ne analysis pinpointing the most likely date to about 930 B.C.E.

The radiocarbon data have yet to be published, but even without them, Barkai, Amihai Mazar, and most other archaeologists who work in the area say that Jerusalem’s pottery-based chronology is good enough, if inexact. Others—including Finkelstein—vehemently disagree and are agitating for a more accurate system that anchors the pottery firmly to radiocarbon dates. They point to the many carbon-14 samples obtained to the north of walled Jerusalem, east of the highlands of the era.

Finkelstein’s and Greenberg’s views are angrily challenged by many Jerusalem archaeologists, who accuse them of taking an extreme “minimalist” view that the Bible offers little or no guidance for historians. “I believe in the accuracy of the biblical accounts—I don’t think they invented King Solomon,” declares Barkai. But she insists her attachment is purely scholarly: “I’ve never felt a religious connection to my work.”

The connection, however, is deeply felt. She was outraged in 2000 when she learned of building activities on the Temple Mount, an important site that is called the Harim al-Sharif by Muslims, who have controlled it for most of the last millennium. Mazar formed a committee to protest destruction of antiquities on the site but was disappointed when Israeli authorities took little action. She adds that her protest is not religious or political: “Islamic monuments are being destroyed too. This is a site important to the world’s cultural heritage.”

But some Palestinians find that hard to square with Israel’s own policy about excavations. Hamed Salem, a Birzeit University archaeologist who lives near Mazar’s current dig, explains that “the Palestinian view is that this dig is illegal” because the territory is considered occupied by the Israelis under international law. “Archaeology is supposed to be neutral,” says Salem. “The conclusions which come out of this excavation will not be on a purely scientific basis.” And a few Israeli archaeologists fear that her funding, which comes through Jerusalem’s Shalem Center, a Jewish research institute, creates at least the appearance of a nationalistic rather than purely scientific endeavor.

Mazar, however, insists that she is not digging to prove anyone’s preconceived notions. “I’m trying my best,” she says, “to keep an open mind.” –A.L.

All in the Family

As a young archaeologist digging in the City of David, an ancient site just south of walled Jerusalem, Eilat Mazar unearthed huge pottery vessels buried just before Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, destroyed Jerusalem 2500 years ago. The pots were stamped with ancient Hebrew writing—and she could read it. The moment crystallized her sense of belonging to the contested city. “This was my language, not some foreign tongue, and it speaks to who I am today and where I was born,” Mazar says.

Today, at 50, Hebrew University archaeologist Mazar is wrapping up a second season uncovering what could be the most significant archaeological find in Jerusalem’s history: the palace of the king who, according to biblical texts, united the ancient Israelites (see main text). For her, excavating in Jerusalem is more than a purely scientific endeavor; it is also a family affair, heavily steeped in the complex history, politics, and religion of the place.

Mazar grew up in a secular home which nonetheless included innumerable editions of the Bible and commentaries on it. She still prizes the Bible once owned by her grandfather, Benjamin Mazar, a renowned archaeologist and Polish emigrant. “He was my main teacher relative to thinking and methodology, and how to combine historical sources with archaeology,” she says. Mazar’s attachment to those sources is legendary; she is fond of saying that she digs with one hand while holding the Bible in the other. But she insists her attachment is purely scholarly: “I’ve never felt a religious connection to my work.”

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