

# The Mystery of the Disappearing Pavement: The Stepped Street in the City of David and the Fate of its Stones

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The excavation by this author of the area of the Pool of Siloam near the southern part of the City of David hill revealed once again the terminus of Jerusalem's main street in Second Temple times, which stretched along the Tyropoeon Valley (Shukron and Reich 2011). The first to discover parts of this street were C. Warren (1867), near the Temple Mount, and F.G. Bliss and A. Dickie (1898), west of the City of David.

We reached the street, of which we had known from the literature, at its southernmost end where it joins a paved plaza north of the Pool of Siloam. Here we excavated two short segments: an eastern segment, which had not been known from previous excavations (Reich 2011: 128–129) and a western segment, which Bliss and Dickie had found (Reich 2011: 126).

After we were unable to unearth more of the western part of the street to the north, it was decided to uncover a portion of the street also familiar from the Bliss and Dickie excavations, some 200 m up the Tyropoeon Valley (in an area that City of David residents call “Hayovel”). The excavation at the site was conducted in the standard fashion, from the surface downward. At a certain level, remains began to come to light of a heap of fallen stones, architectural items and broken and burnt objects, and it was fairly clear that the excavation had reached the destruction level of 70 CE. We realized that this thick layer of destruction lay directly on the pavement of the anticipated street, portions of which had been discovered by Bliss and Dickie through their tunnels, and a small portion of which had been excavated by the British archaeologist K. Kenyon, just south of our area (Kenyon 1974: 22, photographs 7, 97, 101). How disappointed we were to discover that under the heap of stones we found a surface of compacted soil – but no pavement. As the excavation continued, a drainage channel was discovered that led to the central drainage channel below the street, which was uncovered in its entirety in the coming years in the segment between the corner of the Temple Mount and the Pool of Siloam.

In 2010, this author retired as director of the City of David excavation, and Joe Uziel and Nahson Szanton took over the position, followed by Moran Hajbi and Ari Levi. They began unearthing the street in 2013, and expanded the excavation in the Hayovel area. A little more than 1 m from the place where we had believed we would find the pavement but did not, they uncovered the end of the preserved paved street! From that point, which





**Fig. 1.** The paved part of the stepped street south of the Hayovel excavations.

Courtesy: City of David Archives. Photo: Koby Harati



**Fig. 2.** The missing part of the stepped street pavement north of the Hayovel excavations.

Courtesy: City of David Archives. Photo: Koby Harati

later turned out to be the northernmost point where paving stones of the street were preserved, the street was revealed in all its glory for 150 m to the south (Szanton et al. 2019), preserved there in its entirety. I can only regret my bad luck and congratulate the younger generation of archaeologists on their good luck.

It was later decided by the developers, with the approval of the Israel Antiquities Authority, to continue the excavation of the street from the Hayovel area northward. At that point a segment about 100 m long was uncovered, and no remains of paving were found anywhere along it. In retrospect it turned out that our excavation had hit precisely the first southernmost meter of the segment of missing pavement. There are two possibilities here: 1. This part of the street had not yet been paved in Second Temple times; 2. The entire street had originally been paved but here, sometime after the Second Temple period, the paving stones had been robbed to be reused elsewhere. That question will hopefully be answered by the street's excavators.

I would not have needed this introduction if a photocopy of a letter, reproduced here, had not fallen into my hands. It was written in Jerusalem during the period of British military rule over the city, shortly before the establishment of the British Mandate in Palestine:

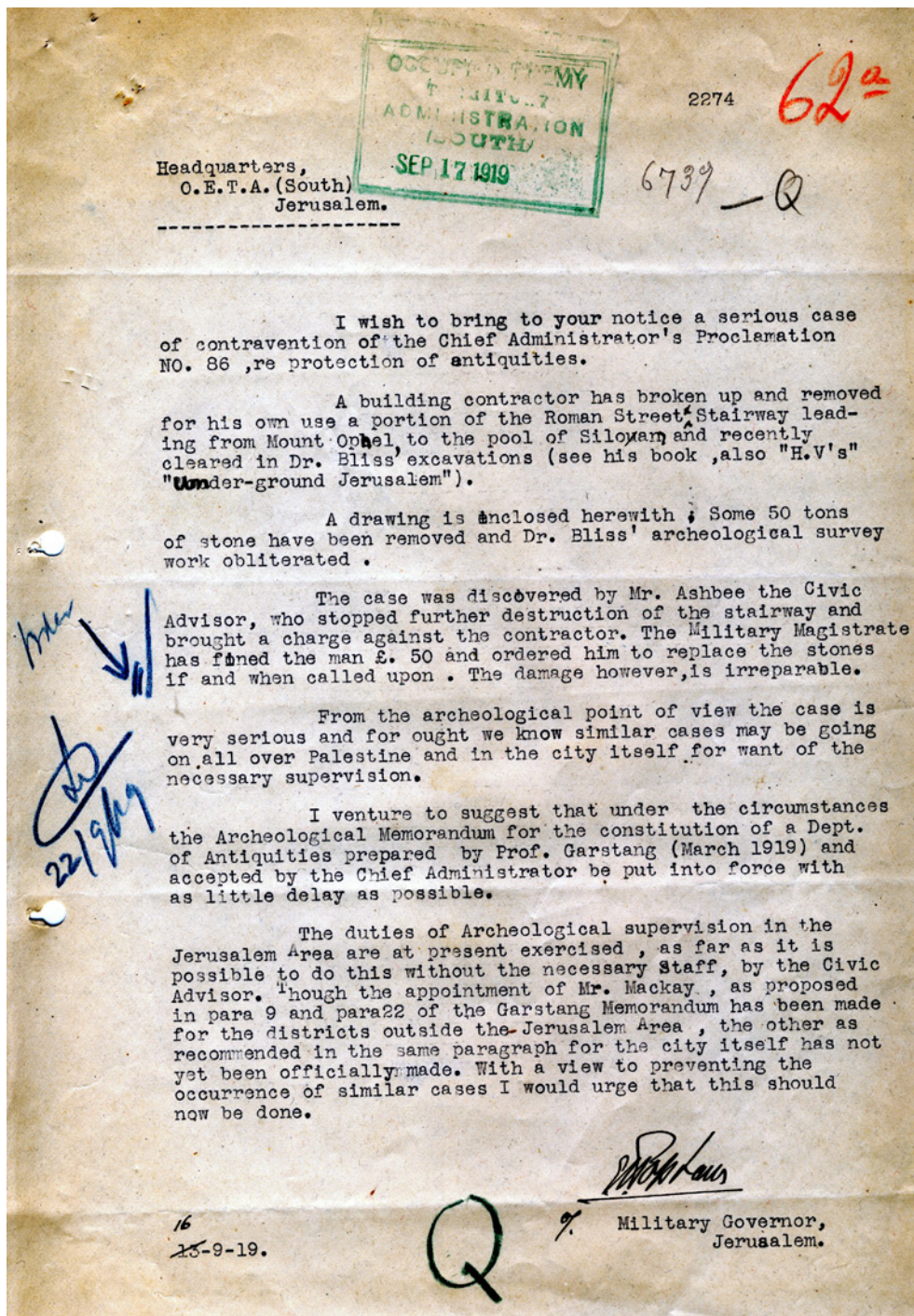


Fig. 3. The original letter, reporting the theft of the paving stones of the stepped street.



O.E.T.A. [Occupied Enemy Territory Administration] (South)

Jerusalem

I wish to bring to your notice a serious case of contravention of the Chief Administrator's Proclamation No. 86, re protection of antiquities.

A building contractor has broken up and removed for his own use a portion of the Roman Street Stairway leading from Mount Ophel to the pool of Silouan [sic] and recently cleared in Dr. Bliss' excavations (see his book, also H.V.'s "Underground Jerusalem").

A drawing is enclosed herewith. Some 50 tons of stone have been removed and Dr. Bliss' archaeological work obliterated.

The case was discovered by Mr. Ashbee the Civic Advisor, who stopped further destruction of the stairway and brought a charge against the contractor. The Military Magistrate has fined the man £ 50 and ordered him to replace the stones if and when called upon. The damage, however, is irreparable.

From the archaeological point of view the case is very serious and for ought we know similar cases may be going on all over Palestine and in the city itself for want of the necessary supervision.

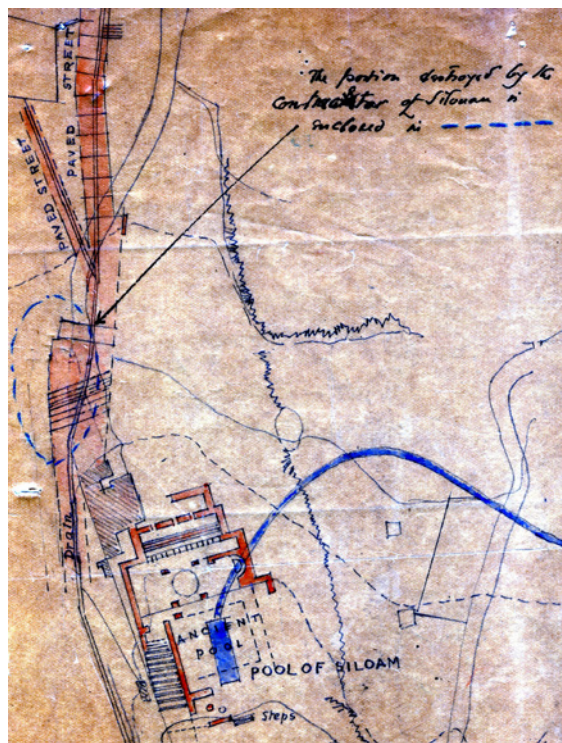
I venture to suggest that under the circumstances the Archaeological Memorandum for the constitution of a Dept. of Antiquities prepared by Prof. Garstang (March 1919) and accepted by the Chief Administrator be put into force with as little delay as possible.

The duties of Archaeological supervision in the Jerusalem Area are at present exercised, as far as it is possible to do this without the necessary Staff, by the Civic Advisor. Though the appointment of Mr. Mackay, as proposed in para 9 and para 22 of the Garstang Memorandum has been made for the districts outside the Jerusalem Area, the other as recommended in the same paragraph for the city itself has not yet been officially made. With a view to preventing the occurrence of similar cases I would urge that this should now be done.

[signed]  
(Ronald Storrs)  
Military Governor,  
Jerusalem

16-9-19

A small sketch of a map was appended to the letter, copied on tracing paper from the plan published by Bliss and Dickie (General Plan II, 1898). On the map was a handwritten notation: "The portion destroyed by the contractor of Silouam is enclosed in..." depicting a broken line to indicate the way the site of the damage had been marked. And indeed, as noted, in the southern part of the current excavation, on the eastern side, is an area where the pavement of the stepped street is missing – obviously due to the theft of the stones.



**Fig. 4.** The map which was appended to the letter, in which is marked in a dotted line the location where the street was damaged.

The Mr. Ashbee mentioned in the letter is Charles Robert Ashbee, a British architect and designer. In 1918 he was invited by Sir Ronald Storrs, the military governor of Jerusalem, to serve as a civilian adviser on the development of the city and to head the Pro-Jerusalem Society, which Storrs had founded. After the British Mandate was established, Ashbee also became secretary of the Jerusalem planning committee, a post he held until 1922, when he returned to Britain.

In a book edited by Ashbee summarizing the committee's activities in Jerusalem during the time of British military rule from 1918 to 1920, the theft of the street pavers is mentioned in an article by Louis-Hugues Vincent (1921). The sketch that Ashbee had copied from Bliss and Dickie's report, on which he had marked the site of the theft with a broken line, appears in the book (*ibid.*: 60, Fig. 76) with the notation: "XXX – the portions encircled are the ones destroyed by the contractor."

It should also be noted here that the file relating to the Archaeological Advisory Board, in the British Mandate Archaeology Department archive at the Rockefeller Museum

in Jerusalem, states that on November 26, 1921, excavation permit No. VIII was issued to Dr. Nahum Slouschz by the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society, for the purpose of excavating in the village of Silwan, in a location between the Dung Gate and the Pool of Siloam. The precise spot is not known, but it is at some point along the Tyropoeon Valley (Reich 2013: 14). Ostensibly this was an unusual request whose background is unknown, but it may have been a salvage excavation due to the theft of the paving stones discussed here. We do not know if the excavation was carried out.

**Kenyon 1974**

Kenyon K. *Digging Up Jerusalem*. London.

**Reich 2011**

Reich R., *Excavating the City of David, Where Jerusalem's History Began*, Jerusalem.

**Reich 2013**

Reich R., The Beginning of the Israel Exploration Society and its Activities vis-à-vis the Mandatory Government's Department of Antiquities, *Qadmoniot* 143: 12–17 (Hebrew).

**Shukron and Reich 2011**

Shukron E., and Reich R., The Excavation of the Central Drainage Channel from the Second Temple Period in Jerusalem, *City of David Studies of Ancient Jerusalem* 6: 156–185 (Hebrew).

**Szanton, Shor and Hajbi 2019**

Szanton N., M. Shor and M. Hajbi, Back to the Cisterns, the Market and the Square: The Lower City of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period." In E. Meiron (ed.), *City of David Studies of Ancient Jerusalem* 12: 87–103 (Hebrew).

**Szanton et al. 2019**

Szanton N., Hagbi M., Uziel J. and Ariel D.T., Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem: The Monumental Street from the Siloam Pool to the Temple Mount, *Tel Aviv* 46: 147–166.

**Vincent 1921**

Vincent L.H., Les Monuments de l'Époque Romaine Protégés par la Société, in: C.R. Ashbee, *Jerusalem 1918–1920*, Being the Records of the Pro-Jerusalem Council during the period of British Military Administration, London: 56–60.