

ISRAEL, MUSEUMS OF

Caroline Tully

School of Historical and Philosophical Studies

Classics and Archaeology

University of Melbourne

Melbourne, Victoria

Australia

tullyc@unimelb.edu.au

Introduction

With over 230 museums, the State of Israel has the most museums per capita in the world. These range in size and sophistication from small house museums to those representing state-of-the-art contemporary museum design, such as the Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum. Israel's diverse assortment of museums cover time periods spanning prehistory to the present day. Not all museums are concerned with archaeology and many focus on other topics as varied as military history, grain, computers, sport, clandestine immigration, founding figures, visual art, folklore and transport.

Definition

Museums that contain archaeological exhibits are of four main types. Small museums found in *kibbutzim* mainly focus on aspects of local history and can include geological, botanical and zoological exhibits along with archaeological material. Regional museums such as the Hula Valley Regional Museum in the Upper Galilee can be more comprehensive, specialising in a particular subject such as prehistoric settlement. Site museums are connected to outdoor archaeological sites such as Masada or urban excavations such as the Burnt House or the Davidson Excavation and Virtual Reconstruction Center in Jerusalem. Large public museums such as the Eretz Israel Museum in Tel Aviv often incorporate art and ethnographic displays along with archaeological material. It is the latter type of museum, housing prominent archaeological collections, which will be covered here in chronological order according to their date of establishment.

Key Issues/Current Debates/Future Directions/Examples

Archaeology plays a significant role in the foundation narrative of the State of Israel, linking contemporary Israelis to both the ancient Israelites and the Jewish nation in ancient Palestine (Petrovato 2006). Archaeological excavation of biblical sites has been described as a “veritable form of prayer” (Ben-Yehuda 2007) and archaeological collections within museums, particularly objects dating to the First and Second Temple periods – the Iron Age, Persian, Hellenistic and early Roman periods, considered the era of the original Jewish community in Israel – assume a religious aura when appearing to substantiate the biblical account. This functions, to an extent, to legitimise the repatriation of the Jewish

disaporic community to its biblical homeland, encourages public support for the Israeli nationalist enterprise, and renders Palestinian (often referred to by the more generic term 'Arab') culture less visible (Petrovato 2006). The museums of Israel are more than simply sites of nationalistic narrative however, containing, as they do, a vast range of artifacts of immense importance to the history of the Levant as well as the wider Eastern Mediterranean and beyond.

Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem

Originally known as the Palestine Archaeological Museum, the Rockefeller Museum in East Jerusalem was established with the aid of a donation by American philanthropist, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. on the initiative of archaeologist and director of the Oriental Institute in Chicago, Henry Breasted. Designed by British architect, Austen St. Barbe Harrison, in a style incorporating elements from Eastern and Western architecture with sculpted reliefs by British artist Eric Gill and decorative tiles by the Armenian artist, David Ohanessian, the museum opened in 1938. The Rockefeller Museum was the first building constructed specifically as a national museum in Palestine in which material from excavations would be exhibited locally, rather than being exported to foreign museums. The museum houses a collection of antiquities from excavations conducted in Palestine during the period of the British mandate (1919–1948) (Ibrahim 2006). British archaeologist and first keeper of the museum, John Henry Iliffe, initially planned to include an ethnographic exhibit displaying local Palestinian culture, but was overruled by Breasted and Rockefeller. In line with Rockefeller's original stipulation, the museum consequently focused solely upon archaeology, excluding historical, biological and ethnographic exhibits (Baruch & Kudish-Vashdi). Arranged in chronological order the exhibit displays material ranging in date from the prehistoric era to the beginning of the 18th century CE. The two main galleries contain finds from major excavations in Palestine conducted in the early 20th century, while several smaller exhibition rooms are organised thematically, containing Egyptian material, decorative features and statuary from Hisham's palace near Jericho, carved wooden elements from both the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, coins, jewelry, and examples from Talmudic-period Jewish culture. Outdoors, within the arcades surrounding the pool, architectural elements, sculptures and stone sarcophagi are displayed. The museum also houses the offices and storerooms of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv

Founded in 1958 as the Haaretz Museum, the Eretz Israel Museum is situated in northern Tel Aviv, next to the Philistine archaeological site of Tel Qasile. Organised in a series of pavilions spread over the site, the museum was initiated by Tel Aviv resident, Dr. Walter Moses, who bequeathed his archaeological collection and library to the Tel Aviv municipality with the proviso that it build a museum in which to house it. Beginning with the inauguration of the glass pavilion in 1959, which houses vessels dating to between 1500 BCE to 1500 CE, subsequent pavilions would be built over the years. The Numismatic Pavilion was inaugurated in 1962 and chronicles the history of coinage and monetary systems. This was followed in 1963 by the Ethnography and Folklore Pavilion, focusing on the Jewish ritual year. The Ceramics Pavilion, installed in 1966, features ceramic objects dating to between the Chalcolithic and Classical periods from Israel, Cyprus, Egypt and Greece, as well as material from Africa and Central America. In addition, the pavilion houses objects from Tel Qasile, one of the first archaeological sites excavated within the new State of Israel, as well as the important cult furnishings from the Yavneh favissa excavated in 2002. The Man and his Work Center, displaying objects related to agriculture, crafts, domestic work, and rustic decorative arts, was established in 1982. This was followed by the Nechushtan

Pavilion in 1983, devoted to metalwork and containing material from the excavations at the copper mining site of Timna in the southern Negev, including the components of an Egyptian-Midianite temple. The Alexander Pavilion of Postal History and Philately, founded in 1998, focuses on the evolution of the mail service from the mid-19th century CE to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Finally, the Rothschild Center, inaugurated in 2006, documents the activities of Baron Edmond Benjamin James de Rothschild who was instrumental in financially supporting the development of Jewish settlements in Palestine between 1882 and 1934. The museum also includes a complex housing olive presses, one of which dates to the Iron Age II, while outdoor sites such as Mosaic Square display mosaics from a Samaritan prayer house discovered on site, as well as others from Beit Guvrin and Tiberius. In addition, the museum incorporates the excavated remains of Tel Qasile, dating to the 12th century BCE, which include the remains of temples and a street lined by workshops, storerooms and houses.

Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Situated on the famous Museum Row in Givat Ram near the Knesset (Israeli parliament) buildings, the Israel Museum was founded in 1965 as a collection dedicated to archaeology, fine art and Jewish art and life. It was initially established with the help of American funds from publishing sales of Cold War propaganda in Israel and a land grant from the Israel government. The Israel Museum is a non-profit company whose shareholders consist of the Ministry of Education, the Hebrew University, the Municipality of Jerusalem, the Bezalel School of Art, the Friends of the Bezalel Museum, and the Jewish Agency (Weyl 1995). The archaeology wing of the museum was established in 1965 by the children of Canadian businessman and philanthropist, Samuel Bronfman, to commemorate his 70th birthday, and was renewed in 2010 as part of the refurbishment and expansion of the entire museum (Snyder 2010). Displaying material mainly discovered within Israel, the museum's permanent collection of archaeology contains 6,000 artefacts, spanning the periods from prehistory to the Ottoman period. The collection primarily consists of provenanced material deriving from controlled archaeological excavations, on loan from the Israel Antiquities Authority. A smaller proportion derives from donations by private collectors (Dayagi-Mendels 2010) as well as material confiscated from dealers and looters (Orly 2002). The museum is not without its share of controversy. In 1986 the museum bought the collection of military leader, politician and notorious looter, Moshe Dayan, for US\$1,000,000, incurring protests and criticism from the Israeli archaeological community as such objects technically did not belong to a private individual to sell (Kletter 2003). In 1988 the museum paid \$550,000 for an ivory pomegranate thought, on the basis of its inscription, to come from the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem but which was later discovered to be a Bronze Age object with a fake inscription (Watzman 2005).

The archaeological collection of the Israel Museum is organised into seven separate galleries organised chronologically. 'The Dawn of Civilisation' incorporates the Early Stone Age/Lower Palaeolithic period; 'The Land of Canaan' focuses on the Early Bronze Age; and 'Israel and the Bible', features material ranging from the Early Iron Age, the Late Iron/First Temple/Destruction and Exile period, to the time of Persian rule. 'Greeks, Romans and Jews' is devoted to the Hellenistic period, including Herod's reign and the Early Roman/Second Temple period and Revolt and Destruction; and 'Under Roman Rule' covers the Late Roman period. 'The Holy Land' includes the Byzantine period, and 'Muslims and Crusaders' covers the Medieval and Late Islamic periods up to the end of Ottoman rule of Palestine in 1917. The museum also features galleries devoted to neighbouring cultures such as Anatolia, Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus, Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, Southern Arabia, Greece and Italy. Other galleries focus on the Islamic Near East, glass, coins, and early Hebrew writing (Dayagi-Mendels 2010). The grounds of the Israel Museum

also incorporate the Shrine of the Book, a highly symbolic building housing the Dead Sea Scrolls, material from the Essene community at Khirbet Qumran, and other rare and unique biblical manuscripts such as the Aleppo Codex. Funded by the Gottesman family of New York and designed by architects Armand Bartos and Frederick Kiesler, the structure evokes the shape of the jars in which the scrolls were found, while a black basalt wall contrasts with the white dome of the shrine symbolising the scroll of the *War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* (Weyl 1995).

Hecht Museum, Haifa

The Hecht Museum, situated at the University of Haifa, was established in 1984 and is based around the private archaeological collection of wealthy industrialist, Reuben Hecht, founder of the Dagon Silos and member of the University of Haifa Board of Governors. A new wing of the museum, inaugurated in 1998, consists of artefacts donated by the Hecht family, objects on loan from the Israel Antiquities Authority, and material from archaeological excavations conducted by the University of Haifa. The museum's permanent archaeological collection is designed to showcase material from the Israelite period and is divided into two sections; one laid out in chronological sequence covering the timespan from the Chalcolithic to Byzantine periods, and the other organized both chronologically and thematically. The thematic display includes material from Egypt, Cyprus, Etruria, Achziv (an archaeological site on the north coast of Israel), and Jerusalem. It incorporates an important collection of West Semitic seals, as well as weights, Jewish coins, oil lamps, games and toys, jewelry and the biblical 'Seven Species'. Also included in the collection are examples of Phoenician material culture, an exhibit devoted to ancient crafts and industries, and the Ma'agen Mikhael ancient ship. The museum also houses a collection of French Impressionist painting and Jewish art from the mid 19th to early 20th centuries.

Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem

Located on Museum Row, the Bible Lands Museum was established in 1992 and primarily consists of material from the private collection of its founder, Dr. Elie Borowski (Westenholz & Romano 2002). Intended to provide background for the *Bible*, the museum situates biblical Israel within its wider Near Eastern context, both regionally and chronologically. This is echoed in its floor plan in which the gallery dedicated to Israel is situated in the center of the building, while the other galleries encircle it. The museum contains twenty galleries arranged in chronological order and thematically titled, beginning with 'From Hunter to Urban Dweller' focusing on the prehistoric era. This is followed by 'The Coming of Civilisation' dedicated to southern Mesopotamia in the late fourth millennium and 'Symbolic Communication' containing seals. 'Literate Voices: The Beginning of Writing' focuses on cuneiform and hieroglyphic scripts and 'The Pre-Patriarchal World' concentrates on religious life and commerce in the ancient Near East of the third millennium. Next in the sequence are 'The Sumerian Temple' and 'Old Kingdom Egypt', followed by a gallery displaying Middle Bronze Age weapons. This precedes 'The Age of the Patriarchs' outlining the religions of Mesopotamia, Syria, Canaan and Egypt at the beginning of the second millennium and intended to provide a backdrop for Abraham, and this is followed by a gallery dedicated to the Exodus. Galleries displaying material culture of the Sea Peoples, Kassites, Arameans and Assyrians flank the central gallery, 'Israel Among the Nations', with the galleries assigned to the Persians, the Hellenistic period, Rome and Judea, Roman and Coptic Egypt, and Sassanian Mesopotamia completing the plan.

National Campus for the Archaeology of Israel, Jerusalem

The National Campus for the Archaeology of Israel is an ambitious project scheduled for completion at the end of 2014. Situated on Museum Hill near the Israel and Bible Lands Museums, the National Campus is a 350,000 sq. foot complex designed by Israeli architect, Moshe Safdie. Incorporating design components evocative of the landscape of archaeological excavations in Israel, the proposed building includes an enormous canopy referencing the ubiquitous black shade cloths used at Israeli excavations, and the floors are numbered from the top downwards in the manner of stratigraphical levels. Intended to house the 'Archaeological State Treasures' (antiquities excavated in Israel including the most comprehensive collection of the Dead Sea Scrolls), the National Archaeological Library, the National Archaeological Conservation and Restoration Laboratories, and the headquarters of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), it will function as the national center for the storage, conservation, restoration, curation, and publication of archaeological material excavated in Israel. It is envisaged that the center will attract international researchers, provide public education, as well as function as a tourist attraction. To this end it will house a 250 seat theatre, an education center, exhibition galleries and a rooftop exhibition garden. With an emphasis on accessibility, the building is designed so as most of its space will be visible, including the conservation and restoration laboratories and antiquities storerooms. The IAA scientific archives and the archaeological library will also be open to the public. Financed primarily by private donations, the project also receives some assistance from the Israel Ministry of Finance (*Friends of the Israel Antiquities Authority* n.p.).

The Occupied Palestinian Territories

Gaza Museum of Archaeology

A museum established from the private antiquities collection of Gaza resident and construction company owner, Jawat Khoudary. Attached to a hotel and cultural center situated on the coast near the Shati refugee camp north of Gaza City, the museum opened in 2008. It houses 350 objects dating from the Bronze Age through to 1967 and the ending of Egyptian administration of Gaza, and is intended to showcase the history and multiculturalism of the Gaza Strip (*Al-Mathaf* n.d.).

Palestinian Museum

The Palestinian Museum will be situated within the campus of Birzeit University near Ramallah on the West Bank. Designed by Irish architects, Heneghan Peng (also responsible for the Grand Egyptian Museum project), it is intended that the museum will function as the principal authoritative source of awareness and understanding regarding Palestinian history, culture and contemporary life. Structured around thematic galleries, the museum will focus upon both past and present-day aspects of Palestinian culture. Although based in Palestine, it will also function as a transnational museum with links to international Palestinians centres. The museum will be constructed in two phases, the first expected to be completed by 2014 (*E-Architect* n.p.; O'Connor 2011).

Cross-References

Antiquities, Illicit Trade of

Archaeology in Colonial Expansion, Invasion and Nation-State Building, role of
 Authenticity in the Manufacturing of Heritage
 Ethnic Identity and Archaeology
 Multiculturalism and Museums: Exhibiting Diversity
 Museum Exhibitions and Displays, and Presentation/Interpretation of Sites/Monuments to the Public
 Museums and Colonialism: the Politics of Display
 Museums and the Distortion of Archaeology for Political Purposes
 Museums and the Material Discourse of History
 Nationalism and Archaeology
 Ownership of the Past

Regional/ Site Museums

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Further Reading

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