



Unearthing Our Past

Dig anywhere in Israel, and you are bound to uncover a piece of Jewish history. In fact, in just the last few months several important finds have been unearthed.

Archaeologists have discovered the largest ever cache of rare coins from the time of the last Jewish revolt against the Romans. The cache, which includes 120 gold, silver and bronze coins, as well as some pottery and weapons, was found in a cave in the Judean Hills near Jerusalem that had served as a hiding place for the Jewish fighters during the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-136 CE).

“This discovery verifies the assumption that the refugees of the revolt fled to caves in the center of a populated area, in addition to the caves found in more isolated areas of the Judean Desert,” said Amos Frumkin of the Hebrew University. Most of the coins are in excellent condition and bear Jewish images and words, such as the facade of the Temple in Jerusalem and the slogan “for the freedom of Jerusalem.”

In Jerusalem’s City of David, archaeologists also uncovered a street that they think was the city’s central thoroughfare during the Second Temple period. One expert familiar with the site explained the symbolism of the find: “Jews hid beneath the stairs from the Romans, and now as a free people, Jews can again walk above the street. After 2,000 years, the steps are not silent anymore.”

Elsewhere in Jerusalem, archaeologists have unearthed a 3,700-year-old wall that is the oldest example of massive fortifications ever found in the city, according to the Israel Antiquities Authority. The discovery marks the first time archaeologists have found such construction from before the time of Herod, the ruler behind numerous monumental projects in the city 2,000 years ago.

Farther north, at the Sea of Galilee, archaeologists discovered a synagogue from the Second Temple period. The ruins were exposed during excavations on a site slated for the construction of a hotel on the beach. In the middle of the synagogue is a stone that is engraved with a seven-branched menorah, the likes of which have never before been seen.

“We are dealing with an exciting and unique find,” said Dina Avshalom-Gorni, excavation director of the Israel Antiquities Authority. “This is the first time that a menorah decoration has been discovered from the days when the Second Temple was still standing.”

Farther south along the Sea of Galilee, 19 years of hard work have finally paid off. After its initial discovery in 1990, a 2,000-year-old Roman amphitheater has been revealed, about 50 feet below ground. “The most interesting thing about the amphitheatre is its Jewish context,” said the late Professor Izhar Hirshfeld upon discovering the site nearly two decades ago. “Unlike Tzipori, which was a multi-cultural city, Tiberias was a Jewish city under Roman rule. The findings demonstrate the city’s pluralistic nature and cultural openness, a fact uncommon in those days.”

One can only imagine what the amphitheater looked like in its prime, when it sat more than 7,000 people. Maybe your ancestors were in the crowd.