

First Temple-Era Biblical Weight Found in Jerusalem

A tiny 3,000-year-old stone engraved with the ancient Hebrew letters spelling *beka*, a weight measurement mentioned in the Bible, was recently found during the sifting of archaeological soil taking place in the Emek Tzurim National Park in Jerusalem.

The weight, dated to the first temple period, was found in archaeological soil originating from the Western Wall foundations, north of the City of David, at the foot of Robinson's Arch.

The *beka* weight was used to weigh the half-shekel donation brought by the Israelites for the temple's upkeep and for the census, and is mentioned in the Bible in Exodus 38:26: "a beka, or half a shekel per head, according to the shekel of the Sanctuary, for everyone who was recorded, from 20 years old and upward, for 603,550 men."

Archaeologist Eli Shukron, who is directing the excavations on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), explained that "when the half-shekel tax was brought to the temple during the first temple period, there were no coins, so they used silver ingots. In order to calculate the weight of these silver pieces, they would put them on one side of the scales and on the other side they placed the *beka* weight."

The *beka* was equivalent to the half-shekel, which every person from the age of 20 years and up was required to bring to the temple, and the biblical shekel weighed grams.

The Rarest Find

Shukron underscored that while "*Beka* weights from the first temple period are rare," this weight "is even rarer because

the inscription on it is written in mirror script, and the letters are engraved from left to right instead of right to left.”

From this, he concluded that the artist who engraved the inscription on the weight specialized in engraving seals, since seals were always written in mirror script so that, once stamped, the inscription would appear in the regular legible script.

Apparently, the seal craftsman got confused when he engraved the inscription on the weight and mistakenly used mirror script as he was used to doing.

“The Bible, the artifact found close to Solomon’s Temple, north of the city of David, the temple foundations—everything is connected,” Shukron added.

The artifacts were discovered as part of the “Archaeological Experience” activity offered to the general public at the sifting project at Emek Zurim National Park. The activity invites participants of all ages to come and serve as archaeologists for the day. They sift through the artifact-rich soil from excavations held by the IAA at the city of David and throughout ancient Jerusalem and reveal Israel’s multi-faceted ties to the city.

Among the artifacts discovered so far in this project: King Hezekiah’s seal, coins from various periods of Jerusalem, arrowheads, jewelry and more.

Incidentally, no one has ever discovered a shred of evidence demonstrating the existence of a “Palestinian era” in Jerusalem. {eoa}

This article originally appeared at .