



By Lawrence H. Schiffman



Left: A view of the Pilgrimage Road at the City of David National Park.
Top (1): A portion of Chizkeyahu's Tunnel.
Top (2): Excavation and restoration of the Pilgrimage Road, or Stepped Street, reveals a small platform set up along the way from the Pool of Siloam to the Har Habayis.

The road used for aliyah laregel has been excavated and is now open to the public

The Stones on Which Our Ancestors Walked



Top: The original Siloam Pool—the water pool fed by Yerushalayim's Gichon Spring during the Bayis Rishon period—beneath the Bayis Sheini-period Pool of Siloam.

Right: Artist rendering of the Siloam Pool during the times of the Beis Hamikdash.



V*sham naaleh v'nei'rah, v'nishtachaveh lfanecha,* “and there (in the *Beis Hamikdash*), we will ascend, appear and bow before You.” With these words, we will *daven* over and over on Sukkos to be able once again to fulfill the mitzvah of *aliyah laregel*, ascending to the *Beis Hamikdash*, where we will have the opportunity to worship as the *kohanim* offer the sacrifices, the *Leviyim* sing the *Tehillim*, and we experience being in the presence of the *Shechinah*.

If we cannot observe Sukkos in this way this year, visitors to Yerushalayim will have the chance to appreciate a small part of what our forefathers experienced, due to the completion of an amazing archaeological excavation project.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, during his mid-September visit to Israel, formally opened the Pilgrimage Road, also known as the “stepped street,” in Yerusha-

layim. During Chol Hamoed Sukkos, tens of thousands will ascend from the Siloam Pool (Shiloach), at what was the entrance

to Yerushalayim during the *Bayis Sheini*, retracing the steps of the *olei regel* from their entrance to the city, their cleansing in the waters of the pool of Shiloach, and their ascent on a beautifully paved road that reached from Shiloach to the very gates of the Har Habayis. All this is due to excavation of parts of this road starting in 1867 and, since 2013, to the work of archaeologists of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) with the support of the El'ad Association, which is still ongoing.

One can call the ability to visit this road, more than 600 meters long (almost 2,000 feet), an archaeological miracle. The width of the road is eight meters (about 26 feet). However, at its southern end the road widens even more and reaches a width of 30 meters (almost 100 feet)! Previous excavators had uncovered sections of the beautiful ancient pavement that lay near the surface of present-day Yerushalayim, but to uncover the entire length of the ancient road required the development of new excavation techniques.

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Whereas excavations are normally conducted by digging down from the surface and carefully separating the historical layers below, the IAA archaeologists had to excavate horizontally beneath large numbers of homes in the Silwan area. This area is located immediately south of the Givati Parking Lot, itself right outside of Shaar Haashpot, the gate leading into today's Kotel area, close to where the buses now drop people off.

In opening these new portions of the Pilgrimage Road, the archaeologists had to develop a technique for maintaining the scientific standards of archaeological research while moving in a horizontal direction. Further, to guarantee both the safety of visitors and the stability of the homes above, enormous feats of construction had to be undertaken. It can be expected that an enormous amount will be learned with the full publication of these excavations. For now, however, visitors can learn about ancient pilgrimage by walking the entire length of the road.

One amazing aspect is the preservation up to now of the paving stones for the largest part of the road. Apparently, stones closest to the Har Habayis were robbed for later construction, a process familiar from many archaeological sites in Eretz Yisrael. Those who walk the full length will see shop after shop on the sides of the road where in ancient times all kinds of products, including food, clothing, various types of vessels and other merchandise were being sold. At one point, along the side, there is some kind of ancient podium. Scholars have argued about what its purpose might have been, some suggesting that it was intended for a kind of “town crier” who would have made public announcements to those traversing the road. Others have suggested that it may have actually been the *even hato'an*, the place where lost objects were announced (*Bava Metzia* 28b). One of the most interesting things about this road is that underneath it for its entire length is a channel that allowed rainwater to drain off the road so that it could be used in all seasons.

This project has not been without its critics, academic and political. I have personally visited almost the full length of the road, and I have even walked through the drainage channel underneath. I fully admit that some of the excavators are good friends and close colleagues. Nonetheless, I think I can be an impartial judge of the work that they have done. Some critics claimed that it was not possible to do scientific archaeology entirely underground, and that digging horizontally will yield reliable results. They will be completely disproven when the scientific publications that will emerge from this site become available. Those who argued that the opening of the Pilgrimage Road was politically motivated simply have no understanding of the significance of the rediscovery of ancient

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THE STONES ON WHICH OUR **ANCESTORS WALKED**

Secretary of State speaking at the opening ceremony of the Pilgrimage Road



Yerushalayim. They don't understand its archaeological and historical importance to the Jewish people.

Completing the excavation of this road brought with it some extra dividends. Among the most important was the gathering of numismatic evidence, ancient coins that can be used today to date archaeological strata. In this case, it was possible to tell that the road was built between 30 and 40 CE. It had previously been thought, based on the sections that had been investigated earlier, that this massive building project had been undertaken during the reign of Hordos (King Herod, ruled 38–4 BCE). Others attributed its construction to Agrippas (Agrippa I, ruled 44–41 CE), both Roman client kings. The excavators were able to prove conclusively, however, that it was built by Roman Procurator Pontius Pilate (governed Judea 26–37 CE), who crucified so many people that the Romans eventually removed him from office. We know from Josephus that he constructed some important projects in Eretz Yisrael, and it now seems that the Pilgrimage Road was one of them.

An added dividend of this entire project has been renewed examination of the Siloam Pool, directly below (south of the beginning) of the Pilgrimage Road. The history of this site in *Bayis Rishon* times



(1) The Siloam Pool and reservoir are fed by the underground Gichon Spring. (2) The stepped street to the Har Habayis. (3) The Chuldah Gates (Triple and Double Gates) on the Southern Wall of the Har Habayis were originally built during Herod's expansion of the Beis Hamikdash. They have been blocked since the Middle Ages. Excavations in what is part of the Ophel have revealed cisterns and ritual baths for visitors to the Beis Hamikdash below a monumental staircase leading up to the gates. (4) Robinson's Arch, which was part of a massive two-way (or possibly four-way) stairway with bridges, arches and landing features that were architecturally unique for the time period. (5) The Har Habayis was lavishly expanded upon by King Herod. (6) Breichot Hatzon. (7) The Antonia Fortress. (8) Herod's palace. (9) The governor's palace, or praetorium.

is fairly well known. We learn from the *Tanach* (*Divrei Hayamim* II 32:1-4) that Chizkeyahu Hamelech, when faced with

the impending attack of the Assyrian Empire, closed off the flowing Gichon stream and conducted the water underground to within the walls of Yerushalayim so as to ensure a regular water supply during the enemy siege. The meeting of the two teams digging this tunnel of over 500 meters (1,740 feet) was memorialized in the Siloam Inscription, a fascinating ancient Hebrew text preserved in the archaeological museum in Istanbul, since it was discovered in the period when Eretz Yisrael was governed by the Ottomans.

While *Chazal* saw this as demonstrating a lack of faith (*Pesachim* 4:9), it prevented a water shortage during the siege. It was generally thought that the earliest history of the Siloam Pool was tied up with this set of events, and that somehow the pool had been built by damming the flow of water in the time of Chizkeyahu. As part of their investigation of the Roman period Siloam Pool structure, scientists undertook carbon-14 dating of the organic material captured inside the dam (between the stones) that blocked the flow

of the Gichon spring, allowing water to be drawn from what is now the Spring House at the City of David. This resulted in an earlier date, most probably to the time of Yehoash or Amatzyah, indicating that there already was a pool there before the extensive water works of Chizkeyahu.

There is a debate about the purpose that this pool served in *Bayis Sheini* times. The excavators have suggested, based on its proximity to the beginning of the Pilgrimage Road, that it was a large *mikvah* facility. To the objections of some that its public position would have made this impossible for lack of proper modesty, they argue that there originally were partitions around it. Others, however, have taken the position that this was simply one of a number of swimming pools located at various points in the ancient city of Yerushalayim. For now, it is hard

to be certain, but I am sure that we will see further discussion of this issue as research continues.

Important excavations, conducted by the Hebrew University with support of the Israel Science Foundation, are also being conducted at the opposite end of the Pilgrimage Road, closer to the southern wall of the Har Habayis and its monumental steps. Archaeologists are exploring the ancient Ophel, an area at the northeast side of the *Bayis Rishon* period City of David. In *Bayis Sheini* times, when the Pilgrimage Road was in use, this area was a center for activity related to *aliyah laregel*. Here numerous *mikva'ot* were excavated, as well as a large Roman period pool similar to that at Siloam. This pool may have been a large-scale *mikvah*. Evidence points to the opportunity here to purchase sacrificial animals as well. It is

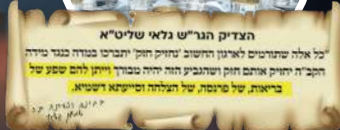
from here that those who walked up the hill on the Pilgrimage Road would enter the *Beis Hamikdash* through the Chuldah Gates (*Middos* 1:3).

The opening of the Pilgrimage Road is a phenomenal opportunity to experience the process of ascending from outside the city of Yerushalayim to the stairs of the Har Habayis. While we still cannot have the experience of our forefathers on the *Shalosh Regalim*, we still pray for the fulfillment of the words of *Musaf*, “*Vahavieinu l'Tzion ircha brinah v'liYrushalayim Beis Mikdashcha b'simchas olam*—May You bring us to Zion Your city in rejoicing, and to Jerusalem Your Temple in eternal joy.” ●

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In Bayis Sheini times, when the Pilgrimage Road was in use, this area was a center for activity related to *aliyah laregel*.

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