

# Archaeologists discover ancient Jerusalem moat

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JERUSALEM (RNS)—Archaeologists from Tel Aviv University and the Israel Antiquities Authority have discovered a remnant of a massive ancient moat in Jerusalem that fortified the city during the time of the First Jewish Temple and the Kingdom of Judah.



Yuval Gadot of Tel Aviv University stands next to the northern side of the moat that protected Jerusalem. Alongside him are carved bedrock channels. (Photo by Eric Marmur, City of David)

“This is an extremely important discovery,” said Yosef Garfinkel, a

professor at the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University. “It shows that by the ninth century BCE, Jerusalem was an important city.”

Although no one knows exactly when or why the moat was created, the archaeologists say it could have been quarried as far back as 3,800 years ago. At the time, the moat physically separated the southern residential part of the city (the City of David) from the upper city—the Temple Mount area—where the palace and First Temple stood.

Open questions and excavations at the City of David archaeological site have persisted for 150 years. So, any new discovery must be cross-referenced with earlier finds.

In this case, the team reexamined 70-year-old excavation reports written by the renowned British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon, who worked on a nearby site in the 1960s.

“It became clear to us that Kenyon noticed that the natural rock slopes towards the north, in a place where it should naturally have risen,” said Yuval Gadot, excavation co-director and head of the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University.

While Kenyon believed it to be a natural valley, she had discovered a different remnant of the moat, carved to the west.

Taken together, the two parts of the moat extend at least 230 feet from west to east. The trench is at least 30 feet deep. The dig site is altogether 3,500 square feet and previously had been used as a parking lot for visitors to the Western Wall.

“Cut into the hill’s natural bedrock, the ditch would have required the quarrying of nearly half a million cubic feet of stone, making it a truly monumental achievement,” an article on the website of the Biblical Archaeology Society notes.

“This barrier appears to have remained in place until the late second century BCE, when it was finally filled in and covered over to allow for new construction.”

## **New insights into biblical place names**

Gadot said the “dramatic discovery” has reenergized the discussion over the meaning of the topological terms used in the Hebrew Bible, such as Ophel, which is believed to be an elevated area, and the Millo, which various scholars have interpreted to mean a stepped stone structure, a tower, a landfill or an embankment.

According to 2 Kings 11:27, Solomon built the Millo and repaired the breaches of the City of David.

The First Jewish Temple was built by King Solomon in 1000 B.C., after his father, King David, conquered Jerusalem. Led by King Nebuchadnezzar, Babylonians breached the Temple’s walls and destroyed it in 586 B.C. The Jews who remained were killed or exiled.

Yiftah Shalev, the excavation’s co-director on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, said the team exposed nearly 10 percent of the moat. He dismissed the notion that the enormous trench was nothing more than a stone quarry.

“We assume it served as some kind of defense,” Shalev said. “You don’t leave a large trench in the heart of the city during the period Jerusalem was the capital of the Judean Kingdom. It would be an obstacle to residents at the time.”

Given the magnitude of the moat, Shalev speculates that it also served as a symbol of the Judean kings’ wealth and prowess.

“It’s as if they are saying, ‘Look, if we can build something so impressive,

imagine what else we can do.’”

Garfinkel agreed.

“There has long been a debate about when Jerusalem became a real capital city,” he said. “This discovery, and discoveries in other ancient cities from that time, altogether change the notion of the strength of the Kingdom of Judah.”

Eli Escusido, director of the Israel Antiquities Authority, said the City of David digs “never cease to amaze” not only because they enhance our understanding of the Bible, but because of the engineering skill needed to build the kingdom.

“It is impossible not to be filled with wonder and appreciation for those ancient people who, about 3,800 years ago, literally moved mountains and hills,” Escusido said.