recent excavations in Jerusalem

As will appear, Warren's discoveries have now been expanded or refined in two respects: The first seems to be a major revision, even more stunning than the original suggestion, of the solution to the question of "Robinson's Arch," springing from near the southwestern corner of the Herodian walls; the second is the discovery of an enormous plaza running almost the whole length of the southern side of the Mount, across which worshippers walked to enter the Temple Enclosure through underground passages.

Other excavations in what had been the Jewish Quarter of the Old City before 1948 have, if anything, produced even more historically consequential findings about the extent of Jerusalem in the periods before and after the Babylonian Conquest, the grandeur of its edifices and the splendid level of craftsmanship of their builders.

The first "modern" excavations around the Temple Enclosure, dominating the city and since Solomon's time the throbbing pulse of Jewish tradition and religious inspiration, were made by a young British ordnance officer, Lieutenant (later Captain) Charles Warren.

He was commissioned by the Palestine Exploration Fund of London in 1865 to do what was, as Landay, in Silent Cities, Sacred Stones, says, "nothing short of the rediscovery of ancient..."
Jerusalem... For so grand a project the Fund should have had an army of prophets, not a military engineer. Warren lacked archaeological experience. He was hampered by Moslem strictures against excavating on the sacred area (about 150,000 square meters) of the Temple Enclosure. He was limited to investigating the outside of the sacred area. He cleared two retaining walls.

In 1879, Warren hired workmen and began mining into the roots of the ancient Jerusalem with a series of vertical shafts, some 125 feet deep. From their bottoms, he ran long galleries up to and along the walls.

"The work was dangerous, because the fill and debris were over a level of water. A tunnelled was formed by stone chips which had no cohesion and rubbish compressed into loose shingles which had a tendency to shift like water. There were frequent cave-ins. The rubbish contained sewage which caused the hands to fester..."

What Warren did, in effect, was to make an underground exploration of a large part of the Western and Southern Walls of the Enclosure, according to its nature, and a mountain of superimpositions of Roman, Byzantine, Moslem, Crusader and ultimately Arabic and Turkish buildings and houses, each set on the ruins of the one below it. At various levels, the walls of the famed Herod's underground aqueduct running along what was called the Central or Tyropoean ("Cheesemakers") Valley. He discovered a whole network of Herodian building blocks running down to bedrock for about 21 courses, or 21 meters, below the then ground level near the southern end of the Western Wall. Digging along the Southern Wall he discovered that the Herodian ashlar extended in places some still another eight courses until they could be set in the bedrock.

Warren saw that building his temple, beginning about 20 B.C. (a replacement for the more modest temple of the 2nd century B.C.), was a Howard's underneath the western and southern sides where the land sloped precipitously toward the Central Valley and the Valley of Hinnom to the south. Left the whole affair slide down the ridge, and Herod held it in place by his gigantic retaining walls. From the top of the retaining wall and its bedrock to the southwestern corner to bedrock, archaeologists suggest that the wall must have comprised more than 50 courses.

Before the current excavations along the western side there were, as Warren's day, only two or three of the Herodian courses to be seen above ground, the two uncanny and the two above were of later construction—Omayyad, Crusader, Turkish and even more recent. Some three or four of the Herodian courses were found along that portion of the Western Wall known as the Wailing Wall (some 200 years after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70) with the help of their own barn on the entry of Jews into Jerusalem to permit them once a year ("to walk over its stones"). About eight excavations are seen to be at the southernmost corner.

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1. Robinson's Arch jutting out of the Western Wall. In the foreground are the remains of a seventh-century Omeyyad palace.

2. Interior of aqueduct of the Herodian period beneath the western street, looking north. The walls are rock-hewn, the vaulting of ashlar construction.

3. Interior of the aqueduct, looking south.

4. Spring of Robinson's Arch and courses exposed by current excavations.

5. Southwest corner of the Temple Mount. At left, pedestrian walk leading to the prayer compound on the Western Wall. In the right foreground, rubble of a building formerly used by the archaeological expedition and the Supreme Rabbinical Court; beneath its foundations is the western wall of a seventh-century Omeyyad palace.

6. The same view of the Temple Mount seen above, as reconstructed by Professor Benjamin Mazar's archaeological team.
1. Plan and structure west of Robinson's Arch.

2. View of the South Wall. The Crusader gate at the right blocks the "Double Gate."

3. Herodian road alongside South Wall; Crusader gate in background.

4. The "Triple Gate." A door-post stone, all that remains of the Herodian gate is under the stone with three holes (left). The three arched openings were added later and subsequently blocked by the Crusaders.

5. The Southwest Wall with (at left) part of the Herodian staircase leading to the "Double Gate." The "Triple Gate" is in center. The marble pillars shown about were first used in a Byzantine building, later reused in a seventh-century Omayan building.

6. Eastern section along the Southern Wall, looking east; at bottom, openings in two subterranean chambers.

7. Herodian paved street running along the Southern Wall, looking east, in the background, huge ashlar tumbled from the walls of the Temple Mount.
A multitude of tombs of the First Temple period were discovered on the western slope of the Central Valley. Two at the very bottom of the valley were incorporated by Herod’s architects into the aqueduct, which zig-zagged here and there to take advantage of the convenient cavities. Very little of importance of the First Temple itself, the glories of which are so abundantly described in 1 Kings: 5, 6 and 7, has been found but remnants of the Second Temple and Herodian periods that have been discovered are particularly interesting. Various fragments of panels, friezes, cornices, capitals, small columns and the like appear to have come from the Royal Stoa and validate Josephus’ enthusiastic comments, as well as his statement that the capitals of the columns in the Portico were Corinthian, and such as “caused amazement.” Also, four of the architectural fragments had traces of gold-leaf overlay, recalling Josephus’ mention of the gold-plating on the Temple itself and further references in the Talmud to the fact that “all the house was overlaid with gold.”

One of the most interesting finds was what must have been the capstone on the parapet at the southwest corner. It was found directly below that spot and was inscribed “To the place of the blowing of the shofar.” The most appropriate spot for sounding the ram’s horn that announced the beginning and end of the Sabbath would of course have been at this point, where the call would be heard in both the Upper City to the west and the Ophel to the south.

Another fascinating find made when the ground below Robinson’s Arch was cleared was an inscription in Hebrew carved on one of the ashlars. The carver, missing a couple of words, had obviously intended to quote Isaiah 66:14 (to be cited often in later Jewish writings as the watchword of visionary activity toward the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple): “And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice and your bones shall flourish like an herb.” In the Bible, the preceding verse reads: “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” The supposition is that the inscription was made during the reign of Julian when for a brief period Jews were given hope from the apostate Christian of being allowed to restore Zion.

The hopes of the present generation are more promising—not, to be sure, of rebuilding the Temple—but of retrieving much more information about its environs. The excavators’ program over the next several years calls for investigating and ultimately exposing all of the Southern and Western Walls of the Enclosure.

Already, an enormous Omayyad construction has been laid bare immediately south and somewhat west of the Enclosure. Four large buildings, of an elegance and size suggesting a great administrative complex, have been identified. At about the level of the Herodian streets, they appear to have been built in the years immediately after the first Moslem conquest of Jerusalem, i.e. in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Ben-Dov writes: “We can thus conclude that in the Omayyad period the region of the Temple Mount underwent a face lifting the extent of which had not been seen since the time of Herod.”

It is clear from the two to three acres exposed that the Omayyad caliphs repaired the then breached retaining walls of Herod and, using much of the stone that had fallen, erected large buildings around them. One building, handsomely decorated, was probably the palace of one of the caliphs, very likely al-Walid I, and others may have housed the servants of Haram el-Sharif (the “Noble Sanctuary” of the Arabs, i.e. the Temple compound). It was from these buildings—as it had been from about the same area 700 years earlier—that pilgrims entered the compound through gates in its Southern Wall to climb up through underground passages to the plazas around el Aqsa Mosque, which al-Walid built, and to the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock that his father, Caliph Abd el-Malik, had built before him.
With the fall of the Omayyad dynasty in the eighth century, the conquering Abbasids repaired the buildings in the Haram but the adjacent palaces and buildings to the south were left to decay and to the ravages of earthquakes and of stone robbers. One may assume that by the time of the Crusaders there was little or nothing of them to be seen.

The extent and vigor of today’s archaeological work in Israel in general and Jerusalem in particular is surely unmatched by any former period. It is impossible even to summarize here the accomplishments of so many enterprises. One program, however, may be mentioned without being invidious inasmuch as it, like that at Mount Moriah, focuses directly on the First and Second Temple periods. It is in the nature of a rescue operation, but in circumstances many another archaeologist elsewhere in the world could envy.

Extensive new construction of religious schools, public buildings and official residences is being undertaken in what was the pre-1948 Jewish Quarter of the Old City, in effect part of the Upper City of Hasmonean times. Under arrangements with the city and national authorities, Prof. Nachman Avigad of the Hebrew University examines the land of every projected construction and if he suspects there is anything of interest he can delay any new work until he has excavated the spot to his satisfaction.

In this process, one of his major finds, of profound importance in casting light on the much-disputed question of the extent of Jerusalem in pre-Hasmonean times, has been the identification of the “Broad Wall.” In Nehemiah 3:6 its existence is implied as of a time before the destruction of the First Temple, and Nehemiah goes on to relate that he restored this part of the wall. The question has been, where was it? Israeli scholars had come increasingly to believe that it lay to the west of the Temple Mount, somewhere in what became the Upper City, but the British archaeologist Kathleen M. Kenyon maintained that at least up to the time of the destruction in 587 B.C. and probably for some centuries thereafter Jerusalem did not extend beyond the Ophel, the hill to the south. Her own major excavations in Jerusalem and her findings of traces of David’s city gave great authority to her judgments.

But these must now be modified in the light of Avigad’s discovery of a wall 7 m. wide, “broad” enough by any definition to qualify for Nehemiah’s term, in the Upper City well to the west and north of the Ophel. By the stratigraphy and by Iron Age pottery found there, it can be dated to the eighth to seventh century B.C., i.e. the First Temple period.

In the same area, evidence from later levels is mounting to suggest strongly that here was the location, more or less as expected, of the Hasmonean palaces. Avigad uncovered monumental building foundations and a column base 1.80 m. in diameter, so huge that it must have been used in an enormous structure. He has also dug up a superbly executed Corinthian capital, the perfection of whose carving forces a reconsideration of the long prevailing notion that Jerusalem was by way of being only a provincial “hick” town in the Roman Empire where the workmanship was crude.

Another find was a graceful and elaborate engraving on plaster of that universal Judaic symbol, the seven-branched candlestick, or menorah, from the Hasmonean or early Herodian period. It is the finest representation among the handful of such early depictions known. The delicate “leaf-and-button” design of the branches brings to mind the representation on the Arch of Titus in Rome of the menorah which he brought as loot from the Temple in Jerusalem.

Finally, Avigad discovered the foundation of the “Nea,” the New Church of the Virgin Mary, built by Justinian in the middle of the sixth century. Contemporary accounts described it as second only to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in magnificence and size, but it has not been seen since Crusader times. About 3 m. below the present ground level, on the slope of the western ridge, the apse of the southernmost aisle was laid bare. The walls are of an astonishing 6.5 m. thickness; only the “Nea” could have been of such dimensions. The location was precisely that shown for it on the famous contemporary Madaeb mosaic map, on the floor of a ruined church south of Amman, in Jordan.