Community Archaeology in Israel / Palestine

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Contents

1 The Nature and Development of Community Archaeology in Israel/Palestine: An Introduction

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Discussion

The Com-Arch projects that we have reviewed in the catalogue are varied in scope and nature. Their numbers have grown over time – from a few early projects to an abundance in recent years. The projects vary, because the worldviews of team members differ, as well as the policies and ideologies of the affiliated institutions, donors, and related communities. Still, we see some general patterns.

Many projects proclaim Com-Arch as an integral, central part of their goals, but the priorities, modes of execution, and commitment to Com-Arch differ great-ly. Regardless of claims, nearly all the projects are top-down – they are initiated and managed by professional archaeologists, often working for established bodies (governmental and academic institutions). Few projects employ more equal rela-tionships with communities, usually those run by NGOs or private initiatives. The closest to "grassroots" mode are the projects carried out at Ir Ganim, Shoham, and the Jesus Trail (Nos. 2, 10, and 13).

There are marked differences between Com-Arch in the Palestinian Authority and in Israel. In the Palestinian Authority, projects are aimed mainly at adults and

are seen as a way to guarantee employment to communities that suffer from acute unemployment. As a corollary, some projects involve ecotourism and development of traditional handicrafts. In contrast, many of the projects in Israel focus on teen-agers – children and young adults (under the age of 18). It reflects the conviction that the future belongs to young people and, also, that they are more suitable for education than adults. Practical concerns play an important role too: adults need and expect a salary, while children are often a "captive audience". They are enlisted (in slang *menudavim*, "being volunteered") by their schools or *mechinot* (pre-mil-itary institutions). In Israel, too, economic reasons play a major role (tourism, employment, development), and in the *Hankhala* projects many youths are paid.

In Israel, post-1700 CE sites and buildings are not (legally speaking) antiquities, and archaeologists do not manage the projects for their preservation and resto-ration. In the Palestinian Authority, though the current Law defines antiquities by the date of 1905 CE, it does not require supervision by archaeologists in heritage projects, especially in sites/buildings that are not ruins. Hence, both in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority, there are projects of heritage that resemble very much Com-Arch, but without the participation of archaeologists.

Not a single Com-Arch project in Israel/Palestine targets the elderly, although they can participate in less-demanding works (registering, sieving, excavating with delicate tools, etc.). Archaeologists sometimes mention with pride the participation of a very old person in their excavation. It is not a shining example of Com-Arch, because such participants are the exception, a sort of rare curiosity.

Often, projects create a community for the duration of the project (whether excavation, conservation, lab work, or exhibition). At the end of the fieldwork, or of the budget, the community "dissolves". A larger local community remains – such as the inhabitants of a town near the site – but it is not the community who took active part in the project. Archaeologists often fail to observe this, identifying the community active in their project as "the" local community. Some scholars criticize Com-Arch for not creating more permanent communities; but this is a misunderstanding. Short-term projects may bear fruits, educationally, in the long run or indirectly, without maintaining formal frames.

The projects discussed in the Catalogue show significant differences in relation to education. If Com-Arch is about the relations between communities and archae-ologists, or an "outreach" towards a larger public, one would expect educational activities to be at the core of the projects. However, many projects are "lite" on education. Usually, "lite education" projects have a large turnover of participants. The *Hankhala* projects of the IAA are an example.[44] The IAA receives the youths almost free of charge, since their employment is mostly paid for by governmental

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[44] Not necessarily all the *Hankhala* projects – we did not review each one of them.

sources. There is limited educational activity, through no fault of the excavators. They are not trained in education and are expected to fulfill the goals of salvage excavations, under pressures of time and budget, with untrained youth on a high turnover of participation.[45] We are unaware of any studies of the challenges faced by the archaeologists, their ways of coping, or assessment of educational achievements. There seems to be a lack of interest in studying the projects, which is more difficult than proclaiming success based on a large turnover of participants. Claiming success by numbers while doing "lite education" is not unique to the *Hankhala* projects.

We are not experts in education, but many Com-Arch projects are typically limited in the scope of their educational work. Excavation teams rarely include professional educators. The teachers that accompany the children on a project are professionals, but they do not do the teaching (they function as assistants, taking care of discipline or helping children in distress). Many projects declare the goal of "connecting the community to their past" – the teaching about the archaeology and history of the site/area translates to teaching about patriotism or nationalism, either from an Israeli or Palestinian perspective. Projects by liberal archaeologists and bodies try to connect the communities to more than one past, and are more open minded. Many projects offer lectures to the participants, it seems, as the main educational content. Of course, some practical training is necessary too, to enable the participants to do the archaeological work. But few projects seem to deal with pedagogy (active teaching) and education of individuals – developing imagination, abilities to adapt or to lead, non-formal learning, abstract thinking, promoting critical reflectivity, etc.[46] An exception is the project with Kohn-Tavor (No. 21) (see also Kohn-Tavor 2023). Probably it is not the sole example, but active educational work is demanding and is, apparently, not on the list of priorities.

Missing from the catalogue of Com-Arch projects – indeed, from the entire discourse of Com-Arch in Israel and Palestine – are the hired laborers of archaeology. Since we are more familiar with conditions in Israel, we will discuss their place in Israeli archaeology. In the first decade of the State of Israel relief workers were the backbone of archaeology, supplying cheap workforce for both salvage excavations and excavations by universities (and even by some foreign teams). Many of them were new immigrants from Arab countries (so called "eastern Jews"). This system was terminated in the 1960s, when economic conditions improved (Kletter 2006, 133–149). After 1967, Palestinians from the Occupied Territories and volunteers from abroad

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[45] Bowden (2020, 88) describes a different world: "Most often, however, volunteer testimonies speak of friends and camaraderie, and of the relaxing atmosphere of the project. For academics who spend their working lives in an increasingly stressful market-driven university environment, perhaps the real value of community projects is that they can remind us why we loved archaeology in the first place."
[46] See Wernecke and Williams 2017; O'Rourke et al. 2018; Landau 2019; Kristensen et al. 2020; Cobb and Croucher 2020, 2–3. Or, maybe adapt a Community Based Learning strategy (Dallimore et al. 2010).

replaced the former relief workers in excavations. Later, Thai and Philippine workers were employed in Israel, but not in archaeology.[47] In recent decades, hired excavation workers are mostly employed through employment agencies. It distances the worker from the employer: there is less commitment (the worker "belongs" to the agency, not to the excavating body). Due to the temporary nature of the work and the high turnover of workers, there is less incentive to form personal ties: the archaeologists will perhaps not meet the same group again. The workers become more anonymous, a replaceable resource. We are not naïve to think that there are easy solutions; but the nice declarations about providing education and opportunities to youth (as in the *Hankhala* framework) signal the abandonment of adult hired workers. Nobody develops an attractive Com-Arch project for them. Their archaeological experience is cyclical and routine: brief employment followed by dismissal. [48]

Not surprisingly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dominates the world of Com-Arch in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Some projects try to avoid it, by claiming that they are "a-political". But the managers and participants of Com-Arch projects are not above politics. It is difficult to accept such claims, given that archaeology as a discipline is tied to national/ethnic aspirations, especially in conflict areas. Com-Arch projects speak highly about local communities, but the local communities are often miniatures of the general "Jews" and "Arabs", and often only one is present; the other is an absentee.

Among early projects of Com-Arch we find more examples of "mixed" projects of Israelis and Palestinians/Arab-Israelis, with ideas of shared heritage and solving conflicts (Nos. 3, 4, 7, 8, 11–12, 17, 19, and 36 [in part]). Early projects also tended to work more with underrepresented and/or minority communities, seeing Com-Arch as a way to solve inequalities. In the radicalized atmosphere of the recent decade, it seems that shared projects are no longer possible. In Israel today, projects with right-wing ideology are more numerous, and today the State (through the *Hankhala* enterprise) is a dominant player. The majority of the restoration projects of "late" sites/buildings is focused on Zionist and Jewish/Israeli heritage too.

Com-Arch in the Palestinian Authority mirrors Israeli Com-Arch (pace De Cesari 2010, 631; following Bshara 2013, 304–305; cf. Sayej 2010),[49] in that it stresses

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[47] One wonders why. Nationalistic views are not the obstacle, since some Israeli-Arabs and Palestinians have been employed. Is it due to language barriers, economic factors, or some other reason?

[48] Under the circumstances, some of these workers become less interested, not more interested in archaeology.

[49] De Cesari's writing leaves us wondering. For example, she writes that the Palestinian heritage organizations are fighting against "the exclusivist narration of Judeo-Christian origins rooted in the monumental Bronze and Iron Age sites of the Levant". The Bronze and Iron Age sites are hardly "monumental" when compared to other cultures of the time, like Egypt or Assyria. In branding them as such, De Cesari "buys" the mythical past offered by nationalists. Do Christian or Jewish origins begin in the Bronze Age, a millennia before Christ?

post 1700 AD Islamic/Palestinian heritage and minimizes or ignores the Jewish/ Israelite past. For example, in the Ramallah Highlands trail guidebook, Israel is credited with destruction of heritage through new construction, but the destruction of sites by Palestinian new construction is not mentioned (https://www.riwaq. org/index.php/heritage-trails-and-guided-tours-re-walk-palestine). The Tel Balata teacher guidebook advocates the noble opinion that heritage sites belong to all the citizens of the world (Taha and van der Kooij 2014, 10). However, in practice, the guidebook avoids mention of the Northern Kingdom of Israel or of Israelites at Shechem, by clumsy articulations about preferring "archaeological interpretation" to "conversation with historical texts" (p. 15), or speaking about anonymous people that "conquered much land and made it into a State" (p. 139). It puts the years 1900–2000 as one "modern time" without either the British Mandate or the State of Israel (p. 7). Hammami (2012, 234) describes how Nablus was founded "by the Canaanites [...] and rebuilt by the conquering Romans", skipping the Iron Age Israelites. He ignores Judaism when writing about "the city's monotheistic religions: Islam, Samaritanism, and Christianity."

Both sides use heritage and Com-Arch as a tool; no place is left for doubts and the past is constantly appropriated for present claims. As precisely worded by Bshara (2013, 312), rehabilitation of heritage becomes a "symbol". Heritage becomes "a vehicle for political action or a medium to produce alternative facts on the ground", and "the political ends justified/have been justifying the blind eye on restoration or preservation alphabets" (Bshara 2013, 309; cf. Yahya 2005, 68). [50]

Many projects, regardless of their nature or scope, claim success – which brings us to the next issue: is Com-Arch in Israel/Palestine a success story?

Failure, or Success?

Measuring success of Com-Arch is fraught with problems (Simpson and Williams 2008, 6). Archaeologists may claim success in order to advance careers, raise funds, keep the community interested, etc.

Several indicators suggest that Com-Arch in Palestine/Israel is struggling. Few archaeologists embark voluntarily on Com-Arch projects (in governmental salvage excavations or conservation projects the archaeologists do not have free choice). Excavations by universities in prestigious tells (like Megiddo and Tell eṣ-Ṣafi) are

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[50] For Saca (2019), the "local" or "indigenous" is always Palestinian and the Israelis are forever colonists and foreign; though she knows that communities do not always live near "their" sites and that descendant communities are judged by feelings, not by proven credentials of descent.

not engaged with Com-Arch. The universities in Israel hardly teach Com-Arch, not to mention having a program for it (cf. Greenberg 2019). Several projects claiming to promote Com-Arch act like businesses, providing a brief experience with antiquities for payment. The experience can be limited to one type of work, which is a poor representation of the richness of an archaeological excavation. When a leading archaeologist summarized the successes of Israeli archaeology in 2011, nothing was said about Community or Public Archaeology (Mazar 2011). The same is true of the 2010 summary on archaeology in the Palestinian Authority (Taha 2010). There is no academic discussion of the *Hankhala* projects after six years, except for one publication on one specific site (Storchan 2020). Tellingly, no Com-Arch project in Israel/Palestine has yet become "famous" in terms of media coverage, or "impact". Com-Arch is often a theme for rosy public statements with little substance.

In the Palestinian Authority too, the discourse is much more positive than "facts on the ground". Archaeology there is struggling in terms of budgets, available experts, and public awareness (Al Houdaliyeh 2009; Jubeh 2018, 86). Due to pressures in densely populated areas, the rushed, new urban building sprawl is "completely uncontrolled, unplanned, and chaotic." So "the historic towns and villages have lost many of their old buildings, much of their fabric, and most of their historic appearance" (Jubeh 2018, 76, 82–83; compare Bshara 2013, 299; Hammami 2012, 240). Due to the conditions, Com-Arch projects in the Palestinian Authority are risky ventures, suffering from lack of long-term investments.

Educational successes of Com-Arch may be invisible in the short term and are difficult to quantify. It is easy to claim success on the basis of a large turnover of participants, but quantity is not quality. Having many participants often means that each one shares only a little time in the project.

When a project is considered a success, the reasons are not always obvious. The example of the four large "Adopt a Site" conservation projects (Nos. 22–25) is enlightening. Modi'in (No. 25) was grasped as the only successful project of the four. It was easy to blame the local communities/municipalities for the failures (Mashiah 2015; 2019). But what made Modi'in different? We suggest four reasons:

1   The budget for Modi'in was large, while the site was smaller and less complex than the others (especially Tel Yoqne'am and Tel Batash). The funds required for long-term maintenance of sites are proportional to their size/complexity.

2   The Modi'in Synagogue, fitted with a shading roof, was useful for public events after the restoration (Bar Mitzvah celebrations, praying, etc.). Therefore, the municipality has an incentive to maintain it. The other sites could

only attract visitors interested in the (not monumental) archaeological remains.

3   The Jewishness of the remains at Modiʿin (cf. Shealtiel 2015, 15) as against much more "universal" remains at the other three sites is a major factor. At Yoqneʿam, the project stressed "our" past in the educational activities, for example, in the stations on the Tell. However, the remains for conservation were not Jewish (a Crusader fortress, a Byzantine Church). Similarly so at Migdal ha-Emeq and Tel Batash. The entire conservation at Modiʿin was determined by the Jewishness of the remains, which were quite modest and unimpressive. They had to be bolstered by massive new construction.

4   Modiʿin is of higher socio-economic status than Migdal Ha-Emeq or Yoqneʿam: grade 8 or 9 of 10 in recent Governmental statistics; 65% of its residents have academic degrees; Migdal Ha-Emeq is 4 of 10). The local community has more abilities and more means for making the best out of the project and for taking care of the site.

Where is the great challenge in restoring a Synagogue in Israel today? Ancient Synagogues were excavated and restored already in the Mandate Period. They are not rare in Israel. So the Modiʿin project is hardly innovative. In our opinion, it was also not a great success of Com-Arch, because it was, in a sense, educating the educated and giving to those who have.[51] We prefer the "failure" at Yoqneʿam. It was not a failure of the local community, or even the municipality, but of those who approved a project without means for sustainability.

Can Community Archaeology Liberate Us?

Archaeology does not happen in a void. All archaeology is community archaeology, to some extent, whether we like it or not, and all archaeologists live in communities. Communities can be imagined and can be created by projects of Com-Arch (Carman 2011; 2017; Greer 2002; Smith and Waterson 2009, 11). Can Com-Arch liberate us, in the sense of "move archaeology beyond its nationalist, colonialist, and imperialist roots" (Marshall 2009; cf. for Turkey Apayadin 2017)?

Greenberg criticized archaeologists in Israel who justify their work as "giving back to the community", but in fact corroborate with the State and other

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[51] We do not mean that this project failed. Encouraging ties to Jewish heritage is legitimate, as long as it does not mean erasing or silencing the heritage of others. Obviously, sites near wealthy towns also deserve conservation and exhibition.

stakeholders for economic gains, causing destructive development. He called it "dig-washing" (Greenberg 2019). Although we agree with the sentiment, we think that the issue is more complex: your "dig-washing" is my praised Com-Arch project. Ideologies cannot be judged in terms of false or true; they are dynamic constructions that change with time, mixtures of emotion and reason, of true and false (Freeden 1996; Vincent 2010).

Two examples can warn us against romantic illusions about Com-Arch. The company that presented its work in Lod as a Com-Arch project, beneficial for Jewish-Arab relations (above, No. 31), is the same company that excavated and removed graves in the Mamilla Muslim Cemetery (in Jerusalem), causing destruction of Muslim heritage (Kletter and Sulimani 2017).

A second example concerns the project at Al-Lid/Lod (above, No. 11). A journalist on a tour with Yuval Gadot, one of the archaeologists running it, was impressed by the contrast between the neglected city (a "desperate ghetto" with old women in traditional Arab dresses, "stray tabby cats scrounging for food along a filthy curb, and children on rickety bicycles weaving between discarded water bottles and scattered garbage") and the bright excavation ("another world", Bonn-Muller 2010, 47). She noticed how Gadot drove through the slum in "a glistening jeep" (Bonn-Muller 2010, 46). Gadot explained that he volunteered to this project, because he wanted to change Lod through Com-Arch: "reach out to people", "instill pride" in them, and "inspire them to take action to save their historical sites". He wanted "to do archaeology that is socially minded, that matters" (Bonn-Muller 2010, 47), and this project was a "groundbreaking endeavor" of Israeli and Arab children working together and learning how to live together. Gadot criticized other archaeologists in Israel, who "deal first and foremost with Biblical materials" (Bonn-Muller 2010, 48).[52]

Similarly, in 2010 Ilan and Gadot (2010, 103) called for "undermining the edifice of ethnocentric historical narrative in Israel". They described Israeli archaeology as "complicit in the Zionist enterprise": "In the first fifty years, Israeli Archaeology produced a nationalistic, monolithic narrative" (Ilan and Gadot 2010, 105). Gadot described himself as "radically leftist" in political outlook (Ilan and Gadot 2010, 109), and engaged in "the archaeology of protest":

Writing about nationalism and chauvinism in archaeology is fine, but the real test of our sincerity is what we do in the field with people, not just with ancient walls and pots (Ilan and Gadot 2010, 120).

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[52] See also Merkur (2016). For a brief description of the project see https://www.archaeological.org/community-based-archaeology-at-khan-el-hilu-lod-israel/

Yet, right after Lod, Gadot moved to excavate in the City of David/Silwan in East Jerusalem. There, his excavations became associated more and more with Biblical Archaeology and the Jewish past. Now, the finds from Gadot's excavations are "placing it [Jerusalem] in the same league as the capitals of Assyria and [North] Israel" (Borschel-Dan 2022; Schuster 2022). His work changes East Jerusalem, not by helping the Palestinian community of Silwan to keep their sites and heritage, but by helping the settler association Elad make the Jewish past of Jerusalem great again and silence the Palestinian heritage ("late" remains and layers are removed to expose and preserve "our" remains, cf. Kletter 2019; and Mizrachi, Chapter 11 in this volume).

It follows that there is not one model of Com-Arch, which can "liberate" us. Archaeologists who call for dialogue with one community may silence another. The same archaeologist may serve completely contradictory social and ethical values when moving from one project to another. As Merriman observed:

> In being about ethics and identity, therefore, public archaeology is inevitably about negotiation and conflict over meaning (Merriman 2004, 5).

But in Israel/Palestine, most of the Com-Arch projects target one ethnic or religious community, and serve ideologies of divisiveness and superiority of one community, rather than of plurality and dialogue-building.

While there are no "true" or "false" Com-Arch projects, there are successful and less successful ones. We should not judge the quality of Com-Arch by professional archaeological standards alone (proper excavation methods, safe treatment of finds, and scientific publications), or by quantities of participants. The core is educational. Without ethical/moral consciousness, there is no education, but only indoctrination.

Acknowledgements

Note

Making this book required a long and complex effort, which was accompanied almost daily by doubts, difficulties, and ethical deliberations between the three editors. The aim of book was not to create a shared, equal project, which would be evenly divided (as best as possible) between authors and editors by political orientations, nationalities or ethnicities. We do not claim that this book represents equally or even fully Com-Arch and its practitioners in Israel/Palestine. Future studies will review other projects and engage with more issues. This book, however, gives new perspectives and a rich selection of varied and, at times, unexpected voices and viewpoints. It will, hopefully, serve as a foundation for more discussions about Com-Arch in Palestine/Israel.

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