

Tiles from the Temple?

Commentary for September 15, 2016 — Other Explanations are Possible

Below is an interesting World Net Daily article about tile pieces discovered by the Temple Sifting Project, but the tiles are not from the true Temple site. DWS

Was latest archaeological find really from Jewish Temple?

WND Exclusive, September 10, 2016



[Leo Hohmann](#)

Traditional site was a Roman fort, critics say.

Archeologists believe they have found new proof that Herod's Second Temple once stood on the site of the current "Dome of the Rock" in Jerusalem, walked upon by Jesus, but others are saying "not so fast."

A representative of the Temple Sifting Project holds up one of the restored inlaid tiles.



Jerusalem-based Temple Mount Sifting Project announced earlier this week it has successfully restored a unique architectural element of the Second Temple. It's known as "opus sectile," which is Latin for "cut work," an ancient Roman method of cutting polished stones and inlaying them in very expensive floors to make a beautiful design. The tile segments were inlaid with such precision that one could not insert a sharp blade between them.

Eight-sided star made from cut rocks inlaid tightly together into tiles:

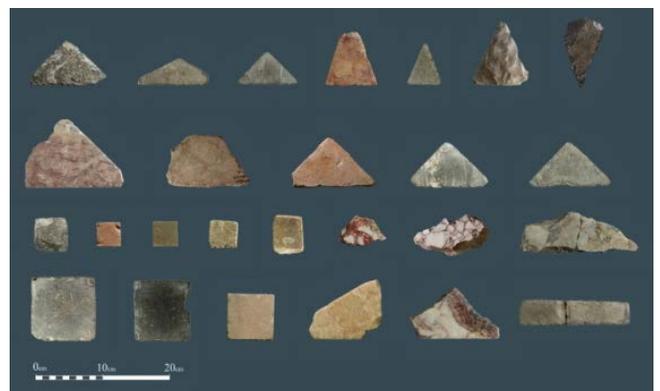


These decorative tiles adorned the porticos atop the Temple Mount and likely featured prominently in the courtyards of the Second Temple during the period that King Herod ruled (37 to 4 BCE) in Jerusalem.

"It enables us to get an idea of the Temple's incredible splendor," stated Dr. Gabriel Barkay, co-founder and director of the Temple Mount Sifting Project. The restored tiles were presented to the public on Sept. 8, at the 17th Annual City of David Archaeological Conference.

The exact place where the tiles came from is not 100 percent locked down but Barkay says he is certain they originated from a building within the present-day Temple Mount.

Some of the 100 cut and polished stones discovered by the Temple Mount Sifting Project:



They fit together to form opulent floor tiles during the Herodian period of ancient Rome and would have been used in the Jewish Temple complex but whether these came from the actual temple or a nearby building is not known.

“We do not know from where exactly they came but they came from within the present day Temple Mount. All the soil that we are sifting originates from inside the walls of the Herodian Temple Mount,” Barkay said. **“They were discovered in the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount and we are sure that they belonged to that placement.”**

“As for the location we feel sure it comes from within the precincts of the Temple, which building I don’t know, but it comes from the Temple Mount complex.”

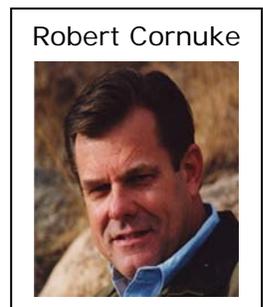
The dating of the tiles is not at all in doubt, he added. **“The materials of which they are made, colorful marble-like stones which originate from different locations and places around the basin of the Mediterranean. They were neither imported before the time of Herod the Great nor later, so we are sure of the date,”** he said in answering questions from WND.

“The dimensions, they are following the fractions of the Roman foot, which fits well with an Italian team that could have been sent by Emperor Augustus to help Herod with his building operations,” Barkay continued. **“And, most importantly, we have parallels to these tiles coming from Herod’s palaces,”** he said.

Approximately 600 colored-stone floor tiles have been uncovered, with more than 100 of them definitively dated to the Herodian Second Temple period. Opus Sectile flooring is consistent with the style of flooring found in Herod’s palaces at Masada, Herodian, and Jericho, among others, as well as in majestic palaces and villas in Italy during the time of Herod. The tile segments, mostly imported from Rome, Asia Minor, Tunisia and Egypt, were created from polished multicolored stones cut in a variety of geometric shapes.

But all are not sold on the idea that the luxurious tiles found and restored by the Temple Mount Sifting Project actually came from the Second Temple. One of the skeptics is Robert Cornuke, who in 2014 published the results of a years-long investigation into the location of the ancient Jewish Temple. The true location, he believes, is not on the traditional site where Jews pray at the Wailing Wall and Muslims gather for Friday prayers at the Dome of the Rock.

Rather, he says, the true Temple site is about 600 feet to the south in what is the ancient City of David. The traditional Temple Mount that includes the Wailing Wall and the Dome of the Rock is actually the remains of Fort Antonia, an ancient Roman fort that boarded thousands of Roman troops, he says. Otherwise, how could Jesus’ prophecy about the Temple in Matthew 24 that **“not one stone would be left standing upon another”** be true?



When Cornuke’s book, [*Temple: Amazing New Discoveries that Change Everything About the Location of Solomon’s Temple*](#), came out in late 2014 it turned heads in scholarly circles. Its pure audacity in challenging multi-generational scholarly consent on the Temple location defied the established archaeological order among those who deal in biblical antiquities.

Cornuke calls his research “biblical kryptonite” because, if it’s true, it would set the estab-

lished order on its head in terms of Jewish-Muslim relations. Right now the Muslim Waft controls the Temple Mount and dictates where Jews can pray, where Christian and Jewish pilgrims can walk, the whole shebang. But if the actual temple site was in the City of David, on a strip of land already under the control of the Israeli government, then the rebuilding of the ancient temple could begin without the consent of the Muslim Waft, which is based in Jordan.

Cornuke believes the Temple Mount Sifting Project is making a huge leap, an unwarranted assumption, by assigning the tiles to the actual Jewish Temple.

"Finding exquisite tiles does not necessarily make them from the Temple area and at best only proves there are beautiful tiles," Cornuke told WND. **"This find is an assumptive interpretation at best which may be correctly assigned to the temple or they also may have been for other Roman usage."**

David Sielaff, director of Oregon-based [Associates for Scriptural Knowledge](#), said Cornuke's investigation served as independent verification of his organization's research, originally performed more than 20 years ago by the late Dr. Ernest Martin.¹ He said opus sectile tiling has even been found in the flooring of the Dome of the Rock mosque.²

"The tiles without any representation of animals or humans is a particularly Islamic thing after a certain period of time. These don't have animals, and they look similar to ones right now in the Dome of the Rock. Not exactly the same but similar."

Sielaff and Cornuke believe the whole structure of the Temple Mount was a Roman fort and the temple was further south, above the Gihon Springs. About 5,400 men were stationed there and Jesus would have been judged at the Dome of the Rock, which was a massive stone according to Jewish historian Josephus about 50 cubits high.

"The rest of that is filled-in area. So this whole platform is not an original platform. It's mostly [land] fill. Fort Antonia was much larger and much grander than the temple sanctuary, so if that whole platform is the temple, and Josephus was there as a child and as he was growing up and he was there when it was destroyed, and he says it was larger and dominated the temple, that means it was taller than the temple."

In fact, another discovery of an opus sectile receiving scant media coverage is a stone fragment that can be found today on display in the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem with the following attached descriptive signage:

"This Greek inscription, discovered in excavations south of the temple mount records the construction of a pavement paid for with a donation by a man from Rhodes. It is possible that the pavement was a costly opus sectile floor, in keeping with Josephus' description: the open court was from end to end variegated with paving of all manner of stones. (*Jewish Wars* 5, 192)."

It is probable from this inscription on the stone that it was a memorial marker for a donor to

¹ [The Temples That Jerusalem Forgot](#). DWS

² The photos on the Sifting Project website in ["A Brief Report about Carpets Replacements and the Floors in the Dome of the Rock"](#) (March 24, 2016) show larger but similar geometric tile mosaics on the floor of the Dome of the Rock, made visible recently when carpets were replaced. These floor designs accommodate the octagonal floor structure around the "rock" of the Dome of the Rock. DWS

the Temple, Cornuke said.

“But the most interesting fact about the stone mounted on the wall of the museum was that it was not found on the Temple Mount but south of the Temple Mount in the general area of the Ophal/City of David,” Cornuke said.

“Does this mean that the temple was really located in the City of David? This could very well be the case but archaeology is, by its very nature, a best-guess proposition and assumptions should not translate into verifiable, empirical declarations by finding some nice tiles.”

Barkay dismissed Cornuke’s research and that of others who have postulated the real site of the Jewish Temple was within the City of David.

“This view, which is advocated by Bob Cornuke, is a minority view,” he said. **“There are no serious scholars that follow that view, and there is a consensus among I would say 99.9 percent of the scholars about the location of the Temple and that is agreed upon for generations of scholars and it is agreed upon by scholars today.”** *[end article]*

Are these tiles from a Temple on the Haram esh-Sharif? No, I do not believe they are. Dr. Barkay says about the tiles (top of page 2 above), **“They fit together to form opulent floor tiles during the Herodian period of ancient Rome.”** These tiles are of Roman style appropriate to a governor’s residence in the Fortress of Antonia, as Dr. Martin demonstrated is the Haram esh-Sharif today, just as Bob Cornuke, I, and many researchers have come to understand.

The Jewish historian Josephus spent much of his youth in Jerusalem, and was present at its destruction of the city and Temple in 70 AD. He quotes Jewish rebel leader, Eleazar, at the Jewish fortress of Masada saying, **“... we saw that holy city razed by an enemy’s hands, that sacred sanctuary so profanely uprooted!”** (*Jewish Wars* 7.375–380, Loeb edition). In other words, even the foundation stones of the Temple were dug up: **“... nothing but that monument of it preserved. I mean the camp of those who has destroyed it, which still dwells upon its ruins”** (*Jewish Wars* 7:376, Whiston translation). The only large structure that remained was Fort Antonia, not the Temple. Fort Antonia is the Haram esh-Sharif.

Twice, the Jews were permitted to restore the Temple, first by Roman Emperor Constantine and later by his nephew Emperor Julian, both in the 4th century AD. Each time work was halted before the foundation was completed. (If the Temple was on the Haram, the foundation work would have destroyed the floor tile designs.) But the Temple was not on the Haram.

The two attempted Jewish restorations occurred at the true Temple site above the Gihon Spring; both were halted. Yet Christian churches were built on the site of the Haram today, beginning in the 4th century, later by Emperor Justinian in the 6th century, until the Muslim Dome of the Rock was built in 692 A.D. No Christian or Jewish writer mentions any such buildings at the true Temple site above the Gihon. Dr. Martin’s article [“The Secret Key to the Dome of the Rock”](#) describes the Christian design underlying the Dome of the Rock.

David Sielaff
david@askelm.com