

Andrew Lawler, *Under Jerusalem: The Buried History of the World's Most Contested City*,  
Doubleday, New York 2021, pp. 464, ill. + maps; ISBN 978-0-385-54685-0

*Under Jerusalem* is an engaging and accessible account of how archaeology from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day has impacted life in Jerusalem. The work is broken into three sections covering the 1860s–1967, 1967–2001, and 2001 to today. Photos and maps highlight the book's discussion points.

Readers will benefit from *Under Jerusalem* in several ways. The book contains detailed narratives about some of the more obscure archaeological ventures in Jerusalem, such as Ron Wyatt's search for the ark of the covenant on the grounds of the Garden Tomb or an attempt by Rabbi Yehuda Getz to break through Warren's Gate and into the Noble Sanctuary's underground. Particularly interesting were the chapters discussing the implications of opening a new exit door from the Western Wall Tunnels onto the Via Dolorosa. Even stories of well-known excavations are loaded with tantalizing details, many connected with the broader context in which the excavations occurred.

The book is also informed by Lawler's interviews with archaeologists and locals, in which they shared unfamiliar or entirely new information. Perhaps the most scandalous example of this type relates to Meir Ben-Dov's excavations south of the Noble Sanctuary. Ben-Dov relayed to Lawler that Yigael Yadin quietly advised him to bulldoze the Umayyad palaces he uncovered there rather than reveal them to the public (pp. 144, 146). He thankfully did not indulge Yadin.

Another strength of the book is its window into the context of archaeology in Jerusalem, especially in the chapters focused on recent decades. Readers will gain a glimpse into the divergent attitudes toward the discipline of archeology both within Israeli society and between Israelis and Palestinians (e.g. pp. 124, 159ff.). Additionally, the narrative highlights key players in Jerusalem's excavation history and discusses them in relationship to each other, such as the IAA, ELAD, the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, the Waqf, the École Biblique, and others. Even if not exhaustive, the web of information Lawler paints helps bring some clarity to the knotty context in which Jerusalem's excavations occur.

The book follows a familiar cast of archaeological characters but does not aim to present a full account of Jerusalem's excavation history. The omissions are notable, including Hermann Guthe's soundings on the Southeastern Hill, Broshi's extensive digs on the Western Hill, Crowfoot and Fitzgerald's work on the Southeastern Hill, and Suke-nik and Mayer's excavations at the Third Wall, to highlight a few. Others are mentioned but only briefly discussed, such as those of Johns, Avigad, Barkay, Kenyon, Gibson, Re'em, and others. The book also does not consider the many small-scale salvage digs that take place in the city regularly. *Under Jerusalem* focuses instead on the city's most

notorious, controversial, and ideologically driven excavations, many of which would be better termed “digging activity.”

Well-known figures are simplified to fit the book’s narrative: Edward Robinson is a “devout and conservative” scholar who used “the tools of science...[to]...counter religious skepticism” (p. xxxi); Charles Warren is a Freemason with “closely guarded spiritual reasons” for excavating in Jerusalem (p. 40); Vincent is an academic opportunist who published a report of Parker’s dig for “scientific gain” (p. 111; see also 349); Kenyon is a “pious Anglican” searching for the City of David (p. 130). This framing reflects Lawler’s view that Jerusalem’s archaeologists are best understood as biblical apologists or treasure hunters (p. xxxi).

*Under Jerusalem* highlights how the city’s first excavations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries created disputes between archaeologists and locals. This foundation allows Lawler to make connections between these and excavations after 1967 (e.g. pp. 142, 189, 211). This framing is important for the book which aims to connect early imperial and later Israeli archaeologists. However, this objective is weakened by the ca. 50-year gap between the discussions of the Parker (1909–1911) and Kenyon (1961–1967).

The coverage of Kenyon requires comment. Her excavations, taking place over seven seasons and the most extensive the city had seen to date, are afforded only one page in the book. This reflects a common approach that minimizes her role in the excavation history of Jerusalem. However, in comparison with her predecessors, her rigorous archaeological method is usually understood to inaugurate a new era of scientific excavations in the city. Her team worked throughout East Jerusalem (not simply near the ancient core) and pursued a variety of research goals related to several historical periods. The book unfairly simplifies her work as a hunt for David and Solomon.

*Under Jerusalem* presents misleading information in several places. For example, Lawler repeats the idea that Charles Warren believed the shaft he ascended in 1867 was the *šinnor* mentioned in II Samuel 5 (pp. 46, 210). However, this mistaken claim was only applied to Warren’s Shaft later and by not by Warren himself. In another place, Lawler writes that the Greek inscription discovered by Charles Clermont-Ganneau warning gentiles against passing beyond the stone balustrade near the temple is “one of the few undisputed pieces of physical evidence” from the Herodian Temple Mount (p. 70). This is a striking statement considering that more than 500 pieces of the Herodian-era Royal Stoa, described in detail by Josephus, have been recovered and published. Lawler also writes that the “vaults and apses [of the Nea Church] were ... locked behind gates and doors inaccessible to the public” (p. 158). His broader point that the church has been neglected is certainly correct. However, the southern apse sits in the open air accompanied by a small sign along the southern Old City wall.

Readers will also encounter several imagined controversies. During the time of Charles Warren, Lawler states that there were competing theories over the location of the City of David (pp. 70, 86, 88). However, the majority view at the time still placed it on the Western Hill (as Lawler mentions later). Despite some outliers, it was not until closer to 1900—after the excavations of Bliss and Dickie—that the Southeastern Hill of Jerusalem came to be universally accepted as the city’s ancient core. Lawler mentions this archaeological revolution but applies the controversy anachronistically to Warren’s time. In another instance, he mentions the “...nagging question of the temples’ location, hotly

debated among biblical scholars since Robinson's day" (p. 190; see also 258ff.). However, the majority view in scholarship has been that all iterations of the temple building proper stood over the limestone bedrock under the Dome of the Rock or in a location immediately nearby. While these or other similar issues are not fatal to the book, together they obscure a number of facts. This leaves the reader in a less confident position when weighing the merit of information with which they are unfamiliar.

Throughout the book, the reader also encounters popular stereotypes of Late Ottoman Jerusalem. Lawler correctly mentions that Jerusalem's neat four-quarter division along ethnic and religious lines is the synthetic imposition of western outsiders (pp. 22, 353–354). However, the city presented is consistently marked by conflict and division (pp. xxvii, 10, 22–24, 74–75, 221). Because the subject of the book is "the world's most contested city," an atmosphere of perpetual conflict in Jerusalem is assumed in the discussion of 19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century excavations. Western narratives that describe the city as a filthy and neglected place are presented as the impetus for visitors to look underground for the "real" Jerusalem instead (pp. xxxii–xxxiii). However, the book does not evaluate whether and how these observations about Jerusalem can be used as a window into the reality of the Late Ottoman city. Scholars of this period have recently emphasized Jerusalem's rapid modernization and suggested that the divisions wrought by the conflict of World War I and later British Mandate policies were much less pronounced earlier. Native sources, such as the memoir of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, paint Jerusalem in an entirely different light than the western archaeologists and explorers that Lawler mentions.

Considering that the book focuses heavily on the controversies created by archaeology in Jerusalem, I was surprised to read that Lawler believes it could also contribute to future peace. His rationale for this centers on remains that attest to the historical presence of all three monotheistic religions. He also emphasizes archaeological surprises that have upended exclusive understandings of the city's history, such as the lack of 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE remains or the uncovering of previously unknown monumental Umayyad palaces. Lawler hopes that readers will accept his interpretation of the textual and archaeological material and learn to set aside their differences.

*Under Jerusalem* is a fascinating and well-written book that presents important data. Few informed readers will question its main assertion that archaeology has become a tool of control in a contested city. However, in the final analysis, the narrative's fixation on the spectacle of archaeological stories attributes too much potency to the city's subterranean realm. This theme, emphasized throughout the book, is reflected in its final words which assert that Jerusalem's "abiding power remains bound up in its underworld" (p. 344). With such statements, *Under Jerusalem* adopts the same framing that it claims to critique by looking past the living city in order to uncover the real and powerful one hidden below.

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