Early Jerusalem

Contributed by Stephen Langfur

We can locate the original Jerusalem from the Mt. of Olives. We must look south of the golden Dome of the Rock, to the left of the bend in the modern street, outside the present Old City walls. Three houses left of that bend, we find what was probably the northernmost point of the pre-Solomonic city (see photo, below). From there, that is, Jerusalem extended to the left (south), on the ridge.

Here is a satellite view from directly overhead. Note the scale (lower left).

The original Jerusalem was protected by deep valleys. These were the Kidron and an unnamed valley to its west (in Jesus' time called the Tyropoeon). It has been largely filled in by garbage and sewage, but in antiquity it was deep. The 2009 excavations show that it angles southwest from the Dung Gate, leaving more space for the city than earlier thought. A third valley stretched from the early city's southern tip westward. This is the Hinnom, Gai Benai Hinnom in Hebrew, which came to be called {jtips2}Gai benai hinnom in Greek became Gehenna – an equivalent of hell. The association may have arisen out of 2 Kings 23:10,
which lists the reforms of King Josiah: "He defiled Topheth, which is
in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son
or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech." (Cf. Isaiah 30:33 and Jeremiah 7: 31-33). The associaton with hell became further established in Jewish apocalyptic literature: 4 Ezra 7:36, "The furnace of Gehenna shall be made manifest, and over against it the Paradise of Delight."|Gehenna (associated with hell){/jtips2}.

Here is an angled view, showing the valleys more clearly (the scale applies only to the bottommost portion):

Thus the original Jerusalem had excellent natural defenses on all sides except the north, where a saddle 12 feet deep linked it to the hill on which the temple would be built. This hill can be considered part of the plateau of Benjamin (to be discussed shortly).

Jerusalem had a spring, the Gihon or "gusher," which is located today in an opening just beneath the floor of the Kidron Valley. (The Kidron was 30 to 60 feet deeper in David's time.) The Gihon can supply about 2500 people.

Why wasn't the original city on a higher hill? The answer, of course, is the spring. But that is not all. The hill had to be small enough so that the number of soldiers produced by the population would suffice to defend its wall.

Here is a view from the west:

{maps}images/stories/Jerusalem/09122002085351.jpg||right{/maps}Some hold that Jerusalem was a tiny village in the time of David and Solomon. Yet the city was already important enough 800 years before David to attract an Egyptian curse in the {jtips}The Egyptians wrote the names of their enemies on clay figures, which they then smashed or maltreated, hoping that a similar fate would befall those designated.|Execration Texts.{/jtips}

What made this first Jerusalem important? The answer includes two factors.

First, on its north side begins a plateau (10 miles south-to-north by 4 miles east-to-west). Since most of it belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, we can call it the Benjamin Plateau. The southernmost good link road between the international trade routes here met the only north-south route in the central highlands. This road used an unbroken ridge (rare in these parts), ascending from the west through the Beth Horons toward Gibeon on the plateau, then descending to Jericho and crossing the Jordan to Heshbon on the King's Highway.

{maps}images/stories/Jerusalem/beth_horon_rd.jpg||right{/maps}The photograph (right) shows the western part of the ridge road.

Armies coming from the west to attack Jerusalem tended to take this unbroken road, reaching the plateau and turning south: for example, the Seleucids on their second attempt to squash the Maccabean revolt, the Romans under Cestius Gallus, the Crusaders, and the British in 1917.

Now we come to the second reason for Jerusalem's early importance. Many cities enjoyed the commercial advantages of the junction at the central Benjamin plateau: Bethel, Beeroth, Mizpeh, Rama, Gibeon, Gibeah, while Jerusalem clung to its southern edge. But although these other towns were closer to the intersection, only Jerusalem had deep valleys for defense, as we have seen. (Perhaps, for this reason, it remained independent of the Israelite tribes until the arrival of David.)

Jerusalem's access to the Benjamin plateau, combined with its defensibility, were among the factors that led David to make it his capital.

David had other reasons too for choosing Jerusalem as his capital:

{maps}images/stories/Jerusalem/13112002080546.jpg|Choice of Jerusalem as capital||left{/maps}After the death of Saul, the whole land was exposed to the Philistines. David, chief of a warrior band, went up to Hebron and ruled Judah. Hebron is ideally situated for controlling the southern quarter of the central highlands, but no more than that. According to

2 Samuel 5: 1-3, after seven years, in response to the Philistine threat, the other tribes asked David to rule over them. Hebron would not be suitable as a capital for such an expanded kingdom: it lay too far south, and its connection with the north was tenuous. Now David cast his eye on Jerusalem: it bordered his home tribe of Judah, and it gave him access to the Benjamin plateau. From here he could connect to all points.

In addition, Jerusalem was a Jebusite city: it did not already belong to any Israelite tribe, and none would have reason for envy.

So David conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital. Solomon built the Temple there. This was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC but restored 70 years later by returning Jewish exiles. In 23 BC, Herod began to rebuild it in grander style. To this city and its Temple Jesus made pilgrimage around 30 AD, followed by the many pilgrims who came in his footsteps starting 250 years later. Several centuries after that, Muslims identified Jerusalem as the place of Muhammad's ascent into heaven. All these traditions have led to the growth of the metropolis that we see before us today.

{mospagebreak title=Top of the Hill}

The Top of the Hill

Archaeological dating is difficult in the earliest Jerusalem, for these reasons:

a) The slopes are so steep that ancient builders either re-used existing structures or cut back to bedrock, dumping earlier remains, so that little could be found in situ.

b) Part of the hill was used as a quarry, probably in the Roman period.

c) Much of it was explored by 19th-century archaeologists. The importance of broken pottery for dating had not yet been discovered. They threw away the sherds they found.

We enter from a road that runs over the area of the ancient city. The current visitors' center is on its eastern edge. Beneath this are huge stones set in patterns. They are the foundations of a very large building, found in an area that was fortunately neglected by Jerusalem's first archaeologists. In 2005, on the basis of the pottery discovered beneath the building's floor, archaeologist Eilat Mazar dated the structure to the 10th century BC - the time of David - although it continued in use until the Babylonian destruction of 586. (Beneath the 10th century level, the next pottery she discovered was from the 18th century BC, the time of Jerusalem's founding.) Mazar thinks that the the building may have been David's palace, referred to in 2 Samuel 5:11 - "Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons; and they built David a house."

cb(5,12); (For the location, see photo, right. For close-ups of the foundations, see

the following photos.)

{maps}images/stories/Jerusalem/capital-bolen.jpg|A proto-Aeolic capital from Megiddo|right{/maps}At the eastern foot of the hill, an earlier archaeologist, Kathleen Kenyon, had found a beautiful proto-Aeolic capital. It was five feet long, far bigger than other such capitals from Israelite palaces in Samaria, Megiddo or Hazor. Mazar asks us to imagine the size of the column that would have been topped by such a capital, and then to imagine a building containing similar columns.

We go east and behold the steep drop to the Kidron Valley. Across from us rises the southern extension of the Mount of Olives.

This southern part of Olivet is called the Hill of Offense, because of a legend that upon it King Solomon erected altars to the gods of his thousand pagan wives. On its steep slope today is the Arab village of Silwan, whose houses seem stacked on one another. The impression is like the one that Jerusalem itself must have offered 3000 years ago, when the houses hung thus on the slope beneath us.

{maps}images/stories/Jerusalem/silwan-and-gihon.jpg|Silwan|left{/maps}We can spot the location of the Gihon, the only year-round spring in the area, today at the bottom of the hill we are on. In antiquity, however, the Kidron Valley was 30 feet deeper at this point, and the Gihon was on the slope. Producing enough water for 2500 people, this spring made the city possible, but we can see that the inhabitants would have had a problem reaching it in times of siege. An enemy could stand on the other side of the narrow valley, where Silwan is today, and shoot arrows at anyone fetching water. We shall see how the early Jerusalemites solved this problem.

(In the time of the First Temple, the hill where Silwan is today was honeycombed with cave-tombs hewn into the rock. Most of them are hidden by the houses today. To judge from the workmanship, these were the tombs of the upper classes. The people of ancient Jerusalem lived facing their eminent dead.)

Apart from the water problem, the first city had another major vulnerability. Where we stand, on its northern end - and only here - no deep valley protected it. A fortress was probably at this spot.

Descending a staircase, we turn and see 18 meters of a massive, curved "stepped-stone structure." It continues far beneath us for at least another 9 meters, maybe as much as 27! No one is sure, for much is still covered by debris from the destruction of 586 BC. The function, apparently, was to reinforce the bedrock (which is cracked) in order to secure a building that was built on it (the Jebusite fortress? David's palace?). Up here it is close to the bedrock that it strengthens, but below us, out of sight, Kenyon made a probe to determine its thickness. After penetrating horizontally for eleven layers, she gave up.

The date is in dispute. We used to think that the stepped-stone structure was preceded by a system of terraces, but this is no longer accepted. The whole was built as a single unit. Archaeologist Jane Cahill, who dug here with Yigal Shilo in the early 1980's, insists that the latest pottery found inside the structure dates to the 12th century BC. If so, the Jebusites would have built it to shore up the bedrock supporting their fortress on top. Eilat Mazar, on the other hand, dates the structure to the 10th century. She thinks it was built as a single unit with the Davidic palace.

Perhaps as early as the 10th century BC, people cut into the stepped-stone structure and built houses there. Standing on the tourist path, looking west, we can see the remains of some. To the left are two squared monolithic pillars. They belonged to the west side of a house of about 8 by 12 meters. (The archaeologists pulled down the remains of the east side in order to explore the continuation of the stepped-stone structure.) This house, Shiloh noted, was better built, its {jtips}Stones cut to fit into a construction|ashlars{/jtips} more finely chiseled, than the houses he found in a residential area to the south. Just south of the pillars is part of a staircase that probably led up to the next terrace, which has since disappeared. Just north of the pillars the diggers found the remains of three service rooms, one containing 37 (!) storage jars from the 7th century BC, the time of Jeremiah. Another small room had a stone, still visible, which is shaped for sitting. There is a hole in its center, and beneath it is a pit about eight feet deep: surely a toilet. Ostraca (inscribed potsherds) were also found in the house, written in a Hebrew script typical for Jeremiah's time. One contains the name "Ahiel," which modern scholars have used in order to designate this villa.

About 5 yards to the right (north) of Ahiel's house, there is part of a second staircase adjoining the wall of another structure. (Not shown here.) Archaeologists call this "the burnt room," for they found many lumps of carbonized wood in it. These included finely worked pieces of boxwood (not native) with motifs such as the palmette, also known from the ivories of this time. Mixed among the pottery sherds were arrowheads of bronze and iron. The impression is one of battle and fire, and to this we can relate the destruction by the Babylonians in 586 BC, as told in 2 Kings 25:8-9:

Now in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, to Jerusalem.

He burnt the house of Yahweh, and the king’s house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great house, burnt he with fire.

cb(25,10);

East of Ahiel's, beneath the path we stand on, the diggers discovered another burnt house with arrowheads from that day… and more: 51 bullae, that is, clay seals from the letters received by the person who lived in this dwelling. The fire had burned the letters and baked the seals. These contain names, including Yerahmiel son of the King, Benyahu son of Hosea, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan. The last was the royal scribe in the days of King Jehoiakim and the prophet Jeremiah (36: 1-12).

(The seal of Baruch the son of Neriah, Jeremiah's own scribe, was also found, but in an unofficial dig, so we are not sure where. It can be seen in the Inscriptions Room of the Israel Museum.

Forty-eight years after the Babylonian destruction, the edict of Cyrus allowed the exiles to return and rebuild the Temple. Under Nehemiah (Chs. 1-6), the city wall too was rebuilt, although it enclosed a much smaller area than before the Babylonian destruction. Note the corner of an inset in the wall above us (No. 3 in the photograph of the stepped-stone structure above). The British archaeologist, Kathleen Kenyon, dug here from 1961 until 1967, and beneath this inset she found sherds from the time of the Babylonian invasion, no later. She identified the wall, therefore, as Nehemiah's work, designed for a very small city. Afterwards the {jtips2}The Hasmoneans: family of Judah Maccabee ("the hammer") and his brothers, who revolted successfully against the Greek Empire in 167 BC. They purified and re-dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, establishing the festival of Hanukah ("dedication"). They ruled till 63 BC, and their domain extended almost as far as King David's.|Hasmoneans{/jtips2} incorporated it into their city wall. Most Jerusalemites in their day lived on the larger hill to the west; there was no need then to build houses on the steep slope below us, and so the wall could run this high up near the spine of the ridge.

We shall now head downhill to see how the people of the first Jerusalem defended their water supply.

{mospagebreak title=Water system}

How the Jerusalemites Defended their Water 3700 Years Ago

We have noted the vulnerability of Jerusalem's spring, the Gihon: an army on the Mt. of Olives, across the narrow Kidron Valley, could make things most unpleasant for anyone going to the spring. How did the first Jerusalemites come to grips with this problem? First, here is an overview of the eastern slope above the spring, as seen from the north.

Note again the vulnerability of the spring. (Silwan on the Mt. of Olives continues outside the picture toward us, so that it is directly opposite the spring.) In the 18th century BC, the Middle Bronze Age, the Jerusalemites built their city wall on the slope above the spring. They also made a water shaft (today called Warren's), which began higher up, inside the wall. We shall now study these things in detail.

We head south from the area of the citadel (Area G) until a staircase appears on our left. We descend it, passing the entrance to Warren's Shaft, until, two-thirds of the way down the slope, we find an assemblage of stones on our left (north of us). They belonged to an earlier wall, probably part of a tower.

Based on the pottery associated with these stones, Kathleen Kenyon dated this wall to the 18th century BC. (Later Yigal Shiloh found more of it in Area E to the south.) The stones are large, such as only a giant can move, one might think. Such construction is therefore called cyclopean, after a famous giant in Homer's Odyssey. One may also see it at Shechem in a wall that also dates to this period. (The modern terraces above this wall are recent, built to prevent collapse, but there must have been ancient terraces here as well.) One can imagine David on the roof of his palace above, glancing down and catching sight of Uriah the Hittite's wife.

It is no accident that we had to pass the opening of Warren's Shaft in order to reach this point. We now climb back up to it. (We shall use the word "shaft" to mean the entire underground tunnel, not just the vertical opening at its end. Charles Warren, an intrepid British explorer, discovered and cleared it in 1867.)

The first Jerusalemites, we have seen, had a problem in reaching the Gihon Spring during a siege. They solved this in the 18th century BC, that is, at the time they built the wall we just visited. The idea was to gain access to the spring from inside the city. That explains the placement of the wall and the shaft: both were part of one plan. Karstic processes had already done much of the work: there are many karstic holes in this limestone hill. (On karst.) That is, rainwater picking up carbon dioxide formed carbonic acid, which over a long period dissolved parts of the limestone. The process had probably created caves, joined by fissures, such that water draining into a fissure above came out below near the spring. (By throwing straw into the water, one could trace it.) The early Jerusalemites would have followed the water with their hammers and chisels.

We descend into the shaft. When we reach the bottom of the steps, where the route becomes more horizontal, we are at the point where two teams of hewers met about 3700 years ago, one coming from above and one from the spring; they had followed the water and broadened the karstic openings.

We continue, and we begin to notice a difference in the shading of the bedrock on the sides. There is an upper layer of soft white limestone, called meleke (royal) because of its high quality, and there is a lower layer of harder, darker dolomite on which we are walking. Only during the most recent excavation by Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron, conducted since 1997, have archaeologists come to realize that the original shaft was dug only through the soft white stone of the upper layer. In other words, when Jerusalemites went to fetch water 3700 years ago, they did not walk where we are walking: they were higher; the top of the dolomite layer served as their floor. We can see this when we come to what used to be the end, for here we find a ladder. Climbing it, we shall enter a passage which, 3700 years ago, was simply the continuation of the Canaanite tunnel. The person who took the picture on the right was standing in this passage. It led, we shall see, to the water of the Gihon Spring.

Before we climb the ladder, however, we must answer the question: who deepened the shaft into the harder, darker stone… and why? The answer lay partly in the passage we shall reach with the ladder. On its floor, Reich and Shukron found a thick deposit of stone chips from the harder dolomite layer, but none from the soft white meleke. They also found sherds of oil lamps from the 8th century BC. But why were they digging? Preparing Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria, they probably did not want to rely on the thousand-year-old Canaanite system of pool and towers. These would have seemed vulnerable in the light of Assyrian military technology, which included a capacity to construct huge ramps and to pick the stones from a wall, as seen in the Lachish reliefs. The Jerusalemites would have wanted a seamless tunnel directly to the spring, as at Gibeon, Gezer, Megiddo and Hazor. In the course of the work, they cut across a karstic opening that descended vertically 40 feet to the water (but they hewed beyond it). The 19th-century explorers saw a metal hook above this opening, so placed that from it one could lower a bucket without impediment to a canal containing water from the spring. This system, however, would have taken too long to supply the whole population. The ultimate answer was an alternative project: Hezekiah's tunnel. It led the spring water to a spot within the city walls on the southern end, at a place protected from Assyrian spears and arrows.

We climb the ladder and at once find, on our left, the opening into a gate 3700 years old. It led to a fortified

area surrounding the Gihon Spring, the city's sole water source. The walls were 10 feet thick. Inside, on its stone floor, Reich and Shukron found sherds from the 18th and 17th centuries BC. ({jtips}Reich, Ronny and Eli Shukron. "Light at the End of the Tunnel." Biblical Archaeology Review, January/February 1999. |Reich and Shukron{/jtips}, p. 30.) They found similar sherds between the bedrock and the lowest course of stones. This gate, then, was built at the same time as the city wall that Kenyon discovered: the entire system (wall, shaft, and gate) was of a piece.

The Gihon Spring was contained within a huge tower, discovered by Reich and Shukron. They had been summoned to perform what is called a "rescue dig," which is obligatory before one may build in this part of Jerusalem. (The plan had been to erect a Visitors' Center.) In the course of a routine probe, they discovered the tower's inside corner. The tower protected the spring and the passage to it against attacks from the Mt. of Olives, which is a stone's throw to the east. It was made of cyclopean stones, and it dates to 3700 years ago.

Nearby to the south, the Canaanites also dug a reservoir. At some point this was deepened to meet a conduit that was cut from the Gihon. Grooves in the side of its northern
rock face (almost 30 feet high) suggest that wooden platforms were
inserted. People would have stood on them to draw water.

The conduit from the Gihon split into two, one part to the reservoir, the other to a channel. This channel (once wrongly attributed to Solomon) extended along the edge of the hill. The northern part was cut from above, and the opening was filled with stones too big to fall in. The southern part was dug as a tunnel. Since the Spring Tower was built over its conduit, it must have been cut before that was built, perhaps only shortly before, as part of the whole system.

In antiquity the Gihon gushed intermittently: the word Gihon means gusher. (The rock was later cut in such a way that it would provide a steady flow.) The area around the spring bore, in David's time, the name Gihon. The Bible refers to Gihon as a place: "to Gihon," "in Gihon." When David's son Adonijah had himself anointed king near Ein Rogel, a less regular spring just south of the city, David countered by commanding that Solomon be placed on his (David's) own mule and anointed "in Gihon." (Cf. {jtips}Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion!...Behold, your King comes to you! He is righteous, and having salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.|Zechariah 9:9{/jtips}.) Solomon probably had the Spring Tower before him, by then 700 years old.

The system may also be related to David's conquest of the city, which then belonged to the Jebusites. In 2 Samuel 5:8 of the American Standard Version, we read:

David said on that day, “Whoever strikes the Jebusites, let him get up to the watercourse, and strike the lame and the blind, who are hated by David’s soul.” Therefore they say, “The blind and the lame can’t come into the house.”

cb(5,9);

A more literal translation would go as follows:

And David said on that day, "Everyone who strikes a Jebusite v'yigga (and touches) the tzinnor (water duct?)… and the lame and the blind are hated of David's soul, which is why it is said that the lame and the blind shall not enter the house."

There may be a lacuna in the passage. We are not sure what tzinnor meant in Biblical Hebrew, although at a later time it came to mean water pipe. In 1 Chronicles 11:6 we read,

David said, “Whoever strikes the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain.” Joab the son of Zeruiah went up first, and was made chief.

cb(11,7);

It is tempting to think that the military challenge was literally to touch the water shaft. In order to do so, the army would have had to conquer the old towers guarding the spring and the pool. It would not have been necessary to fight more deeply into the city. Merely by holding the area of Gihon, one would force a capitulation. That may well be what transpired, because there is an indication that Jebusites continued to live in or near the city, at peace with the Judahites, after David's conquest: David later bought a threshing floor from Ornan the Jebusite on the peak of the same hill, which was destined to become the Mountain of Yahweh.

{mospagebreak title=Hezekiah's Tunnel}

Hezekiah's Tunnel

From the area of the 3700-year-old towers near the Gihon Spring, we prepare to enter a tunnel dug a thousand years later, in the time of Isaiah. We shall need flashlights and footwear for walking in water, which will reach at some places up to our waists.

In preparing his revolt against the Assyrian Empire in 705 BC, Hezekiah made a major religious reform, destroying rural pagan cults and centering worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. He expanded the city westward, probably bringing in many rural folk who would otherwise have been in harm's way. It was a period of urbanization and centralization. The strength of the rural clans and extended families diminished. Two units of human existence now became prominent: the nation-state and the individual. The new stress on the individual will be reflected, a century later, in prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Hezekiah did not want to rely on the towers at Gihon to defend the city's water supply. He probably feared, as said earlier, that Assyrian military technology had rendered these fortifications obsolete. The basic problem, we have seen, was the location of the spring within easy range of the Mt. of Olives. He attempted, probably, two solutions, either of which would have sufficed: 1) to lower the level of the shaft known today as Warren's, reaching the spring from inside, as many cities had done by then, e.g., Megiddo; or 2) to dig a tunnel that would lead the water to a point that was protected from the Mt. of Olives.

In any case, Hezekiah's Tunnel was completed in time. Some 533 meters long, it leads the Gihon water to the west side of the spur on which the city was built, invisible from the Mt of Olives. We read in 2 Chronicles 32:30, "This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper spring of the waters of Gihon, and brought them straight down on the west side of the city of David."

The Assyrians did besiege Jerusalem, thinking, apparently, that the water supply was still at Gihon and that they would capture it. In 2 Kings 18:27, after the Assyrians have taken Lachish, their envoy comes to Jerusalem and proclaims to its people that unless they surrender they are "doomed to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine." (More)

{maps}images/stories/Jerusalem/hez_tunnel.jpg|Start of tunnel|left{/maps}The Assyrians failed to conquer Jerusalem. Hezekiah got off by paying a large tribute. The tunnel is one reason why the Assyrians failed. If they had succeeded, they would have dealt with the Jerusalemites as they had with the northern tribes, dispersing them among their colonies. Like the northern tribes, the exiles would probably have lost their national identity, assimilating to their new surroundings. There would then have been no one to preserve the texts that today make up the First Testament. (The Samaritans did not yet exist.) There would be, today, no Bible, no Judaism, Christianity or Islam. This tunnel, therefore, has a great deal to do with who we are.

After feeling the rush of the spring, we wade through a short, roughly-hewn section, where the water comes up to our waists. A rush of air comes at us from the opening of Warren' Shaft. Then we find ourselves in a long straight section.

From an inscription we know that two teams worked from either end. To judge from the tunnel's winding course, they were probably following water that flowed from one end to the other through karstic fissures, as explained earlier. Else how could each team possibly have known in which direction to work? There aren't even any air vents: instead, they kept the ceiling high.

After we have waded about 15 minutes, the passage begins to twist and turn, with occasional false starts and corrections. The hewers must have heard each other. Giving up the system they had used till then, each was trying to hack toward the other's voice.

Amid the twists, one can make out a change in height, like a shallow step, in the ceiling. Up to this point, the chisel marks in the sides were made in the direction of our movement. Beyond this point, their direction is against us. This then was the meeting point.

The workers could not have known the full effect of their success on the subsequent history of the world. In breaking through, they shaped who we are.

The achievement seemed important enough, even then, to deserve an inscription, which was carved in the rock near the southern end. A bather discovered it in 1880, when the land was under Ottoman rule. The original is in the Istanbul Museum:

[...when] (the tunnel) was finished. And this was the way in which it was cut through: - - while...] (were) still [...] axes (s) , each man toward his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be cut, [there was heard] the voice of a man calling to his fellow, for there was a crack [???] in the rock on the right [and on the left]. And when the tunnel was finished, the hewers hewed (the rock), each man toward his fellow, axe against axe; and the water flowed from the spring toward the pool for 1,200 cubits and the height of the rock above the head (s) of the hewers was 100 cubits.

The tunnel straightens again, and after five minutes or so the ceiling begins to rise, until it is quite high. Apparently, the team that started on the southern end began high on the hill, following water into a karstic fissure, water that the earth seemed to swallow. After meeting the team from the spring, they lowered the floor so that the water from the spring could flow all the way to the chosen place: the Pool of Siloam (Shiloach in Hebrew).

We emerge from the tunnel into a pool. Here the {jtips2}The Byzantine period – that is, the period of the Eastern Christian Roman Empire –may be dated from 330 AD, when Constantine re-named the city of Byzantium "Constantinople" and dedicated it to the God of the Christians. Its end, in this land, came in 638, when the Muslims took Jerusalem. Elsewhere it lasted much longer: Constantinople finally fell to the Turks in 1453.|Byzantines{/jtips2}

recognized the Pool of Siloam. It makes sense too that the much earlier pool of Hezekiah's time would have been here. For one thing, the tunnel comes out at this point. To repeat the passage: "This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper spring of the waters of Gihon, and brought them straight down on the west side of the city of David." (2 Chronicles 32:30.)

This pool's original shape is unknown, but certainly it was bigger than what we see. In the northwest corner stands a pillar. It belonged to a Byzantine church from the mid-5th century. (A church appears at the corresponding place, roughly speaking, on the {jtips} A church at Madaba, today in Jordan, goes back to Byzantine times. In the 19th century, a mosaic floor was uncovered, dating to about 580 AD. It contains a pilgrim's map of the entire country, including Jerusalem.|Madaba{/jtips} map.) Here Christians came to commemorate the miracle in John 9: Jesus smears mud over the eyes of a man born blind; the man washes the mud off at the Pool of Siloam and sees.

But this was not the pool of John 9! For now one end of the later pool has been dug up. It lies a few feet to the south. Herod's pool, of course, did not need the natural protection that Hezekiah had required. It was the time of the Pax Romana. Herod's 33-year reign saw hardly any warfare. And besides, the city had its main water supply from elsewhere.

Even the small excavated section of the Herodian pool testifies to its grandeur. Here are two views, the first looking W:

And this view looks at the pool's NE corner.

It is a good place to read John 9.

{mospagebreak title=Spine of the City}

Who shall ascend the Hill of the Lord?

After we issue from Hezekiah's Tunnel, our bus can receive us near the Pool of Siloam, but if we prefer, we can make the steep climb up the spine of the ancient city, or in the words of Psalm 24, we can "ascend the hill of Yahweh." On scaling the edge, we stop for a look at the meeting of the valleys: the Kidron, Tyropoeon and Hinnom, which, as one, cut from here through the wilderness to the Dead Sea.

Over most of the Herodian Pool of Siloam is a rich green area. It too received (and still receives) the Gihon water. Here, probably, was the royal garden mentioned in Nehemiah 3:15, where Shelah is Siloam (Shiloach in Hebrew):

Shallun the son of Colhozeh, the ruler of the district of Mizpah repaired the spring gate. He built it, and covered it, and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and the wall of the pool of Shelah by the king’s garden, even to the stairs that go down from the city of David.

We would have liked Shallun's stairs on ascending a minute ago! Continuing upward, we soon find a wire gate on our right. We enter and head a bit further east until we see, to the north, the openings of two large rock-cut shafts. They were once even longer than what we see, but this area later (in the Roman period?) became the focus of intensive quarrying.

People have been tempted to regard the shafts as the tombs of the kings of Judah. David, we know, "slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David" (1 Kings 2:10), as were his royal descendants. (Ordinary folk were not buried within the city. For the tradition of David's Tomb on Mt. Zion, see here.) As {jtips}Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. The Holy Land: An Archaeological Guide, 4th edition. London: Oxford, 1998.|O'Connor{/jtips} (p. 114) points out, the quality of the stone-cutting in the shafts is poorer than that in the tombs on the other side of the Kidron Valley. Yet this is not a decisive objection, since David's shaft was surely earlier than those, and its neighboring shaft may have been earlier too.

We also have the next verse in Nehemiah (3:16):

After him, Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the ruler of half the district of Beth Zur, made repairs to the place opposite the tombs of David, and to the pool that was made, and to the house of the mighty men.

cb(3,17);

These repairs may have been to a wall that later became part of the {jtips2}The Hasmoneans: family of Judah Maccabee ("the hammer") and his brothers, who revolted successfully against the Greek Empire in 167 BC. They purified and re-dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, establishing the festival of Hanukah ("dedication"). They ruled till 63 BC, and their domain extended almost as far as King David's.|Hasmonean{/jtips2} fortifications: we see a piece of it just NE of us.

On the other hand, nothing was found in the shafts to indicate their date or use. Between them is the opening of a large "mikveh" (ritual bath), near which was found a stone slab with a long inscription in Greek (enlarge the picture below). It gives credit to one Theodotus, priest and ruler of the synagogue, for building a synagogue and the associated chambers (evidently a large complex). The presence of the ritual bath suggests that the synagogue was here. The two rock-cut shafts may have been its basements. ({jtips}Reich, Ronny, Gideon Avni and Tamar Winter. Yerushalaim: madrich l'gan ha-archaeologi. Jerusalem: Yad Yityzhak Ben Zvi, 1998. (Hebrew. An English translation exists.)|Reich, Avni, Winter, pp. 62-63{/jtips})

{maps}images/stories/Jerusalem/theodotus-inscription.jpg|Synagogue inscription|right{/maps}Leaving by the same wire gate, we continue our upward climb. Soon, on our right, we can see, below us, the ruins of a residential section, mostly from 7th century BC, protected by a stretch of the eastern city wall. The latter was built on pieces of the cyclopean wall from a millennium earlier, the same one that Kenyon found below Warren's Shaft.

We continue to ply our way up the mountain toward the site of the ancient Temple. If the going is hard, let us remember what we are ascending. Until the time of King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet, most Jerusalemites lived on this hill, which they would mount in procession toward the Temple. We may imagine them singing, as they climbed, Psalm 24.

{mospagebreak title=Logistics}

Logistics for visiting the first Jerusalem and the City of David

The "City of David Visitors Center" (which has restrooms) controls the site. Telephone: (02)6262341 or *6033. Open in winter from Sunday through Thursday 08:00 -17:00, Friday and holiday eves, 08:00 - 13:00. Open in summer from Sunday through Thursday 08:00 - 19:00, Friday and holiday eves, 08:00 - 15:00. The Pool of Siloam has different hours, which should be checked by phone. The whole site is closed on Sabbaths and Jewish holidays. Leave enough time to complete the tour (e.g. Hezekiah's tunnel).

For Hezekiah's Tunnel, be prepared to walk fifty minutes in water, sometimes waist-deep. You will need footwear that won't slip off in the current. A flashlight (candles not permitted!) is necessary.