

# **Mount Tabor and the Politics of Archaeology in the Holy Places (1858-1924)**

## **The Custody of the Holy Land's Defence of Property Rights, Excavation Campaigns and Building Work on the Mount of Transfiguration**

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Lo studio analizza l'uso che i Francescani della Custodia di Terra Santa fanno dell'archeologia, allo scopo di assicurare legittimazione ai Luoghi santi di Palestina. Questi, infatti, si dimostrano meta sempre più ambita dai pellegrini dei santuari di Terra Santa, in un periodo in cui l'area mediorientale subisce una invasione nazionalistica, che giunge a strumentalizzare perfino la religione. Individuata la triplice scansione del fenomeno, l'autore presenta inizialmente il tentativo dei Francescani di accreditarsi come "custodi dei Luoghi santi", mediante l'esercizio del diritto di proprietà sui siti archeologici; approfondisce successivamente il confronto da essi operato con la moderna scienza archeologica, onde assicurare una base scientifica alla tradizione, fondata fino a quel momento sulle testimonianze dei pellegrini; indugia, infine, sulla monumentalizzazione dei medesimi siti archeologici, operata mediante il passaggio, per così dire, dalla fase archeologica a quella architettonica, nuova strategia politico-religiosa per legittimare i Luoghi santi.

### *Digging for God and His Pilgrims*

*Digging for God and Country* by Neil Asher Silberman (1982),<sup>1</sup> now a classic of the history of Middle Eastern Biblical archaeology, draws particular attention to the ties between the study of ancient ruins and nationalistic interests. An unequivocal tendency to view the history of the archaeology of Middle Eastern Biblical sites against the background of European politics and nationalism is displayed by a series of volumes published between the late 1980s and the middle of the following decade. For example, fascinating long discussions between archaeologists, pilgrims and consuls, united by their passion for the exploration of Palestine, are recounted by Naomi Shepherd in her 1987 study *The Zealous Intruders*.<sup>2</sup> The post-colonial and postmodern perspective which dominates the historiography of the following period has further contributed to highlighting the political,

<sup>1</sup> N.A. Silberman, *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archaeology, and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1799-1917*, New York 1982; a similar work, published the following year, was that by P.J. King, *American Archaeology in the Mideast: A History of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Sheffield Academic Pr, Sheffield 1983.

<sup>2</sup> N. Shepherd, *The Zealous Intruders: the Western Rediscovery of Palestine*, San Francisco 1987; on the history of archaeology in the Middle East, see also: P.R.S. Moorey, *A Century of Biblical Archaeology*, Cambridge 1991; L. Vogel, *To See a Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pa 1993; J. Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1996.