touched the stones of the Cardo, he felt a deep connection with his Jewish ancestors who lived in the city during the

Second Temple period, walked through this road and touched the same stones (Mendelbaum 2016).

The New Saraya: Erasing Heritage by Creating Antiquities

As previously mentioned, the construction of the New Saraya symbolized wider processes of modernization that took place in Jaffa since the second half of the 19th century and allowed its transformation into a modernized multicultural urban center (LeVine 2005). However, as I attempt to demonstrate, the conservation of the New Saraya reflects the self-perception of Tel Aviv as the negation of Jaffa (Nitzan-Shiftan 2012; Shoham 2012).

Historically, the New Saraya served several civilian, administrative and military purposes. Among its many functions, it housed daycare facilities for children and a soup kitchen for the poor. As the animosity between Tel Aviv and Jaffa grew in the first half of the 20th century, it also served as a base from which attacks were launched against Tel Aviv (LeBor 2007: 64). The growing animosity between the Zionist movement and the Palestinian population culminated in the destruction of the Saraya in a bombing led by the Lehi Jewish underground in the 1948 war. The attack caused the deaths of at least 26 civilians, among them children that attended the daycare facilities.[1]

In 1951, Jaffa was officially annexed into Tel Aviv and the cities were renamed Tel Aviv–Jaffa (Nitzan-Shiftan 2012). However, as illuminated by the treatment of the New Saraya in Israel's formative years, Jaffa's modern heritage continued to be perceived as a threat to the Zionist narrative regarding the development of Tel Aviv as the negation of Jaffa. For example, in a city council meeting regarding the restoration of Clock Tower Square that took place in 1962, one of the council members claimed that the municipality had no responsibility for the conservation of the "enemy's heritage" (Tel Aviv–

1 As reported in the *Davar* Hebrew-language daily, "Casualties in an Explosion in the 'National Committee' House in Jaffa," January 5, 1948.

Fig. 4: The ruins of the New Saraya (year unknown)
https://danielventura.wikia.org/he/wiki/%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%95)

Jaffa Municipal Archive 1962). As such, until the 1990s, the ruins of the New Saraya were left to slowly deteriorate and were only removed when part of the building collapsed or when plans were made to pave a new road to the north of the former building (Fig. 4).

This utilization of the urban space in Jaffa can be understood as reflecting strategies of absent heritage. Paradoxically, the perpetuation of the New Saraya as a constant reminder of the debacle of the Palestinian city of Jaffa also served as a constant reminder of the role that Jaffa played in the development of the

Fig. 5: The reconstructed New Saraya façade (photo by Chemi Shiff)

region. As such, this narrative regarding the New Saraya was stored as a part of society's unconscious archive (Assmann 2008).

In the 1990s, plans were made for the redevelopment of Jaffa's historic core. As part of these plans, the decision was made to preserve Clock Tower Square and transform it into a lucrative tourist attraction that would serve as an economic engine allowing the revival of Jaffa in general (Tel Aviv–Jaffa Municipality 2002). In the New Saraya, it was decided to reconstruct only its monumental façade (Fig. 5). Explanation plaques described the New Saraya as

a building that was planned by a Jewish engineer and destroyed by the Lehi Jewish underground because it served as a base for attacks against Tel Aviv.

While these descriptions are historically accurate, they continue to reflect strategies of absent heritage that emphasize only the fact that the New Saraya served as a threat to Tel Aviv. They fail to recognize the important political and social functions of the building, as well as the symbolic role the building served for the Palestinians living in Jaffa until 1948. In this respect, the decision to reconstruct the New Saraya's façade does not symbolize a change in the treatment of Jaffa's Palestinian heritage as a threat that must be suppressed.

While the preservation of the New Saraya's façade represented practices of absent heritage, the role that the conservation of the New Saraya played in the development plan of Clock Tower Square illuminates the deployment of strategies of nullifying heritage—ones that emptied Clock Tower Square of any political, ideological or symbolic importance.

According to Eyal Ziv (personal communication, 2017), the architect responsible for the development of Clock Tower Square, the conservation efforts were not supposed to be utilized to illuminate the authentic nature of the urban space, nor was it to be used to promote any ideological perceptions regarding the past. Rather, conservation served as a politically neutral planning tool able to be used to complete his economic vision for the development of Clock Tower Square.

For example, the architect claimed that the decision to reconstruct the New Saraya's façade was not made due to its historic or architectural importance but rather to prevent a plan to expand the road that was paved to the north of the building in Israel's formative years. He further explained that this utilization of the conservation methods would raise the value of the real estate in Clock Tower Square and optimize its ability to function as an economic engine that would attract investors to the city (personal communication, 2012).

The relegation of the conservation practices implemented as part of the development plan of Clock Tower Square into professional planning tools

prevents a perception of the various buildings comprising it as part of a distinct geographical unit. The preservation of Clock Tower Square was not used in order to illuminate its historical role as the city's entrance and as the administrative and civilian center of a thriving urban center of the modern city of Jaffa. Rather, it was presented as a space whose main importance is its ability to promote the redevelopment of Jaffa into a lucrative tourist attraction with no independent heritage in and of itself. It subordinates Clock Tower Square to Tel Aviv's perception of Jaffa as a neglected city that can only thrive once it succumbs to the modernist nature of Tel Aviv. One of the best examples for this process lies in the decision to name a hotel that was established in another historical building, adjacent to the New Saraya, as "Setai Tel Aviv" (Setai Tel Aviv, n.d.).

Absent Heritage and Nullifying Heritage as Complementary Strategies

The examination of the case studies of the Cardo and the New Saraya highlights the interchanging definitions regarding which remains are worthy of conservation and which are not. It demonstrates how the parallel utilization of the strategies of absent heritage and nullifying heritage prevents non-hegemonic narratives from becoming an intrinsic part of a pluralistic discourse regarding Israel's collective identity.

At the same time, both case studies demonstrate the continuous presence of what Assmann defined as an "archive," in which non-hegemonic narratives and memories may be stored until such a time that the existing power relations or values in society change in such a way that what was once regarded as worthy of conservation is then perceived as a disturbance and vice versa. As such, this paper presents the parallel utilization of the absent heritage and nullifying practices in both the Cardo and the New Saraya as a coping mechanism through which the Jewish Israeli hegemonic identity groups attempt to delegitimize the participation of non-hegemonic identity groups in an open discourse regarding

Israel's collective identity—in a way, attempting to prevent any opening of Assmann's archive.

In this context, the two contested conceptions of "Jewish Jerusalem" and "modern Tel Aviv" may in fact be perceived as two sides of the same coin: in both cases, the combined implementation of the absent and nullifying heritage conservation methods limits the discourse regarding Israel's collective identity to the hegemonic groups already existing in society. It demonstrates how the work done by practitioners of cultural heritage—archaeologists, conservation experts, tour guides and others—reflects a concentrated attempt to defend the existing power relations in society. Potentially, however, this article may also shed light on the ability to critically deconstruct the process of conservation. It may supply practitioners of cultural heritage with tools through which they may transform the utilization of archaeology and conservation into arenas promoting an open discourse between contested identity groups in society.

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