

Layers of Jerusalem Archaeology

Aelia Capitolina and the eastern Jerusalem cardo
Biblical Archaeology Society Staff • 12/20/2011

At the edge of the Western Wall plaza in Jerusalem, archaeology is revealing layers of the ancient city, including the eastern Jerusalem cardo from Aelia Capitolina of the Roman period.

When you get involved in Jerusalem archaeology, you have to be ready to find just about anything from the city's rich millennia-long history.

Israel Antiquities Authority archaeologist Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah and some of her colleagues in Jerusalem archaeology discovered just that when they undertook an excavation at the edge of the Western Wall plaza, across from the Temple Mount and Judaism's holiest site. In addition to uncovering evidence in this excavation of quarries and structures and inscribed seals from the First Temple period in Jerusalem, archaeology has shed light on the fascinating period of Aelia Capitolina, as Jerusalem was called when the city was under Roman rule starting in the second century C.E.

One of the most significant discoveries from Aelia Capitolina was the eastern Jerusalem cardo that ran north-south through the city parallel to the (more famous) western cardo. When the Romans rebuilt Aelia Capitolina, they established the orthogonal street grid that was standard in Roman cities, including a north-south cardo and an east-west decumanus. In this case there were actually two Jerusalem cardos. The eastern one was revealed in part by these latest excavations.

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The excavations also showed that the eastern Jerusalem cardo was a wide paved and colonnaded street, much like the western one. There were several shops carved into the cliff on one side of the street and several decorated pottery fragments that show the presence of Roman soldiers in this area. The excavations also uncovered two perpendicular side streets that run east from the cardo toward the Temple Mount. A big question among scholars is what (if anything) was on the Temple Mount in Roman and Byzantine Jerusalem. Archaeology is showing that although there is still no clear answer, it seems the Temple Mount and the eastern part of the city continued to be important in those periods.