

Israeli archaeologists find ancient fortification

September 2 2009



This image made available by Israel's Antiquities Authority Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009 shows part of a 3,700-year-old fortification wall discovered in Jerusalem. Archaeologists have discovered a 3,700-year-old wall in the City of David, part of the earliest fortification construction on such a large scale ever found in Jerusalem, the Israel Antiquities Authority said Wednesday. The 26-foot high wall is believed to have been part of a protected passage used by the Biblical Canaanites that led from a fortress on top of a hill to a spring. Ronny Reich, director of the excavation and a professor of archaeology at the University of Haifa, said the discovery marks the first time such "massive construction" before the time of King Herod was found in the oldest parts of the city. (AP Photo/IAA)

(AP) -- Archaeologists digging in Jerusalem have uncovered a 3,700-year-old wall that is the oldest example of massive fortifications ever found in the city, the Israel Antiquities Authority said Wednesday.

The 26-foot-high wall is believed to have been part of a protected passage built by ancient Canaanites from a hilltop fortress to a nearby spring that was the city's only water source and vulnerable to marauders.

The discovery marks the first time [archaeologists](#) have found such massive construction from before the time of Herod, the ruler behind numerous monumental projects in the city 2,000 years ago, and shows that Jerusalem of the Middle Bronze Age had a powerful population capable of complex building projects, said Ronny Reich, director of the excavation and an archaeology professor at the University of Haifa.

The wall dates to the 17th century B.C., when Jerusalem was a small, fortified enclave controlled by the Canaanites, one of the peoples the Bible says lived in the Holy Land before the Hebrew conquest. The kingdom thought to have been ruled from Jerusalem by the biblical King David is usually dated to at least seven centuries later.

A small section of the wall was first discovered in 1909, but diggers have now exposed a 79-foot portion, and Reich believes it stretches much further. Reich said budget constraints related to the global financial crisis put an end to the excavation, at least for now.

"The wall is enormous, and that it survived 3,700 years - this is, even for us, a long time," Reich said. It was remarkable that a [fortification](#) of this kind was not dismantled for later building projects, he said.

"When you just stand there and see it, it is amazing," he said.

The wall and other archaeological finds at the site will be opened to the

public beginning Thursday, the Antiquities Authority said.

Archaeological research at the site known as the City of David, just outside the walls of Jerusalem's Old City, is caught up in the struggle for control over the city.

The archaeological site, one of the richest in a country full of ancient remains, is in the midst of a Palestinian neighborhood in east Jerusalem.

The City of David digs are funded by Elad, a Jewish settler organization that also buys Palestinian homes and brings Jewish families into the neighborhood. Palestinian and Israeli critics have charged that the archaeology is being used as a political tool to cement Jewish control over parts of Jerusalem that Palestinians want for the capital of a future state.

Israel captured the Arab section of Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war. Unlike other areas it captured, Israel quickly annexed east [Jerusalem](#) and declared the whole city as its capital. In some rounds of failed peace talks, Israel has indicated willingness to cede Arab sections to a Palestinian state, but no agreement was reached.

The current Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has taken such offers off the table, and no peace negotiations are in progress now.

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Citation: Israeli archaeologists find ancient fortification (2009, September 2) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-09-israeli-archaeologists-ancient-fortification.html>

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