Location and introduction
Excavations were commenced in 2006 at a site situated along the outside of the southern Old City wall of Jerusalem, about 114 m. east of the present-day Zion Gate. This work is a continuation of a dig originally carried out at this location by Magen Broshi between 1974 and 1978. In topographical terms, the site is situated within the heart of the “Upper City” of the 1st century CE, and at the southern end of the Byzantine *Cardo Maximus* colonnaded street. The goal of the excavation is to clarify the ancient occupational history of a key topographical location on the upper southeastern slope of the Western Hill of Jerusalem.*

The new excavations (Fields A–E) were undertaken across the site previously examined by Broshi with the objective of studying the stratigraphy and chronology of the dense structural features and intervening rubble and soil deposits he had uncovered. What has been revealed hitherto are the superimposed architectural remains of domestic buildings dating from Early Roman, Late Roman/Early Byzantine, Late Byzantine, Umayyad, and Abbasid/Fatimid periods. Additional data was obtained on the chronology of the construction and use of the current line of the southern Old City fortifications from Fatimid to Ottoman times.

Iron Age II and Late Hellenistic (Hasmonean) periods
Bedrock was sporadically encountered at a few locations indicating that the overall topographical appearance of this area has changed quite substantially since the Iron Age II, with a noticeable fall of underlying rock levels towards the south and southeast. Cavities or caves were cut into the sides of the resulting rock scarps.

A thin *terra rossa* soil layer was encountered at a few locations above bedrock with mixed artifacts from the Iron Age II (8th–6th centuries BCE), including *lmlk* stamped jar handles, and Late Hellenistic (Hasmonean, late 2nd–mid-1st centuries BCE) period. Building remains from these periods have yet to be identified at the site.
General view of the excavation, looking southeast, at the end of the 2018 season
The Early Roman (Herodian) period

The remains of a multi-room dwelling or mansion dating from the Early Roman/Herodian period (late 1st century BCE–70 CE) was uncovered, with at least three well-preserved rooms belonging to the structure’s basement level with their barrel-vaulted ceilings still intact.

The dwelling includes a subterranean vaulted, stepped and plastered ritual bathing pool (miqveh), with a shattered 1st century CE storage jar lying on the lowest step. Next to it, to the south, is a room containing a plastered bath (of adult length), larger but similar to...
excavated examples from the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem and at Jericho dating from the same period. A smaller miqveh installation was also found in the northeast of the excavation area. Within the adjoining courtyard to the west were three circular bread ovens.

A cistern extending below the level of the basement had a few complete cooking pots on its floor-bottom dating from the Late Hellenistic/Hasmonean to Herodian period transition, suggesting the structure was first built at the time of Herod the Great (37–4 BCE). Numerous artifacts were found belonging to this period, notably a bowl/lamp made of black stone (diameter: 11.3 cm., a fragment of an ornamented stone window-screen, stucco and wall painting fragments, murex shells, stone scale-weights, and stone vessel fragments (including large jars, ossuaries, and an inscribed cup, see below). Many coins were also found, including a rare gold *aureus* from the reign of Nero struck in 56/57 CE.

The overall dimensions of the structural complex unearthed at the site are unknown as it extends beyond the excavation area, but it was evidently multi-roomed and comprised of at least two stories. The building was destroyed in the Roman conquest of the Upper City in 70 CE, as evidenced by signs of burning and many coins of the First Jewish Revolt.
The inscribed stone cup

An inscribed cylindrical stone cup (or mug) of 1st century CE date was found broken into four pieces within a fill overlying the edge of the vault of the subterranean ritual bathing pool (miqveh) at the center of the site. The cup was made of soft white limestone (height 12 cm.) and bears an incised inscription, with ten or perhaps eleven lines of script, cut into the distinctive knife-pared facets of its outer side. The rest of the facets were filled with zig-zag lines, perhaps intentionally to ensure that no further script might be added.

The cup has been studied using special photographic enhancing methods (PTM/RTI imaging) to clarify the script of the inscription. The incisions were made by a scribe using a stylus or a small sharp nail, and it was originally done by tipping the vessel over on its side. Individual letters are identifiable and carefully drawn (letters average 0.6 to 0.9 cm. in height).

This was not a straightforward Hebrew or Aramaic cursive inscription, but instead resembles cryptic texts known from the Qumran caves. Three different scripts have been identified: (1) a script known from the Dead Sea Scrolls as “Cryptic A” script (also known as “Hebrew Hieratic”); (2) an unknown cryptic script which is unique to this specific inscription, even though some letters bear a resemblance to cryptic letters and signs already known in the Dead Sea Scrolls; and (3) the standard Jewish/Aramaic square script of the period (with only a few words evident in lines 5-6). An interesting feature is the appearance of repeated letters which may signify they
are musical notations (used in chanting?), or perhaps they had some other mystical or liturgical significance. Lines 5–6 appear to be in Jewish script of the period and may represent a paraphrasing of Psalm 26:8 and/or a reference to Psalm 27:4.

The cylindrical cup (or mug) is a well-known type of hand-carved vessel frequently found in 1st century deposits in Jerusalem, with a wide distribution not only in Judaea but in Jewish communities throughout the Land of Israel, and it may have been used for the ritual cleansing of hands (netilat yadayim) using water taken from large stone jars (the qalal jars):

...they may not... pour [water] over the hands, save only in a vessel [i.e. the cup]; and only vessels that have a tightly stopped-up cover [i.e. the jar with a lid] afford protection (M. Yadaim 1.2; Danby edition).

Hence, the stone vessels used for the act of pouring the water are probably the hand-carved cylindrical cups with handles (some even have spouts), and vessels like these are mentioned in M. Parah 3.2:

[In Jerusalem]... they brought oxen with doors laid upon their backs, and on these the children sat bearing in their hands cups of stone. When they reached [the spring or pool of] Siloam they alighted and filled the cups with water and got up again and sat upon the boards.

The Late Roman/Early Byzantine period
Following the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 CE, the ruined houses in the area of the excavation were abandoned. A few Tenth Roman Legion stamped roof tiles and scattered pottery were included in the fills overlying the Early Roman architectural remains, but otherwise building remains from this time were not evident. At some point towards the end of the Late Roman period, or at the beginning of the Byzantine period (4th century CE?), new building activities took place in the area; the walls of the Early Roman structures were reconstructed and raised to their original height using the same plan. This indicates that the original ruined houses from the Early Roman period survived and were still visible centuries later. The subterranean spaces at the basement level of the Early Roman houses, however, were entirely blocked during the new building operations, thereby preserving their vaulted ceilings from destruction.

The Late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods
Major building activities took place in the area later in the Byzantine period, with the deposition of large quantities of leveling rubble and soil across three terraces, and with the construction of massive and deeply-emplaced sub-structural consolidation walls extending across the area.

Some of these foundation walls were of varying thicknesses and were inserted into deep trenches. Associated with these foundations were drainage chutes (probably for sewerage purposes), sunken rectangular basins, plastered channels, and circular stone-lined shafts leading down to subterranean water cisterns. The leveling fill associated with these sub-structural consolidation works was 2–3 m. thick in places, containing primarily Early Roman finds, except for a very small quantity of Late Roman/Byzantine potsherds. The intention behind this construction work and leveling operation was to create a substantially elevated and flattened area for building purposes.

The exact date when this massive leveling operation took place is uncertain, but on chronological grounds it may have been at the same time as the construction of the nearby Justinian Nea Church in the mid-6th century CE.

Very few superstructural remains of this large building complex have survived on the upper two terraces at the site except for a few plastered walls, flagstone pavements, and fragments of mosaic floors (one decorated with red-and-black florets). However, a well-preserved and large arched chamber (preserved to a height of 3 m. with a plain mosaic floor)
was uncovered on the lower terrace on the east side of the area. It is conceivable that this building complex is depicted on the late 6th century Madaba map of Jerusalem as a small rectangular area immediately southwest of the Nea Church and at the end of the columned Cardo Maximus street.

Numerous finds from the Byzantine period were retrieved, including a Greek ostracon with a reference to the delivery of three wine jars on 6th November of an unknown year.

The late Byzantine building complex at the site had a long life and continued to be used during the subsequent Umayyad and Abbasid periods, according to finds from the surviving floors. It was abandoned towards the end of the Abbasid period, (possibly in the 9th century CE), and a smaller building was erected on the southwest side of the area, with squared piers in the internal corners, and with at least one doorway in the wall facing east. Next to it was a courtyard with a cistern, and a few terrace walls nearby. This building appears to be from the Fatimid period (early 11th century CE).

Fatimid/Crusader fortifications

Already in 1047, a Persian visitor to Jerusalem, Nasir-i Khusraw, expressed his awe of Jerusalem’s fortifications and described them as
“strong walls of stone, mortared, and there are iron gates…” Building operations on the walls of Jerusalem were undertaken just before the earthquake of 1033, as well as at the time of Caliph al-Mustansir Billah (between 1059 and 1063), and further details are provided in the writings of William of Tyre.

During preparations made by the Fatimid authorities a year before the arrival of the Crusades, the city fortifications were strengthened once again and various additions were made to them, notably a ditch dug in front of the southern city wall running across the summit of Mount Zion (today, the southern wall of the Old City). In 1099 Crusader forces lay siege to Jerusalem and the commander of the Provençals, Raymond of St. Gilles, Count of Toulouse, took up position at a location not far from the southern wall of the city. Numerous attempts were made by the Crusaders, over three days and nights, to fill in the problematic deep ditch (fovea nimis profunda) running in front of the wall, with clods of soil and stones, or at least the part where the siege tower was to be brought close to the wall. The anonymous chronicle Gesta Francorum relates that the ditch was indeed eventually filled in by Raymond’s soldiers:

Now, Count Raymond, from the southern sector, was leading his army and siege tower up near the wall. But between the siege tower and the wall was a ditch. And so it was proclaimed that whoever brought three stones to the ditch would be given a denier [a coin]. It took three days and nights to fill the pit; once it was filled, the siege tower was brought up close to the wall.

Traces of the Fatimid fosse-ditch have been uncovered in the current excavations and it had a width of at least 15–17 m. in front of the fortification wall. A substantial stretch of the actual Fatimid fortification line (45 m. in length), running east to west, had previously been uncovered by Avigad in the Jewish Quarter excavations along the inner side of the Old City wall, east of the Zion Gate. The ditch was full of debris and soil deposits and the top of it was found sealed beneath two horizontal ground-surface levels dating from the 12th and 13th centuries, indicating that it was no longer in use at this time. The fosse did not have a forewall or counterscarp along its outer edge, which was one of the reasons that made it difficult to identify during the excavations.

Following the conquest of the city in 1099 by the Crusaders, the southern line of the Fatimid city wall was restored and reused. A thick layer of black ashy deposits with white streaks (40 cm. thick) was traced on the west side of the excavation area. It was rich in carbonized materials (mostly wood fragments, and grape seeds), and animal bones (primarily pig). Artifacts included metal objects, mostly made of iron, such as an arrowhead, crossbow bolts, and a hook. A coin was found in this
layer and has been identified as belonging to the “rough series” of coins issued by Baldwin III, possibly starting in c. 1152/1153. This ashy layer may have been connected with Baldwin III’s attempt to wrest power from his mother, Queen Melisende, who was residing in the palace adjacent to the Citadel on the west side of Jerusalem.

The Ayyubid gate and external market
Following the conquest of Jerusalem in 1187 by Salah-a-Din, the southern city wall—established by the Fatimids and reused by the Crusaders—was abandoned, and in 1191/92 a new fortification wall was built, which also had a ditch in front of it, and it encircled the summit of Mount Zion, extending as far as Burj Kibrit (located at the middle of the present southern wall of the Old City). In the early 13th century this wall, built by Salah al-Din to include Mount Zion, was abandoned and the southerly fortification line previously used during the Fatimid and Crusader periods was once again followed. Six towers are believed to have been established at this time along the southern wall, but in fact many of them may first have been built during the Fatimid period. It was during the rule of al-Malik al-ʿAdil (1200–1218) that this process of refortifying Jerusalem began, with the actual work of building the fortifications made by and completed by al-Malik al-Muʿazzam ʿIssa. The earliest inscription representing his fortification activities was found below the western city wall of Jerusalem, south of the Citadel, and dates from 1202/1203. The latest is an inscription from the Citadel referring to the construction of a tower (burj) which has been dated to 1213. Six years later, in March and April 1219, the city walls and towers were knocked down quite substantially, as well as the walls of certain public buildings, and this led to a partial depopulation of some parts of the city; the razing of the city walls was completed in 1220 and 1227.
A hard undulating surface was traced in the 2009 season just south of the medieval tower with a gate (with inscription dating from 1212) previously identified by Broshi. The surface could be dated to the Ayyubid period (early 13th century). Flotation procedures were initiated with the gridding of the hard surface, and the collection of samples for micro-archaeological analysis. The matrix of this surface contained an exceptional quantity of fish bones and eggshells (presumably from chickens), lending substance to the suggestion that this area served as an open market in front of the gate of the early 13th century. Further parts of this surface were excavated in subsequent seasons, and in 2015 a much larger area was gridded and investigated, bringing to light additional quantities of fishbones, seashells, and various metal objects, including a bronze fish hook.

From the analysis of the excavation results, it appears the builders of the foundations of the Ottoman city wall in the mid-16th century preferred to follow the line of the Ayyubid city wall and towers, and largely ignored the line of the southern city curtain wall dating from the time of the Fatimids.

**Select bibliography**


