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MARIE-LOUISE WINBLADH

ARCHAEOLOGY AS A WEAPON

Long-lasting legacies of colonialism and nationalism
in Israel, Palestine, Cyprus and Greece

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"Archaeology as a Weapon" is a compelling critique of the intersection between archaeology, politics, and cultural identity. Exploring the lasting effects of colonialism and nationalism in Israel, Palestine, Greece, and Cyprus, the book reveals how historical and archaeological narratives are shaped, manipulated, and sometimes weaponized. [...] the overall text, with meticulous research and a sharp analytical approach, challenges conventional perspectives and calls for a more ethical and decolonized approach to the study of the past.

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About the author

Marie-Louise Winbladh was the Senior Curator of the famous Cyprus Collections in Stockholm at the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities from 1971-2007. The Cyprus Collections are the largest and most important collections in the world outside Cyprus. The Swedish Cyprus Expedition (SCE) excavated throughout Cyprus between 1927 and 1931 and the total number of finds from the excavations was ca. 18,000. The number received by the Swedes in 1931 was about 12,000, or 65%. Winbladh produced exhibitions and organized the work in the storerooms with the many precious antiquities housed in the museum. She has also written several books (popular and scholar), given lectures, and performed many other tasks. Her books deal with archaeology, history and religion on Cyprus and Crete during antiquity. Winbladh has studied the archaeology, history, culture and politics of Greece and Cyprus for 30 years. Moreover, she has been working in both countries as an archaeologist, and speaks Greek fluently, which has given her useful contacts and information. Now Winbladh is a writer and independent researcher. Since 1974, she has been a member of the joint Danish-Greek-Swedish excavations in Chaniá, Crete, publishing groups of finds. These excavations have been mentioned by scholars as one of the most important projects of the last century, with unique finds. For the last few years, she has also been involved with the archaeology and politics of Israel/Palestine and has written several articles on the subject (mostly Swedish).

Summary

In Israel, Palestine, Cyprus and Greece, the reconstruction of the past through archaeology has been used to strengthen national identity. Narratives about the past and origin myths have been constructed for political purposes. Cyprus and Palestine have both suffered from British colonialism since the early twentieth century, which has had a profound influence on their cultural heritage. Through nationalism, archaeology has been exploited by far-right movements and political parties to claim ownership of heritage and has become an efficient political tool.

In Israel, archaeology and religion have been exploited to construct the Israeli state and still play a crucial role. The country claims to be the conqueror of Palestine under the protection of God, who they believe gave them possession of the land. Western religious groups are convinced that it is the religious duty of Christians to support the modern nation-state of Israel. Biblical archaeology has become an ultra-religious American speciality, marked by fraud and pseudoresearch. Notorious smuggling scandals were staged by American Christian multibillionaires buying artefacts looted from the National Museum of Iraq and other countries.

Looting, plundering and blacklisting are among the most serious problems in Cyprus, causing irreparable damage to artefacts, monuments and society. Palestine's rich archaeological, historical, and religious heritage has been undermined by occupation and land confiscation. Hundreds of sites have been looted during the Israeli occupation, and an illegal trade of ancient artefacts has occurred on a large scale.

Populism is frequently associated with extreme nationalism and racism. Over the past few years, white nationalists and supremacists have seized the history of Greece and Rome. White nationalists and neo-Nazis in the US have used the slogan "Classics Made Great Again" showing their obsession with ancient sculptures and their alleged whiteness. When visiting Jerusalem, the Trump administration promoted an evangelical program where the politics of moral superiority is associated with white Christian supremacy.

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