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To cite this article: Neil Bar & Harel Chorev Halewa (26 May 2025): Constructed Autochthony: Palestinian Nationalist Historical Revisionism, The Journal of the Middle East and Africa, DOI: [10.1080/21520844.2025.2500763](https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2025.2500763)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2025.2500763>



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Published online: 26 May 2025.



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Constructed Autochthony: Palestinian Nationalist Historical Revisionism

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ABSTRACT

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is fueled by contested historical narratives. This article examines how Palestinian elites have systematically re-engineered select periods and figures from antiquity to reinforce national identity while undermining rival Zionist claims. We analyze three interrelated narratives: Solomon Temple denial, appropriation of Canaanite ancestry, and the Palestinization of Jesus Christ. Through examination of official pronouncements, religious sermons, educational materials, and media content, we demonstrate how these narratives form a coherent nation-building project that simultaneously asserts Palestinian continuity on the land and challenges Jewish historical claims. Grounded in theoretical frameworks of chosen glories and vicarious identity, this study reveals how these revisionist accounts aim to foster collective pride and challenge the perception of Jews as an ancient nation. The findings illuminate how the refashioning of history shapes both Palestinian self-perception and the broader framing of the conflict.

KEYWORDS

Palestine; revisionism;
Temple Mount; Canaanites;
Israel; Jesus

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is arguably the most disputed in modern history, encompassing national, religious, ideological, ethnic, and political dimensions. However, at its core it is defined by a profound historical disagreement over the question of primacy or indigeneity – essentially, who was “here” first. Generally speaking, Israelis claim that Arabs first arrived in Eretz Israel/Palestine following the Arab-Muslim conquests in the seventh century CE and continued in-immigration into the twentieth century, long after the events described in the Bible that established a three-millennia-old Jewish connection to the land. Conversely, Palestinians generally contend that modern Israel is the product of Western settler-colonialism, founded by European refugees and immigrants who embraced Zionism, a European concept of Jewish nationalism. They broadly reject the idea that Jews constitute a national group entitled to self-determination and sovereign rights, regarding them instead as members of a religious community.

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Against this backdrop, this article examines how Palestinian elites have actively engaged in constructing national-historical narratives since the turn of the twenty-first century. These narratives are carefully crafted and often include the outright denial of key elements of Jewish history such as the existence of the ancient Solomon Temple in Jerusalem (known as the First Temple) – an approach that directly challenges core Jewish claims and religious-historical ties to the land. Those narratives also extend to the “Palestinization” of religious figures, most notably recasting Jesus Christ as Palestinian, thereby reinforcing a sense of indigenous identity tied to revered major religious-historical figures. In other cases, these efforts emphasize Palestinian autochthony by portraying Palestinians as descendants of the ancient Canaanites, thereby countering Israeli assertions of historical precedence. Taken together, these competing historical visions highlight the central role that contested narratives play in fueling and perpetuating this deeply entrenched conflict. By examining speeches, publications, and media presentations, this analysis reveals how these narratives are not only a response to the geopolitical conflict, but also an attempt to shape the historical consciousness of both international and domestic audiences.

There is a good reason why history stands at the base of this dispute. The role of historical narratives and myths in nation-building has been extensively analyzed, revealing that history is foundational to how nations forge identities through imagined communities and sometimes invented traditions.¹ This established perspective is widely accepted among scholars studying the influence of historical narratives on nation-building. This well-trodden path has demonstrated increasing theoretical interest in how national history contributes to the definition of national identity and has shown repeatedly that a group’s representation of its history fundamentally conditions its sense of what it was, is, can be, and should be, thereby playing a crucial role in the construction of its identity, norms, and values. These narratives also delineate a trajectory that aids in constructing the essence of a group’s identity, how it interacts with other groups, and what its options are for addressing current challenges.²

Given the established role of historical narratives in shaping national identities, it is clear why *ancient* history is emphasized in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both nations are competing for the same territorial and historical heritage, and both seek to validate their claims through deep

¹Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. and extended ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²James H. Liu and Denis J. Hilton, “How the Past Weighs on the Present: Social Representations of History and Their Role in Identity Politics,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 44, no. 4 (2005): 537–56; Tibor Pólya, “National History Contributes to the Definition of National Identity,” *Journal of Psychology Research* 7, no. 8 (2017); Eerika Finell and Karmela Liebkind, “National Symbols and Distinctiveness: Rhetorical Strategies in Creating Distinct National Identities,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 49, no. 2 (2010): 321–41.

historical roots.³ The emphasis in the nationalist discourse on ancient history specifically, rather than contemporary or modern history, extends beyond simple nostalgia or appreciation for the past. It is utilized to represent a longstanding and prestigious cultural legacy. Such historical connections are used to validate and legitimize contemporary viewpoints and actions, suggesting that today's political claims are rooted in long-standing traditions rather than recent innovations.

This association with antiquity and even prehistory not only underscores continuity but also enhances a group's claim to superiority and rightful recognition compared to others. This dynamic is particularly pronounced when the nation in question is emerging in direct contestation with another nation over the same territory and historical landmarks. Thus, history is a cornerstone with fundamental consequences for a group's identity as a whole. Because of its significant impact on contemporary politics, historical narratives are easily prone to being re-engineered and revised to suit modern agendas, constraints, and shifting realities. Several sociological and psychological theoretical frameworks explain this phenomenon.

Vicarious identity is a concept that elucidates how individuals or groups construct their self-identity, purpose, and self-esteem through appropriating the achievements and experiences of others, particularly those from historical contexts. This phenomenon involves a deeper psychological process wherein individuals integrate these past successes or experiences into their own identity framework. For instance, the success of a sports team can engender a profound sense of personal pride among its supporters, despite their lack of direct involvement in the competitions. Similarly, parents may derive a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment from their children's achievements. This phenomenon also permeates historical and cultural dimensions, where individuals often identify with the accomplishments of their supposed ancestors or cultural icons, viewing these achievements as integral to their own heritage. Such identification fosters a sense of continuity, pride, and belonging, effectively linking individuals to a broader narrative that extends beyond their personal experiences.⁴

Chosen glories is another concept, that refers to selectively chosen historical events, achievements, or eras that a group celebrates with pride, representing the high points in its history that foster a sense of collective self-esteem and identity. These can include significant victories, cultural golden ages, or major scientific and artistic accomplishments, often commemorated through various rituals, educational narratives, and public discourse. All of these are not objective historical facts, rather they are emotionally and symbolically charged,

³For the Israeli case, see Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁴Christopher S. Browning, Pertti Joenniemi, and Brent J. Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations: Self, Security, and Status on the Global Stage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

forming an integral part of the narrative a group constructs about itself. These narratives influence the group's current attitudes, behaviors, and intergroup relations.⁵

In situations of territorial disputes or conflicts over historical primacy, chosen glories might serve as a strategic tool for asserting legitimacy and strengthening claims to the land. By emphasizing significant historical achievements, groups establish a narrative of longstanding and continuous presence, fostering a cohesive national identity and instilling pride in their past. These celebrated events and accomplishments legitimize territorial claims, mobilize internal and external support, and counteract opposing historical narratives. Through educational systems, public commemorations, and cultural rituals, these narratives are perpetuated and reinforced over generations, ensuring they remain a central part of the group's identity and collective memory.

In parallel, in the Palestinian case, these constructed and essentially political narratives strive to invalidate the Jewish-Zionist claim of historical continuity and autochthony by contesting the historical existence of Solomon's Temple on the Jerusalem site known as *Har ha-Bait* (Temple Mount) in Hebrew, or, in Arabic, the *Haram al-Sharif*. The strategic formulation of these narratives serves a dual purpose: first, to affirm and reinforce a Palestinian historical claim to the land that predates and contradicts other historical claims, and second, to challenge and undermine the historical narratives that are central to Zionist ideology.

Moreover, while Palestinian elites often contest the existence of Solomon's Temple, this article's authors have failed to locate any mention of Herod's Temple in Palestinian statements, constructed around 20 BCE. This omission is especially significant because many of the visible remains on today's Temple Mount are in fact remnants of Herod's extensive renovations. Herod, a Jewish king whose historical existence is well-documented, left behind architectural evidence that is impossible to deny. Thus, the selective nature of these historical claims and omissions underscores the inherently political motives behind the narratives and the complexities that arise when historical memory is contested in pursuit of nationalist objectives.

This phenomenon of Palestinian historical revisionism has already been identified by scholars, such as Litvak, Luz, Reiter, and Barnett, but these works are few and primarily written in Hebrew for domestic audiences. Additionally, all of these scholars have focused on these revisionist attempts separately, each spotlighting Temple denial and the Canaanization of the Palestinians as two distinct narratives. These works shall be cited all through this article.

This study aims to provide a more holistic treatment of this under-researched topic by comparing and combining three narratives. We argue that these

⁵Vamik D. Volkan, *Psychoanalysis, International Relations, and Diplomacy: A Sourcebook on Large-Group Psychology* (Boca Raton, FL: Routledge, 2018).

attempts at re-engineering the past share the same objectives, serving as illustrative examples of the strategic promotion of vicarious national-historical narratives as tools for Palestinian nation-building while focusing on a very carefully chosen glory. All three narratives converge on a common objective: the cementing of Palestinian autochthony and connection to the land. This is accomplished by simultaneously depicting Jesus Christ as a Palestinian – thus claiming that even ancient Jews were in fact Palestinians – and by denying the historical existence of Solomon’s Temple while also tracing modern Palestinians’ lineage back to the ancient Canaanites. In doing so, these narratives serve to negate the Jewish claim to the land and undermine the Zionist assertion that Jews are a distinct national group entitled to self-determination. By comparing the three narratives, we can have a fuller picture of the historical revisionism conducted by Palestinian elites to promote modern and contemporary political goals and objectives, as opposed to genuine historical study.

In what follows, the article will proceed in three main parts: first, by examining the phenomenon of Temple denial and its implications for historical claims and legitimacy; second, by exploring the process of “Canaanization,” through which Palestinians seek to establish an autochthonous lineage to the land; and finally, by analyzing how Jesus is “Palestinianized” to further reinforce these narratives and contest Jewish historical ties to the region.

Temple denial

Before we begin our analytical part, it is important to contextualize the discourse we are about to examine and the claim to be revised. Up to the very start of Palestinian nationalism in the early twentieth century, the Jewishness of Jerusalem and the existence of Solomon’s Temple in its midst were widely undisputed. As we shall see below, this historical consensus was accepted by various scholars, historians, and political entities. This acknowledgment was based on testimonies dating back from antiquity to the modern age, written by Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Polytheist writers alike.

For example, already in the fourth century BCE, the Greek historian Hecataeus of Abdera (c. 360 BCE – c. 290 BCE), whose works did not survive but were preserved in fragments in other works such as those of Josephus and Diodorus Siculus, described at length (and rather anachronistically) the foundation of Jerusalem by the Jewish leader Moses. Diodorus detailed the Temple enclosure, the Temple building itself with its golden altar and Menorah, and noted the absence of statues or sacred plants, highlighting the aniconic nature of Jewish worship.⁶ Additionally, Roman historians such as Livy (59 BCE – 17 CE), Tacitus (c. 56 CE – c. 120 CE), and Cassius Dio (c. 165 CE – c. 235 CE)

⁶Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, 40.3, trans. C. H. Oldfather (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933); Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, 196–201, trans. Steve Mason, *Josephus Flavius: Translation and Commentary*, vol. 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

among others, also described the Temple in Jerusalem and its connection to the Jews and the Jewish faith.⁷ Various other sources from the medieval period also acknowledge the existence of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. For instance, Saint Bede (c. 673 CE – 735 CE) wrote an entire book on the subject, and numerous maps from the Crusader period clearly depict the location of *Templum Salomonis*.⁸

What is more telling is the fact that even Muslim authors during the modern age, under the Ottoman and British occupations, did not dispute the existence of the Jewish temple at its accepted location. Indeed, such acceptance had deep roots. Early Islamic naming conventions and historiography point to the very same identification. Before the tenth century, when the name *al-Quds* became dominant, Muslims referred to Jerusalem as *Ilya* (from the Roman *Aelia*) and *Beit al-Maqdis*, an Arabic rendering of the Hebrew *Beit HaMikdash* meaning “House of the Temple.”⁹ Indeed, the city bore that Arabic name (*al-Quds*) precisely because it was understood to contain the ancient Jewish Temple. Islamic narrative traditions known as the *Isra'iliyyat*, together with historians and travelers beginning with al-Tabari, explicitly placed the Israelite Temple on the present day *Haram al-Sharif*.¹⁰ Throughout the formative and classical centuries of Islam, the Temple's location in Jerusalem was therefore taken for granted.

This longstanding consensus continued into the modern era. For example, Ahmed Jamal Pasha, the Ottoman Governor of Syria, admitted in 1918 that the Dome of the Rock stands where Solomon's and Herod's temples once stood.¹¹ Moreover, during the British Mandate, the Supreme Muslim Council (SMC), led by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husayni, published a yearly guidebook in English for tourists on the Temple Mount. This guidebook repeatedly stated that “[the sanctuary's] identity with the site of Solomon's Temple is beyond dispute. This, too, is the spot, according to the universal belief, on which David built there an altar unto the Lord...”¹² However, despite these historical acknowledgments, the SMC today denies any Jewish right to the Temple Mount.

⁷Livy, *Scholia in Lucani Bellum Civile*, 2.593, trans. H. Usener, (Leipzig: B.G. Teubneri, 1869); Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *Historiae*, 5.18, trans. Ronald Mellor (New York: Routledge, 1994); Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 69.12, *Dio's Roman History*, vol. 8, Books LXI-LXX, reprint ed., *The Loeb Classical Library*, 176 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁸Bede, *On the Temple*, trans. Seán Connolly, Translated Texts for Historians 21 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995); Silvia Rozenberg, ed., *Knights of the Holy Land: The Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*, Weisbord Exhibition Pavilion, Summer-Fall 1999 (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1999).

⁹Peri, Oded. “Islamic Law and Christian Holy Sites: Jerusalem and Its Vicinity in Early Ottoman Times,” *Islamic Law and Society* 6, no. 1 (1999): 97–111; al-Tel, othman Ismail, “The Geographical Boundaries of Aelia (Jerusalem) During the Byzantine Rule (135–638 A.D): Islamic Perspective,” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 7, (2012): 41–60.

¹⁰Yitzhak Reiter and Dvir Dimant, *Islam, Jews and the Temple Mount* (London: Routledge, 2020).

¹¹Ahmed Djemal Pascha and Theodor Wiegand, *Suriye ve Filistin ve Garbi Arabistan Abidat-ı Atikesi/Alte Denkmäler Aus Syrien, Palästina Und Westarabien* (Berlin: Verlag Georg Reimer, 1918).

¹²*A Brief Guide to Al-Haram al-Sharif* (Jerusalem: Supreme Muslim Council, 1924); *A Brief Guide to Al-Haram al-Sharif* (Jerusalem: Supreme Muslim Council, 1925), (accessed April 17, 2024). https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/supreme_Moslem_Council_Guide_1925.pdf.

As mentioned above, scholars have already noticed the phenomenon of Temple denial by Palestinian religious and academic figures, which boomed after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem following the 1967 Six-Day War.¹³ Yet this denial was framed as an attempt to gain an advantage in the interreligious competition for control over Jerusalem. However, scholars did not connect this phenomenon to a broader strategy, wherein religious symbols are employed in a larger effort to assert the primacy of one ethnic and national group over the other.¹⁴

The most quoted incident of Temple denial occurred during the 2000 Camp David Summit, where Yasser Arafat, then Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, and his chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat, claimed in front of American President Bill Clinton that “the whole story of the Temple was just a Jewish invention with no historical basis.” When Clinton intervened, stating that not only Jews but most Christians also recognize the existence of the Temple on the Temple Mount, Arafat responded with a lecture, which he repeated on several occasions after the summit.¹⁵ He asserted that the Jewish Temple actually existed not in Jerusalem but in Yemen and that he had even visited the site in which the actual Temple had once stood.¹⁶

These alternative locations were not invented in a vacuum. Arafat’s Yemen thesis echoed the claims of Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi, whose book *The Bible Came from Arabia*¹⁷ placed biblical Jerusalem in the ‘Asir region of southwestern Arabia, an idea most scholars consider speculative and methodologically unsound. On other occasions, Arafat suggested Mount Gerizim, overlooking Nablus, as the true Temple site,¹⁸ presumably because the mountain had once housed the Samaritan sanctuary and thus offered a non-Jewish sacred pedigree. By circulating more than one putative location, Arafat sought to weaken the uniquely Jewish association with the present-day *Haram al-Sharif*.

This incident is usually framed in a religious context and not in a nationalist one, which is meant to negate the Zionist claim over Jerusalem (and the entirety of the land) and fortify the Palestinian one. Yet Arafat’s claims during the 2000 Camp David Summit can also be understood as part of a broader strategy to vicariously re-engineer historical narratives and assert Palestinian national and ethnic primacy. By denying the existence of the Jewish Temple in

¹³David Barnett, “The Mounting Problem of Temple Denial,” *Middle East Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (2011); Yitzhak Reiter, *Jerusalem and its Role in Islamic Solidarity*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 37–63.

¹⁴In fact, Luz did acknowledge this, although very briefly. See Nimrod Luz, “Al-Haram Al-Sharif in the Arab-Palestinian Public Discourse in Israel: Identity, Collective Memory and Social Construction” (The Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies, 2004), 39–42.

¹⁵Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Prophets without Honor: The 2000 Camp David Summit and the End of the Two-State Solution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 106–7; Reiter, *Jerusalem and Its Role in Islamic Solidarity*, 37.

¹⁶Reiter, *Jerusalem and its Role in Islamic Solidarity*, 37.

¹⁷Kamal Salibi, *The Bible Came from Arabia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985).

¹⁸Barnett, “The Mounting Problem of Temple Denial,” 22.

Jerusalem, Arafat aimed to undermine the Jewish historical and religious connection to the Temple Mount and delegitimize Israeli claims to the city. This denial also served to consolidate Palestinian national identity by challenging the Jewish historical narrative and promoting a distinct Palestinian narrative through a chosen glory.

This is evident in Erekat's recollection of the events in an *Al-Jazeera* debate in 2009, where he said that after Clinton tried to persuade Arafat to recognize that the Jewish Temple lies beneath the *Haram*, Arafat responded "defiantly," stating that he was not willing to be a traitor to the Palestinian cause and that "Jerusalem will be nothing but the capital of the Palestinian state, and there is nothing underneath or above the *Haram Al-Sharif* except for Allah."¹⁹ This claim is even more evident in the statements of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu-Mazen), who was then the PLO Executive Committee Chairman and later Arafat's successor, in an interview with *Al-Hayat* a few months after the summit:

[at Camp David] the Israelis and Americans [...] dropped the bomb of their demand for sovereignty over the Haram, claiming that the remnants of the Haykal Suleiman [the Temple] lie in or beneath the plaza of the Haram Al-Sharif. [...] Naturally, we rejected this. [...] Our position on Jerusalem remains simple and completely uncomplicated: Jerusalem is part of the lands occupied in 1967. [...] Jerusalem must return to our sovereignty, and we will establish our capital in it.²⁰

These claims are not unique to one side of the Palestinian political spectrum, nor are they confined solely to the PLO and Fatah. This nationwide revisionism can also be seen in its usage by Hamas, the chief opponent of Fatah. In territories controlled by Hamas, this revisionism is being disseminated from the top down, through religious preaching and educational programs.

For example, during the 2015–16 "Knife Intifada," Sheikh Muhammad Sallah, a preacher at the Al-Abrar Mosque in Hamas-controlled Rafah in the Gaza Strip, brandished a large knife during a sermon and encouraged Palestinians in the West Bank to stab Israelis: "My brother in the West Bank: Stab the myths of the Talmud in their minds! My brother in the West Bank: Stab the myths about the temple in their hearts!"²¹

In another example, on July 15, 2022, an episode of "Pioneers of Tomorrow," (*Ruad al-Ghad*) a children's show broadcast on Hamas-controlled *Al-Aqsa* TV, featured a segment with a man-sized puppet hosting a discussion with a young girl and boy about Jerusalem. During this interaction, the puppet

¹⁹"Chief Palestinian Negotiator Saeb Erekat: 'Abbas Rejected Israel's Proposal at Annapolis Like Arafat Rejected the Camp David 2000 Proposal,'" MEMRI, April 16, 2009, <https://www.memri.org/reports/chief-palestinian-negotiator-saeb-erekat-abbas-rejected-israels-proposal-annapolis-arafat>.

²⁰Yael Yehoshua, "Abu Mazen: A Political Profile," MEMRI, April 29, 2003, <https://www.memri.org/reports/abu-mazen-political-profile>.

²¹"Rafah Cleric Brandishes Knife in Friday Sermon, Calls Upon Palestinians to Stab Jews," MEMRI, October 8, 2015, <https://www.memri.org/tv/rafah-cleric-brandishes-knife-friday-sermon-calls-upon-palestinians-stab-jews>.

inquired theatrically, “What is the Zionist entity plotting?” In response, the young boy articulated with evident pathos, “They want to build the false Solomon’s Temple. (...) I want to stress that this is not true. It never existed, and it will never be built.”²²

These kinds of messages are repeatedly voiced by Palestinian elites, and examples of this are numerous, but a few will suffice to prove the point: Mahmoud Al-Zahar, a senior Hamas official, was interviewed in April 2005 by the Hezbollah news outlet in Lebanon, *Al-Manar*, where he stated:

This temple is the symbol of their religion. Where is their religion now? [...] It [the Torah] is known to be a fabrication. That’s why I say that these people have no right to this land, for they were only created by colonialism ...²³

Similar arguments were voiced by the Deputy Chairman of Hamas’s Political Bureau, Saleh Al-Arouri, in an interview with Hamas’ *Al-Aqsa TV* in 2021:

The Jews’ immigration to Palestine from all corners of the world, in order to establish their state, was based on the myth that Jerusalem had been their capital and that they had a temple there, that Jerusalem belongs to them, and that it is their Promised Land. These are the myths that they have invented out of thin air.²⁴

By questioning the existence of the Jewish Temple and the very authenticity of the Torah, these statements aim to undermine the historical and religious claims that Jews have to the land, thereby refuting the Zionist narrative of an ancient and continuous Jewish connection to Jerusalem. By calling the Torah a fabrication and describing the Jewish connection to Jerusalem as a myth, they seek to delegitimize one of the key bases upon which the state of Israel claims its right to exist.

This rhetoric is designed to galvanize support among Palestinians and the broader Arab and Muslim community by appealing to shared sentiments of anti-colonialism and solidarity. Politically, denying Jewish historical claims strengthens the Palestinian negotiating position both locally and internationally while maintaining a unified Palestinian narrative that Jerusalem and the land of Palestine are inherently and exclusively Palestinian. Additionally, framing the conflict in terms of colonialism and fabricated history aims to influence international perception, garnering sympathy and support from

²²“Children in Hamas TV Kids’ Show: The Criminal Jews Are Plotting to Replace Al-Aqsa Mosque with Their False Temple,” MEMRI, July 21, 2022, <https://www.memri.org/reports/children-hamas-tv-kids-show-criminal-jews-are-plotting-replace-al-aqsa-mosque-their-false>.

²³“Senior Hamas Official Mahmoud Al-Zahar: The Jews Have No Right to the Land of Palestine; The Torah is a Fabrication,” MEMRI, April 13, 2005, <https://www.memri.org/tv/senior-hamas-official-mahmoud-al-zahar-jews-have-no-right-land-palestine-torah-fabrication>.

²⁴“Saleh Al-Arouri, Deputy Chairman of Hamas’s Political Bureau: We Can Continue Fighting for Many Months,” MEMRI, May 13, 2021, <https://www.memri.org/tv/hamas-saleh-arouri-we-can-continue-fighting-for-many-months>.

global audiences opposed to colonialism and sympathetic to indigenous rights movements.

One of the most frequently repeated motifs in this revisionist narrative is attempts to *empirically* prove that the Jewish Temple never existed. This motif is essentially an almost word-for-word repetition of Arafat's arguments made in an interview given to *Al-Hayat* in October 2002, where he stated, "For 34 years they have dug tunnels [...] They found not a single stone proving that the Temple of Solomon was there, because historically the Temple was not in Palestine."²⁵

Arafat's claims are not entirely accurate. After the Six-Day War, Israel inherited the Ottoman and British *status quo* regarding the holy places.²⁶ Despite criticism from various factions within, Israel has maintained delicate handling of the Temple Mount and has not conducted archeological excavations on the *Haram* complex.²⁷ So much so that, after repeated requests, the Israeli Supreme Court issued a directive in 1988 that forbids Israeli authorities from conducting any actions inside the complex.²⁸

However, while digging on the actual site of the Temple itself is impossible due to religious and national sensitivities, the Israel Antiquities Authority has been conducting archeological expeditions around the complex, in areas where the Jordanian *Waqf* is not in charge. In the areas that can be excavated, archeologists have retrieved many items linked to First Temple religious life. A key discovery is the stepped stone structure and its adjoining massive walls just south of the mount. Kathleen Kenyon dated these fortifications to roughly the tenth century BCE and identified them as part of Solomon's royal palace quarter that bordered, rather than occupied, the Temple enclosure.²⁹ Although these remains are not pieces of the sanctuary itself, they demonstrate substantial Judahite construction beside the later *Haram* and thus affirm the site's First Temple period importance.

This revisionism is frequently repeated by the Palestinian elite on all sides of the spectrum. In January 2001, 'Ikrima Sabri, the Mufti of the Palestinian Authority gave an interview to the German newspaper *Die Welt*, where he was asked questions concerning his role as a Palestinian religious leader. Among the answers he gave, he noted:

²⁵"Interview with Yasser Arafat," MEMRI, October 11, 2002, <https://www.memri.org/reports/interview-yasser-arafat>.

²⁶The Ottoman status quo primarily concerned Christian sites, but under British rule, it was expanded to include Muslim and Jewish sites as well.

²⁷Ifrah Zilberman, "Jerusalem and Ayodhya – A Profile of Religious and Political Radicalism" (The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1997), 10–12.

²⁸Gideon Avni and Jon Seligman, *The Temple Mount 1917–2001: Documentation, Research and Inspection of Antiquities* (Israel Antiquities Authority, 2001), 25–27.

²⁹Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Digging up Jerusalem* (London: Benn, 1974). Other artifacts related to Jewish prayer customs, dating to the end of the Bronze Age, were found in the vicinity of the complex. See Meir Ben-Dov, *The Dig at the Temple Mount* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1982), 35–37; Mordechai Naor, *Jerusalem a City and a Nation: From King David to Our Days* (Jerusalem: Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, 1995), 16–20. It is also worth noting independent projects, such as "Temple Mount Sifting Project," accessed June 6, 2024, <https://tmsifting.org/en/home/>.

There is not [even] the smallest indication of the existence of a Jewish temple on this place in the past. In the whole city, there is not even a single stone indicating Jewish History. Our right, on the other hand, is very clear. This place belongs to us for 1500 years. [...] The Jews do not even know exactly where their temple stood. Therefore, we do not accept that they have any rights, underneath the surface or above it.³⁰

In August 2010, a Palestinian employee of the United Nations, Zaid Nabulsi, wrote a column for the *Saudi Arab News*, in which he stated that Zionism is “a terrible disease of the mind.” In this column, he also claimed that Jews have nothing in common with the land. Among his proofs was the claimed lack of evidence for the existence of the Temple:

All Zionist archaeologists have failed—after digging up every conceivable corner of Palestine for the last 62 years—to come up with a single credible Jewish teapot or tablespoon, let alone excavate an alleged Jewish temple ...³¹

Similarly, in February 2017, Omar Al-Ghoul, former advisor to Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, published an article in *Al-Hayat* attacking the Secretary-General of the UN, António Guterres, following an interview he gave to an Israeli radio station where he stated that it is “completely clear that the temple which was demolished by the Romans was a Jewish temple.”

If you are interested in history, and committed to it, Mr. António, [then you should know that] Jerusalem and all of Palestine from the river to the sea, belong to the Palestinian people, and their history is its history. [...] Solomon’s Temple does not exist and never existed in Palestine. The Israelis have been excavating across the entire land for nearly a century since fully occupying it in June 1967 and have found nothing related to Judaism in all of Palestine, not just in Jerusalem.³²

These claims were repeated almost exactly in June 2021 by Mohammad Shtayyeh, the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister, during an interview with *Al-Jazeera* where he notes that “[s]ince 1967, when it occupied the West Bank, and to this day, Israel has conducted a number of [archeological] digs underneath the al-Aqsa Mosque, but failed to prove anything about a [Jewish] temple or whatever.”³³

³⁰“The PA Mufti: Jews From Germany Should Return There,” MEMRI, January 26, 2001, <https://www.memri.org/reports/pa-mufti-jews-germany-should-return-there>.

³¹Zaid Nabulsi, “A Terrible Disease of the Mind,” *Arab News*, August. 24, 2010, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/353429>.

³²“Palestinian Columnist in Response to UN Secretary-General’s Statements on Jerusalem’s Jewish Connection,” MEMRI, Feb. 1, 2017, <https://www.memri.org/reports/palestinian-columnist-response-un-secretary-generals-statements-jerusalems-jewish-connection>.

³³“Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh: Despite Several Archeological Digs Under the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Israel Was Never Able to Find Proof of the Existence of a Jewish Temple,” MEMRI, June 7, 2021, <https://www.memri.org/tv/palestinian-pm-mohammad-shtayyeh-despite-archeological-digs-under-al-aqsa-mosque-israel-found-no-proof-of-jewish-temple>.

Canaanization of the Palestinians

A second part of Palestinian historical revisionism is the vicarious appropriation of the ancient Canaanites. While Temple denial is primarily focused on negating Zionist claims by disputing the historical Jewish connection to Jerusalem, the appropriation of Canaanite ancestry serves a more positive, reflective, and inward-focused purpose, by a carefully selective chosen glory. This argument not only contrasts Zionist narratives but also fortifies the Palestinian claim to the land by establishing a narrative of continuous and ancient presence in the region.

The goals here are similar, and the motives for claiming descent from the ancient Canaanites are closely related to the Palestinians' narrative of denying the existence of Solomon's Temple, with both strategies serving to assert Palestinian historical and cultural primacy over the land. By appropriating the legacy of the ancient Canaanites, Palestinian nationalists aim to establish a narrative that predates Jewish historical claims, thereby reinforcing their own autochthony and deep-rooted connection to the land. This appropriation serves to legitimize Palestinian claims to the territory by presenting Palestinians as the original and continuous inhabitants of the region.

Historically, aside from biblical testimonies, it is evident from archeological finds that when the Israelites allegedly entered what they called the Promised Land, they took possession of a land already fully occupied.³⁴ This historical context makes contemporary Palestinians very prone to appropriating the narratives of these ancient inhabitants for obvious reasons and contemporary motives. While the arguments vary, their motivation is always the same: to assert that Palestinian ancestry derives from those enigmatic people who revolutionized aspects of material culture in the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000 – 1550 BCE) and were later expelled or subjected by the ancient Israelites.³⁵ By claiming descent from these ancient Canaanites, Palestinians aim to fortify their historical claims and primacy over the Jews in the ongoing conflict with Israel.

³⁴Kathleen Kenyon, *Amorites and Canaanites, Schweich Lectures on Biblical Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1. Recent archeological research offers a more nuanced reconstruction of early Israel. Field surveys and excavations indicate that the Iron Age Israelite population arose from within Canaan itself rather than arriving as an external conquering force. Continuity in pottery styles and village layouts links highland Late Bronze settlements to later Israelite sites, suggesting an indigenous community that reshaped its social and religious identity before gradually extending control over neighboring city states. Key tels such as Jericho and Ai, long considered emblematic conquest targets, show no destruction horizons that match the dramatic military sweep described in the Book of Joshua. Taken together, the material record points to a slow internal transformation rather than a single, outside invasion. See further: Brett, Mark. "Israel's Indigenous Origins: Cultural Hybridity and the Formation of Israelite Ethnicity," *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3 (2003): 400–12; Avraham Faust, "The Emergence of Iron Age Israel: On Origins and Habitus," in *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider, and William H.C. Propp (Cham: Springer, 2015), 467–82.

³⁵Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10000–586 B.C.E.*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 175.

Unlike the Temple argument, the Canaanite question is not one that can be easily negated or proven by historiographical or archeological means. The Canaanites left no written testimonies behind, and their presence faded from the pages of history over time (largely thanks to the Jewish kingdoms that rose over their destruction), making it difficult to definitively link them to any modern group through traditional historical methods.

However, genetic studies have proven unanimously that modern Palestinians are indeed genetically linked to the ancient Canaanites and Philistines.³⁶ Yet, it is overlooked by the Palestinian elites that these genetic studies also show that modern Jews and Palestinians share more than fifty percent genetic resemblance, including Canaanite (see below),³⁷ making both groups empirically indigenous to the region.³⁸ The motives for this are clear, as by selectively appropriating the Canaanite narratives to emphasize their connection while ignoring the genetic studies that show a shared ancestry between modern Jews and Palestinians, they can claim an ancient and glorious past merely for the Palestinians, a past that will compete and overshadow in its splendor and antiquity with the past claimed by the Israelis based on the Bible.

If we compare the two revisions, unlike Temple denial, the Canaanite revision is not entirely a revision of historical facts. Instead, it selectively downplays certain aspects and emphasizes others of the empirically proven fact, as it better serves their contemporary political agenda.

By the mid-twentieth century, Palestinian intellectuals had already begun to assert direct descent from the ancient Canaanites.³⁹ It also entered the literary canon: The Palestinian national poet, Mahmoud Darwish, who in 1995 wrote about the connection between ancient Canaan, the Canaanite goddess Anat, and a longing for a return to a long-lost magical world: “O Anat, tarry no longer in the lower world! [. . .] come back, and bring back, bring back the land of truth and allusion, the land of Canaan, the origin. [. . .] so that miracles may return to Jericho.”⁴⁰

This, too, has been rooted from the top down through television broadcasts and school curriculums. For example, during a performance marking the 104th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, held on November 2, 2021, at a Hamas-controlled kindergarten in Deir Al-Balah in the Gaza Strip, children

³⁶Lily Agranat-Tamir, et al., “The Genomic History of the Bronze Age Southern Levant,” *Cell* 181, no. 5 (2020): 1146–57; Abdelhafidh Hajje, et al., “The Genetic Heterogeneity of Arab Populations as Inferred from HLA Genes,” *PLOS ONE* 13, no. 3 (2018); Michal Feldman, et al., “Ancient DNA Sheds Light on the Genetic Origins of Early Iron Age Philistines,” *Science Advances* 5, no. 7 (2019).

³⁷These kinds of studies are highly controversial and politically charged, with the retracted 2001 article by Spanish immunologist Antonio Arnaiz-Villena being a well-known example of this.

³⁸Agranat-Tamir, et al., “The Genomic History of the Bronze Age Southern Levant,” 4–5.

³⁹For example, Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh in his multivolume encyclopedia *Our Country, Palestine* (1964–76), along with ‘Abd alWahhab Kayyali in his *Palestine: A Modern History* (1978). The theme was later amplified by officials and antiquarians such as Hamdan Taha, Elias Shoufani and Ziad Mona, then filtered into schoolbooks, museum labels and political speeches.

⁴⁰Mahmoud Darwish, “Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?” trans. Mohammad Shaheen, (London: Hesperus Press, 2014), 44.

were seen waving Palestinian flags, raising their fists, and singing. Among the slogans chanted was, “We are your owners, oh Palestine. We are planted in this land since the days of the Canaanites.”⁴¹

This, too, is a cross-political narrative and is used not only by Hamas but also by its political rival, the Palestinian Authority, and is deeply embedded in its nationalist ethos. A known example of this is the poem recited by TV hostess Dana Abu Shamsiya on the Palestinian Authority’s TV station, *Palestine TV*, in honor of Palestinian “*shaheed*” (martyr) Abd Al-Rahman Abu Jamal, who stabbed four Israeli policemen in Jerusalem, where she proudly proclaimed: “I am a Palestinian lion cub, planted in my land like the olive and fig trees. I have solid roots that go back to the Canaanites.”⁴²

This narrative is not only used on popular and educational platforms but is mainly employed by Palestinian elites for contemporary political agendas that seek to cement Palestinian primacy over the land and negate similar claims made by Israel. For example, in August 2005, during the disengagement plan in which the Israelis withdrew from the Gaza Strip, Muhammad Deif, the military commander of the Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, gave a victory speech. In it, Deif hinted at Palestinian primacy over the land, claiming that Palestinians are an ancient people, even older than the Jews, noting “To the Zionists who plundered our land, those who pretend to represent Solomon’s Temple and the Star of David, we have a greater right with regard to Solomon and David, may they rest in peace . . .”⁴³

Other nationalists are far less subtle, explicitly arguing for direct descent from the ancient Canaanites. The political figure who spearheads this argument is the Palestinian Authority’s President, Mahmoud Abbas, who regularly mentions the Palestinian “forefathers.” Here, too, evidence for this practice is numerous, but a few examples will suffice to present the point. In an address to the PLO Central Council in January 2018, amid heightened tensions between Israel and the Palestinians, following President Trump’s declaration to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, Abbas declared:

This is our country. This has been our land since the days of the Canaanites. [...] our Canaanite forefathers [...] From the days of the Canaanites and to this day, [our

⁴¹“Gaza Kindergarten Performance Marking 104th Anniversary of Balfour Declaration: Palestine is Ours, We Shall Return; Down with the Balfour Declaration,” MEMRI, Nov. 3, 2021, <https://www.memri.org/reports/gaza-kindergarten-performance-marking-104th-anniversary-balfour-declaration-palestine-ours>.

⁴²“PA TV Host Dana Abu Shamsiya Praises Palestinian Who Stabbed Israeli Policemen: He Harvests Souls on the Battlefield and is Desired by the Virgins of Paradise,” MEMRI, Nov. 23, 2018, <https://www.memri.org/tv/palestine-host-dana-shamsiya-praises-terrorist-stabbed-policemen-opening-monologue>.

⁴³“Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades Commander Muhammad Deif Threatens to ‘Turn All of Palestine into Hell for Israel,’” MEMRI, Sept. 8, 2005, <https://www.memri.org/reports/izz-al-din-al-qassam-brigades-commander-muhammad-deif-threatens-%E2%80%98turn-all-palestine-hell>. This might be understood in another context, which is not being discussed here, where there is an argument that claims the Palestinians are the true descendants of the biblical Jews.

forefathers] have not left this land. They were here before our patriarch Abraham. We were [here].⁴⁴

A few months later, following the transfer of the embassy to Jerusalem and violent large-scale demonstrations on the Gaza border, Abbas used the same rhetoric again, repeating his earlier statements almost verbatim:

They opened it [the embassy] today, and said it was [located] in the land of the [Jewish] forefathers. This is a distortion of history. This Palestinian soil was the soil of our Canaanite forefathers, even before the era of our honorable [ancestor] Abraham, and we have continuously inhabited it [since then].⁴⁵

Other more or less similar words were uttered in the same vein. Claims such as “we are the Canaanites!” and that the Palestinians have lived here for the past 5,000 years, asserting that the Jews “will all go to the garbage bin of history” were repeatedly replayed by the Palestinian president.⁴⁶

Similar arguments were raised by Abbas’ closest advisors. In 2022, Mahmoud Al-Habbash, senior advisor to Abbas, claimed that the Jews have “no racial or religious connection to Abraham” and that the Palestinians are even older than “the Natufians, the Canaanites, the Jebusites, and the early Palestinians.”⁴⁷ That same year, Mohammad Shtayyeh, the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister, stated that “Samson set fire to the tails of wolves and released them in the Canaanites’ fields, in order to burn our wheat. Samson is gone, but Palestine’s wheat is still here. Samson is gone, but our land is still here.”⁴⁸

All these narratives tend to lean on several genetic studies (though not explicitly mentioning them), selectively emphasizing parts of numerous studies’ results that show that Jews and Palestinians are genetically similar, thus both being related to the ancient Canaanites and the people who lived on the land several thousand years ago. Palestinian nationalists focus on these aspects to assert their ancient and indigenous connection to the land, highlighting the Palestinian descent from the Canaanites. However, they simultaneously negate the same genetic relations to Jews (who belong “in the garbage bin of history”).

⁴⁴“Palestinian Authority President Abbas: ‘This Has Been Our Land Since . . . The Canaanites,’ Since Cromwell, Israel Has Been ‘A Colonialist Enterprise’ Unconnected with Judaism; ‘We Won’t Accept America as Mediator with Israel,’ PLO Must ‘Reexamine the Agreements’ with Israel,” MEMRI, Jan. 16, 2018, <https://www.memri.org/reports/palestinian-authority-president-abbas-has-been-our-land-canaanites-cromwell-israel-has-been>.

⁴⁵“Harsh Anti-U.S. Rhetoric by the Palestinian Authority and its Daily Newspaper: Throughout History, U.S. Policy Has Been Based on Aggression, Mass Extermination; U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem is ‘Den of Settlers,’” MEMRI, May 16, 2018, <https://www.memri.org/reports/harsh-anti-us-rhetoric-palestinian-authority-and-its-daily-newspaper-throughout-history-us>.

⁴⁶“Palestinian Authority President Abbas at Jalazone Refugee Camp: We Will Enter Jerusalem as ‘Millions of Fighters,’” MEMRI, Aug. 21, 2019, <https://www.memri.org/reports/palestinian-authority-president-abbas-jalazone-refugee-camp-we-will-enter-jerusalem-millions>.

⁴⁷“Palestinian Presidential Advisor Mahmoud Al-Habbash: We Have Been Here Since Before the Natufians, Canaanites, Jebusites,” MEMRI, April 15, 2022, <https://www.memri.org/tv/palestinian-presidential-advisor-habbash-here-since-before-natufians-canaanites-jews-no-connection-land-abraham>.

⁴⁸“Palestinian PM Mohammad Shtayyeh: The Occupation Uses Palestinian Blood to Fund its Election Campaign; Our Blood is Not Cheap, But it is A Small Price to Pay For Our Homeland,” MEMRI, Oct. 16, 2022, <https://www.memri.org/tv/palestinian-pm-shtayyeh-occupation-funding-elections-blood-pledge-liberate-homeland>

By doing so, they aim to bolster the narrative that Palestinians are the true and original inhabitants of the region while denying the legitimacy of Jewish historical and ancestral ties to the land.

This selective use of genetic evidence serves as a form of historical revisionism, reshaping historical narratives to support contemporary political agendas and strengthen Palestinian vicarious claims to the land. By emphasizing only the parts of the genetic research that support their claims and ignoring the parts that reveal a shared ancestry with Jews, Palestinian elites can present a one-sided historical narrative, or a chosen glory. This approach not only aims to enhance the Palestinian claim to the land but also to undermine and delegitimize Jewish claims, thereby supporting their broader political and territorial objectives in the ongoing conflict with Israel.

The Palestinization of Jesus Christ

As in the Temple denial narrative, a historical background is due here as well. The historical figure of Jesus emerges from a specific time and place that is crucial for understanding both his identity and the complex historical narratives surrounding the region. Born in *Provincia Iudaea* to Jewish parents, Jesus (known in his Hebrew name as Yeshua) was deeply embedded in Jewish religious and cultural life. He practiced Judaism, preached primarily to Jewish audiences, and engaged extensively with Jewish religious symbols and spaces, including the Temple in Jerusalem.⁴⁹ His Jewish identity was so central that even in his death, according to tradition, the Romans acknowledged it, placing the inscription “Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum” (Jesus of Nazareth, King of Jews) above his crucified body. The early Christian movement initially considered itself a Jewish sect, with the separation between Judaism and Christianity only occurring during the post-Temple rabbinical era.⁵⁰

This historical context becomes particularly relevant when examining claims about Jesus’s geographic and cultural identity. While the name “Palestine” had appeared in earlier Greek writings, notably in Herodotus’s accounts,⁵¹ it referred specifically to the coastal plains region inhabited by the Philistines – a people whose name, derived from the Hebrew word *Pleshest* (meaning “invaders”),⁵² indicated their non-indigenous origins. During Jesus’s lifetime, the region where he lived and

⁴⁹Hans Dieter Betz, “Wellhausen’s Dictum ‘Jesus was Not a Christian, but a Jew’ in Light of Present Scholarship,” *Studia Theologica – Nordic Journal of Theology* 45, no. 2 (1991): 83–110; Zev Garber, ed., *The Jewish Jesus: Revelation, Reflection, Reclamation* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2011).

⁵⁰Adele Reinhartz, “5. How Christianity Parted from Judaism,” in *Early Judaism*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 97–120.

⁵¹Herodotus, *The Histories*, 2.104.3, ed. Carolyn Dewald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵²Still, the etymology of the name remains speculative. See Bernard Lewis, “Palestine: On the History and Geography of a Name,” *International History Review* 2, (1980): 1–12.

died was known as Judaea – a name recognized by both the local population and their Roman rulers. The transformation of this nomenclature came only in 135–136 CE, more than a century after Jesus’s death, when Emperor Hadrian renamed the region “Syria Palaestina” following the suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt.⁵³

The underlying logic of this Palestinian historical revisionism operates on a subtle but significant distinction: rather than outright denying Jesus’s Jewish religious identity, it challenges the concept of Jewish nationality itself. The argument posits that while Jesus may have been Jewish by faith, the original Jews were themselves Palestinians, thereby attempting to separate religious identity from national identity. This interpretation serves a broader political purpose by challenging one of Zionism’s fundamental premises – the concept of Jews as both a religious and national group. By recasting ancient Jews as Palestinians who practiced Judaism, this narrative attempts to undermine the historical basis for Jewish national self-determination while simultaneously claiming Jesus as a Palestinian national figure.

The narrative of Jesus as a Palestinian figure has gained particular prominence since October 7, 2023, though its origins predate this period.⁵⁴ This reframing represents a significant departure from traditional religious and historical understanding, approaching Jesus not primarily as a spiritual figure but as a symbol in a contemporary nationalist movement. The transformation of Jesus’s identity from Jewish to Palestinian exemplifies how historical figures can be repurposed to serve present-day political objectives, attempting to reshape not just cultural practices but fundamental historical narratives.

An example of this narrative’s deployment can be found in two Christmas Day columns (2023 and 2024) published in the Palestinian daily *Al-Quds*.⁵⁵ The author, Hamada Fara’neh, a member of the PLO National Council, made the claim that Jesus was “the first Palestinian martyr.” His writing weaves together ancient antisemitic tropes about Jewish responsibility for Jesus’s death with contemporary political narratives about the Palestinian struggle.

This rhetorical strategy attempts to draw direct parallels between historical events and current political conflicts, suggesting a continuous line of

⁵³Werner Eck, “The Bar Kokhba Revolt: The Roman Point of View,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 89, (1999): 76–89; Mark Alan Chancey, “The Archaeology of Roman Palestine,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 64, no. 4 (2001): 164–203; Miriam Ben Zeev, “New Insights into Roman Policy in Judea on the Eve of the Bar Kokhba Revolt,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 49, no. 1 (2018): 84–107.

⁵⁴As early as 2021, a pro-Palestinian protest in London featured a banner depicting a figure of Jesus Christ wearing traditional Palestinian attire and carrying a cross, accompanied by the message: “Do not let them do the same thing today again.” See Lee Herpin, ‘Jews are Christ Killers’ Banner at Anti-Israel Protest,” *Jewish News*, May 22, 2021, <https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/jews-are-christ-killers-banner-at-anti-israel-protest/>.

⁵⁵“Jordanian-Palestinian Journalist in Christmas Day Column: Jesus, ‘The First Palestinian Martyr,’ was Killed by a Jewish-Roman Colonialist Conspiracy,” MEMRI, January. 8, 2025, <https://www.memri.org/reports/jordanian-palestinian-journalist-christmas-day-column-jesus-first-palestinian-martyr-was>; “Palestinian-Jordanian Journalist: The West Stole Christianity from Us, Just as it Stole Palestine; Jesus was the First Palestinian Fida’i,” MEMRI, January. 8, 2025, <https://www.memri.org/reports/palestinian-jordanian-journalist-west-stole-christianity-us-just-it-stole-palestine-jesus>.

opposition between Jews and Palestinians stretching back two millennia. Fara'neh's column goes further, accusing Western nations of appropriating Christianity from Palestinians: "They stole the Christian religion from us." He portrays Jesus as "the first Palestinian and first warrior" (*fida'i*), characterizing him through the lens of "sacrifice, altruism and an untimely death." The article draws explicit parallels between Jesus's crucifixion and contemporary political situations, claiming that "the Palestinian people are being crucified in their own homeland, just like Jesus [was crucified] because of a pact between the Roman imperialism of his era and the treason of Judas Iscariot."

The theoretical framework of this historical revisionism has found concrete expression in various high-profile cultural and religious contexts. A particularly notable example occurred on December 7, 2024, when the Vatican unveiled a Nativity scene created by Bethlehem-based artisans. The event, attended by representatives of the Palestinian Embassy to the Holy See and special envoys of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, featured a provocative modification to the traditional Christian iconography: the infant Jesus was depicted lying in a crib covered by a black and white kaffiyah, the traditional headscarf that has become a powerful symbol of Palestinian identity and resistance.⁵⁶

This wasn't an isolated incident. On Christmas Day, the Palestinian Mission to the United Nations' official X account shared an artwork titled "Palestinian Family"⁵⁷ by Sliman Mansour. The piece appropriated traditional ecclesiastical iconography, depicting the Holy Family with traditional halos, but incorporated contemporary Palestinian symbolism. The infant Jesus was not only wrapped in a kaffiyah but was shown making a two-finger gesture recognized in Palestinian society as symbolizing "victory or martyrdom" – a fusion of religious imagery with modern political symbolism.

The narrative gained further traction through social media, where users spread claims that Bethlehem, Jesus's birthplace according to the Gospels, was under Israeli bombardment during the Christmas period. While these claims were demonstrably false, they generated significant emotional responses online, effectively linking the figure of Jesus Christ with contemporary regional conflicts. This combination of religious symbolism with current political messaging created a powerful narrative that resonated with many audiences, despite its historical inaccuracies. The strategy demonstrated how religious imagery and historical narratives can be effectively repurposed to serve

⁵⁶Nicole Winfield, "Vatican's Palestinian Nativity Scene Raises Eyebrows – and Then Disappears," *The Independent*, Jan. 8, 2025, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/pope-palestine-vatican-keffiyeh-nativity-b2663374.html>.

⁵⁷State of Palestine [@Palestine_UN], "Palestinian Family' Sliman Mansour, 2016," Twitter post, Jan. 8, 2025, https://x.com/Palestine_UN/status/1871646150002176065.

contemporary political objectives, even when such representations contradict established historical facts.

Conclusions

As suggested by extensive sociological and psychological research on collective memory, historical narratives and myths are potent instruments of forging nationhood. Whether through vicarious identity – where individuals derive self-esteem from their group’s glorified past – or chosen glories – selectively highlighted triumphs or cultural achievements – people anchor their present identity in a reconstructed, often idealized version of history. In the modern Palestinian context, these strategies manifest most visibly where ancient history is invoked to assert continuity, dignity, and legitimacy. The more rooted and ancient a nation’s presence appears, the stronger its modern claims look to local audiences and potential international allies. Yet in an intensely contested space like the alleged Holy Land, this pursuit of deep historical roots also becomes a cornerstone of nationalist conflict, particularly when used to undermine the other side’s narratives.

Solomon’s Temple denial exemplifies one of the most potent forms of historical revisionism. While sources from antiquity – Greek historians such as Hecataeus of Abdera, Roman writers including Livy and Tacitus, and medieval Christian maps referring to *Templum Salomonis* – overwhelmingly confirm the Jewish Temple’s presence in Jerusalem, Palestinian leaders began disputing this consensus following Israel’s capture of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1967. Even the Supreme Muslim Council, which had published annual guidebooks under the British Mandate affirming that the Dome of the Rock stood on the site of Solomon’s Temple, changed its position once the conflict escalated.

From Yasser Arafat’s famous assertion at Camp David in 2000 that the Temple was actually in Yemen, to Muftis and Hamas leaders calling the Temple a “Jewish invention” or “myth,” a consistent thread runs through these statements: negate the historicity of the Jewish presence at the Temple Mount to weaken Israel’s claims to Jerusalem. Often, these arguments hinge on a supposed lack of archeological evidence, although Israeli authorities, adhering to religious and political sensitivities, have not excavated directly under the Temple Mount itself. When they have conducted digs around it, numerous findings have pointed to extensive Jewish ties. Yet denial persists, reflecting an overriding political goal to sever or minimize a Jewish connection to the land.

Parallel to negating Jewish claims is the “Canaanization” of Palestinians, a narrative that stresses their descent from ancient Canaanites who inhabited the region before the Israelites. Whether in speeches by President Mahmoud Abbas or in poems recited on television, Palestinians regularly affirm that their lineage extends back 5,000 years or more – well before the biblical patriarchs.

While genetic studies indicate that both modern Jews and Palestinians share substantial indigenous roots, these narratives highlight only the parts that fortify a uniquely Palestinian lineage while dismissing evidence of shared ancestry. Through children's performances in Gaza, television broadcasts of Hamas or Fatah officials, and official pronouncements by Palestinian Authority leaders, the story of a direct and continuous line from the Bronze Age Canaanites to modern Palestinians reinforces the notion of primordial ownership, overshadowing competing Jewish narratives of equally ancient connections.

A third form of historical reconstruction further amplifies Palestinian indigeneity by framing Jesus Christ as a Palestinian. Traditionally recognized as a Jewish religious teacher born in Roman Judaea – long before Emperor Hadrian renamed the area “Syria Palaestina” – Jesus has lately been recast in Palestinian circles as “the first Palestinian martyr.” This transformation appears in media columns claiming that Jews bear responsibility not just for his crucifixion but also for “stealing” Christianity, and it extends to dramatic cultural displays such as Nativity scenes featuring the kaffiyah as a symbol of Palestinian identity. Here, the reasoning shifts from denying that Jesus was Jewish to denying that a Jewish nation even existed in the sense recognized by Zionist narratives. By portraying ancient Jews as Palestinians who simply practiced Judaism, these depictions aim to undermine one of the fundamental pillars of Zionism – that Jews have been not just a religious community but also a nation entitled to self-determination in their ancestral land.

All these narratives intersect with the needs of contemporary politics, illustrating how history can be readily re-engineered to meet the demands of modern nation-building. They spread across the Palestinian political spectrum, from leaders of the Palestinian Authority to Hamas preachers, revealing that denying Israel's legitimacy through negation of the Temple, claiming a privileged ancestry through ancient Canaanites, and appropriating key religious figures such as Jesus are all part of a unified strategy.

On the one hand, such narratives galvanize Palestinians themselves, forging a cohesive sense of belonging and pride; on the other, they seek to persuade international audiences of Palestinian autochthony while framing Israel's claims as colonial fabrications. In doing so, these reimagined histories become potent tools for mobilization, sustaining collective resolve, and shaping wider public opinion in favor of the Palestinian cause.

These revisionist accounts exemplify how profoundly the conflict over land and sovereignty is tangled with battles over the past. When national identities hinge on a perceived continuity stretching back millennia, any acknowledgment of shared heritage or mutual belonging becomes politically risky. The result is a circular dynamic: intensifying competition leads to ever more elaborate attempts to exclude the other from the historical record.

While such approaches might yield short-term gains in domestic legitimacy, they also deepen the sense that reconciliation requires more than just a political arrangement. Indeed, any sustainable resolution will likely have to grapple with the fundamental power of historical narratives to define identity, legitimize territorial claims, and shape collective emotions. Until these mythologies – both Israeli and Palestinian – are honestly addressed and placed in conversation, the region will remain saddled with entrenched versions of history that defy compromise and perpetuate the conflict they ostensibly explain.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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