A Very General Archaeologist—Moshe Dayan and Israeli Archaeology

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ABSTRACT This article is a preliminary investigation of three decades of robbery, collection and trade in antiquities by General Moshe Dayan, perhaps Israel’s most famous commander and politician. In trying to separate facts from the many rumors that follow his name, this contribution is mainly based on written sources, some never published before. They prove that, since 1951, Dayan was involved in large-scale robbery of antiquities in dozens of sites in Israel and the occupied territories. Dayan used army equipment and personnel for robbery and transfer of antiquities; established a vast collection of stolen and bought antiquities, and exchanged and sold antiquities in Israel and abroad. He became a negative model for others and damaged the cause of Israeli archaeology as a whole. Although Dayan was caught in person at least four times during robbery, he was never brought to justice. After his death, his collection was sold by his widow to the Israel Museum for 1 million US$. Though Dayan’s activities are a sort of a known secret in Israel, they were never investigated from an archaeological perspective. Many facts remain unknown since they appear in remote Hebrew sources, hence writers about Dayan, including some of his biographers, often follow the wrong, romantic view of him as the ‘good guy’—a sort of an Israeli Robin Hood that fights stupid bureaucracy and social rules. This article brings a representative sample of Dayan’s deeds and tries to evaluate them and to ask how they were possible, and what has changed since those “good old days”.

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Dayan was a very artistic character”, says Professor Oz Almog, an expert on Israeli society at the Haifa University. “When I look at him in pictures and movies there is something in his demeanor, something in his face that is almost inhuman. He looks bionic, with an unmoving look, even his voice lacked intonation, very mechanical. He was a noted archeology enthusiast, but took his hobby too far and became something of a grave robber. He never felt the need to apologize for anything, and the public accepted him as is, for he was Moshe Dayan. Peres was very faithful to Dayan, and their relationship had always been strong, though it is hard to understand why Dayan needed Peres’s support in particular at that critical time. ‘Mr. Security’. General (res.)

Israeli archaeology unearths controversy. The discovery of an ancient architectural structure from the Hasmonean era in Jerusalem, the latest in a series of archaeological findings that connects the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, has become an ideological tool for Minister of Education Naftali Bennett, among others. MOBILE VIEW. Read In: נבעית. A worker for the Israel Antiquities Authority works at an excavation site where a compound containing an oil press, a wine press and mosaics was exposed near the Israeli town of Beit Shemesh, Sept. 18, 2014. Photo by REUTERS/Nir Elias.

Moshe Dayan, the Israeli soldier-statesman, died of a heart ailment today in Tel Aviv’s Sheba Medical Center. He was 66 years old. Mr. Dayan was rushed to the medical center around midnight last night, complaining of chest pains and shortness of breath. The Israeli radio and television reported that his condition in the hospital deteriorated this afternoon, with respiratory problems and loss of blood pressure. His death this evening was attributed by a Government official to a heart attack. --- - Soldier and Diplomat By ERIC PACE. Moshe Dayan was a general who made war, a diplomat who made peace and a political figure who stirred repeated controversy in his homeland. Although single-minded in his passionate Israeli nationalism, he was a complicated man in other ways.