

Coins show Herod built only part of Second Temple walls

November 23 2011, by Hazel Ward



Two ancient bronze coins which according to Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) archaeologists were struck by the Roman procurator of Judea, Valerius Gratus, in the year 17/18 CE and recently were revealed in excavations beneath the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City are exposed to the media.

Israeli archaeologists have uncovered ancient coins near the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City which challenge the assumption that all of the walls of the Second Temple were built by King Herod.

The coins, which date back to around 15 AD, were found inside a Jewish ritual bath located at the foot of the western wall of the Second Temple, which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, [archaeologists](#) said on Wednesday.

Until now, archaeologists and scholars have largely accepted that the Roman king was responsible for construction of both the Temple and its walls in a project completed by the time of his death in around 4 BC.

During the dig, archaeologists found the ritual bath, or mikveh, had been filled in to make way for construction of the wall, part of which was built directly on top of it, with the coins found in the half which was not covered by the foundation stones.

"Until today, accepted wisdom said that all the walls were built by Herod," said Eli Shakoun, an archaeologist from the Israel Antiquities Authority who led the dig with Professor Ronny Reich of [Haifa University](#).



Archaeologist Eli Shukron of the Israel Antiquities Authority kneels inside a ritual bath exposed beneath the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City. Israeli archaeologists have uncovered ancient coins near the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City which challenge the assumption that all of the walls of the Second Temple were built by King Herod.

"When we found these coins which were dated about 20 years after Herod's death, we understood that it couldn't have been him who built this part of the wall," he explained.

The find also showed that construction of the walls had taken at least 40 years, which is longer than previously thought, Reich told reporters.

"Herod started building in the 18th year of his reign, which was around 22 BC, and here we have coins (underneath the wall) which date back to at least 15 AD, which show it was at least 40 years," he said.

The mikveh and the [coins](#) were discovered in the last two months during excavations of a 2,000-year-old drainage channel which stretches from a site near the Western Wall and the adjacent Al-Aqsa mosque compound and runs under the Old City [walls](#) to end in the Arab neighbourhood of Silwan.

[Excavation](#) of the 600-metre tunnel has caused controversy as the site is very close to the mosque compound, which houses the third holiest site in Islam and is known to Muslims as Haram al-Sharif or the Noble Sanctuary.

The mikveh was uncovered dozens of metres from the Western Wall,

one of the holiest sites in Judaism, revered as the last remaining remnant of the Second Temple.

Israeli excavations and construction work in the Old City often stir controversy, particularly around the Western Wall which backs onto the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, one of the most contentious sites in the Middle East conflict.

Israel occupied and later annexed east Jerusalem, which includes the Old City, during the 1967 Six-day War and considers it to be its "eternal and indivisible capital."

But the Palestinians oppose any extension of Israeli control over the city's eastern sector which they want as the capital of their future promised state.

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