



New Studies in the City of David The 2013 - 2014 Excavations

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The intensive archaeological work on the city of David hill during the period covered in this article has continued in previously excavated areas (the stepped street, the Spring House, an area along the western wall of the Temple Mount and in the Givati Parking Lot. New excavation areas have also been opened (Area D on the eastern slope of the City of David). We will briefly present the key new findings and information gleaned in these areas over the past season.

■ The Stepped Street (Area S), City of David

Area S is located approximately 30 m south of the Yovel Compound and above the central drainage channel (Reich and Shukron's Area K2). Excavation of this area, under the aegis of the Israel Antiquities Authority and directed by Nahshon Szanton and Joe Uziel, began in 2013 and is still underway. The main finds exposed so far focus on the stepped street, which is some 7 m wide and dated to the end of the Second Temple period (the Early Roman period). The street was built in monumental style, using gigantic, square stone slabs (Fig. 1). It continues the route of the stepped street that had previously been uncovered near the Shiloah Pool, which was the main route by which pilgrims ascended to the Temple Mount from the south. A burnt layer is now being



Fig. 1. Paving on the Second Temple-period stepped street, looking north.

uncovered that is rich in findings "frozen in time" during the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE. The heaps of ruins that accumulated at street level caused some of the paving slabs to sink, and in one case even to break. It was decided to remove the broken slab and excavate beneath it, which allowed us to closely examine the relationship between the pavement and the network of retaining walls below. These walls were built of fieldstones, creating constructional cells that were filled with soil. After the destruction, the soil in the cells apparently eroded away, causing the paving stones to shift.



Fig. 2. Monumental staircase uncovered east of the stepped street, looking east.

Also noteworthy is a monumental staircase discovered on the eastern side of the street.

Although its nature has still not been entirely clarified, it was clearly an impressive and rare monument (Fig. 2). As excavations move ahead, the connection is revealed between the main drainage channel and the stepped street above it. The tunnel excavated by Bliss and Dickey at the end of the nineteenth century is also coming to light once again.

■ The Spring House Excavations, City of David (Areas C and H)

Excavation in the Spring House, directed by Joe Uziel and Nahshon Szanton for the Israel Antiquities Authority, continued to reveal various dated strata from the second millennium BCE to modern times. The main findings from these excavations date from the Middle Bronze Age, Iron Age II and the Early Roman period.

During the Middle Bronze Age a system of fortifications was built around the Gihon Spring; this system was uncovered mainly by Reich and Shukron's excavations. This system included a massive tower around the spring and a protected corridor that led from the city up the hill to the water sources, known as the fortified passage. The current excavations have uncovered the lower courses of the foundations of the tower, which was preserved to a height of approximately 7 m. Additional segments of the walls of the fortified passage were also exposed. The excavation findings indicate that these



Fig. 3. Fragment of a clay bowl incised with an inscription in archaic Hebrew (photo: Clara Amit, Israel Antiquities Authority).

Fig. 4. Selection of finds from the Spring House excavations: stamped handles, lamps and figurines from the end of the First Temple period.



massive walls continued to serve the inhabitants of the city until the end of the Iron Age. During the seventh century BCE the fortifications were covered with a thick layer of debris. This layer included numerous pottery vessels, particularly lamps, figurines and a fragment of a clay bowl bearing incised ancient Hebrew letters of the truncated name “...yahu son of Bana” (Fig. 3-4). Adjacent to the northern end of the fortified passage a structure from the Iron Age II has continued to come to light. This discovery can provide added support for the supposition that the powerful wall system of the Middle Bronze age II was known to and used by the inhabitants of the city from the Iron Age.

Following the destruction of the city at the end of the Iron Age this area was destroyed and abandoned and

was not resettled until the Early Roman period, during which time retaining walls were built along the Kidron channel. In addition, a lime pit from that period was built above a heap of huge fallen rocks from which the Spring Tower had been built. These rocks sealed beneath them a layer of soil dated to the end of the Iron Age, which conforms to the abovementioned theory that the spring’s fortifications continued in use during the Iron Age.

The excavations in the visitor center ended in the summer of 2013, and a new excavation project was opened at a site on the slope outside and to the west of the center (east of the entrance to Warren’s Shaft). These excavations continued to uncover the architectural elements that had been revealed here in the past.

■ Excavations Along the Western Wall

From December 2013 to March 2014 an archaeological excavation was conducted along the foundations of the western wall of the Temple Mount, directed by Moran Hajbi and Joe Uziel for the Israel Antiquities Authority. The purpose of the excavation was to uncover the foundations of the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount and prepare the area for visitors.

A number of significant elements came to light in this area. These include the western wall of the Temple Mount and its foundations courses. They also include the system of walls built to support and level the street at the foot of the Temple Mount, which are dated to the first century CE. Also uncovered are cuttings in the bedrock that predated construction of the wall and the system of retaining walls, and the drainage channel delimiting the excavation area on the south. The findings in this area were dated mainly to the first century CE.

The Rock Surface

Evidence is present all along the excavation area of the leveling and smoothing of the bedrock in preparation for the laying of the stones of the wall and the system of retaining walls.

The Western Wall

A section of the western Temple Mount wall was uncovered, some 10 m long and 3.5 m high. The excavation reached the foundations of the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount, built of particularly long stones, some of which averaged about 6 m long (Figs. 5-6).



Fig. 5. Southwestern corner of the Temple Mount during excavation.

Fig. 6. Southwestern corner of the Temple Mount immediately after it was uncovered.

The System of Retaining Walls

The street's retaining walls were built along the western and the southern Temple Mount walls. Parallel to the western wall and at about 2 m away it, a long wall (W102) was built that continued northward beyond the boundaries of the current excavation area (into areas previously excavated by Reich and Shukron). Cross walls were built between this wall and the western wall, abutting the western wall and creating a system of cells that extended all along it. The upper part of these cross walls can be seen today above the surface of the street, identified as small shops built along the street during the Second Temple period. During the current excavation, three of these cells were excavated from north to south. They were found to have been intentionally filled, apparently by the builders of the street. The lower part of the fill contained stone chips that may have come from finishing touches on the stones of the wall to fit them together more closely. Earthen fill was laid on top of this intentional fill; the earthen fill contained numerous pottery vessels, among them whole clay vessels, coins and glass vessels, which dated the cells to the first century CE.

The Drainage Channel

At the southern end of the excavation a low wall was uncovered that follows the route of the main drainage channel and covers the channel's vaulted roofing stones.

■ City of David – the Givati Parking Lot

The excavations of the Givati Parking Lot, directed by Doron Ben-Ami and Yana Chekhanovets for the Israel Antiquities Authority, focused this year on two main areas. One area continued the excavation area from the previous year, further revealing the early strata at the site. The second area included the southeastern corner of the parking lot, which had not been previously excavated.

Fill excavated in the first area was found to contain a huge quantity of sherds from the Hellenistic period. In these layers of fill, which slope from the ridge downward and westward toward the Tyropoeon Valley, the foundations of a large structure from the late Hellenistic period (Fig. 7) were built. The structure, whose walls had clearly been massively robbed in antiquity, was found to consist of two different phases dated to the second century BCE. The coins found on the floors of its rooms indicate that the earlier of the two phases dated to the first half of the second century BCE and the later phase



Fig. 7. Ashlar walls in the Hellenistic structure in the Givati Parking Lot excavation. The walls at the edge of the photograph belong to a building from the Late Roman period; looking north.

to the second half of that century. Continued excavation of these layers of fill and of the remains of the structures from the Hellenistic period will add information about the process of the city's development westward. The Hellenistic structure seals walls from the Iron Age. In the coming year, excavation will concentrate on extensively uncovering these earlier remains and clarifying the architectural and stratigraphic array of the Iron Age in this area.

In the second area the final layer of asphalt was removed from the last unexcavated portion of the parking lot. Remains continued to come to light in this area from the Abbasid period of an integral part of a well-planned quarter that included streets and industrial installations of various types. Most of its remains had been excavated during previous seasons throughout the excavation area. Particularly noteworthy in this context is a round stone installation approximately 2 m in diameter, apparently a baking oven. A layer of flint pebbles found under its floor was apparently intended to maintain the heat in the installation (Fig. 8).

Fills were also excavated in a section excavated here in the 1960s by the British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon. The outlines of this section (Kenyon's Area M) were

identified in the current excavation area. A retaining wall and staircase found in the Kenyon section were apparently built to reach the section during her excavation. On the eastern side of the section, the bedrock that Kenyon described in her preliminary reports has begun to emerge.



Fig. 8. Givati Parking Lot: the round baker oven from the Abbasid period.

■ Area D3

During the past year another excavation area was opened on the eastern slopes of the City of David spur (Area D3). This area, the excavation of which was directed by Yuval Gadot for Tel Aviv University, is situated near Yigal Shiloh's excavation areas. In a section opened near the Kidron channel, layers of refuse were excavated from the Early Roman period. These layers are very familiar from all the excavations conducted on the eastern slope of the spur (Fig. 9). The layers can be seen to descend sharply to the east and contain a huge quantity of sherds, stone vessels and rich organic finds. The layers of refuse are wet-sifted and carefully sorted. To deepen the section, the baulks were removed and the



Fig. 9. Area D, looking southwest.

lengthwise sections were terraced. This made it possible to sample the layers of refuse in a more controlled manner. In addition, where possible, care was taken to excavate the layers diagonally, thus to ensure full control of the stratigraphy. The purpose of the excavation is to meticulously study this refuse to learn whether it was created in a single event or whether it accumulated over time.

Sources of Illustrations

Fig. 1. Nahshon Szanton and Joe Uziel.

Fig. 2. Nahshon Szanton and Joe Uziel.

Fig. 3, 4. Photograph: Clara Amit, Israel Antiquities Authority.

Fig. 5, 6. Photograph: Moran Hajbi.

Fig. 7-9. Photograph: Asaf Peretz, Israel Antiquities Authority.