

Israeli Archaeologists Unveil Jewish Claim to Jerusalem, Spiting UNESCO

Israeli archaeologists have made public a fragment of an ancient text which they say is the earliest Hebrew reference to Jerusalem outside the Bible—a discovery the government swiftly enlisted as evidence of the Jewish connection to the holy city.

The 11 cm by 2.5 cm (4.3 by one inch) piece of papyrus, dated by the Israel Antiquities Authority to the 7th century B.C., was presented at a news conference in Jerusalem shortly after Paris-based UNESCO adopted a resolution that Israel said denied Judaism's link to the ancient city.

Two lines of ancient Hebrew script on the fragile and faded artifact suggest it was part of a document detailing the payment of taxes or transfer of goods to storehouses in Jerusalem.

"From the king's maidservant, from Na'arat, jars of wine, to Jerusalem," it reads.

The Antiquities Authority said its investigators had recovered the document, described as "the earliest extra-biblical source to mention Jerusalem in Hebrew writing", after it was plundered from a cave by antiquities robbers.

For Israel's government, the papyrus is a rebuttal to UNESCO, the UN scientific and cultural organization, which is regarded by many Israelis as hostile. Arab members of UNESCO and their supporters frequently condemn Israel.

"Hey UNESCO, an ancient papyrus dating to the 1st Temple 2700 yrs ago has been found. It bears the oldest known mention of

Jerusalem in Hebrew,” Ofir Gendelman, a spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, wrote on Twitter.

Emmanuel Nahshon, a spokesman for Israel’s Foreign Ministry, called Wednesday’s vote in Paris by UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee “a piece of rubbish”.

The resolution, according to a text provided by Palestinian officials, refers to a Jerusalem compound—revered by Jews as Temple Mount and by Muslims as Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary)—only as a “Muslim holy site of worship”.

Two weeks ago, Israel lashed out at UNESCO for renewing a similar resolution that condemned it for restrictions on Muslim access to the site, in a part of Jerusalem captured by Israeli forces in a 1967 war.

Israel considers all of Jerusalem as its capital, a position that is not recognized internationally. Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent state they seek in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

“The discovery of the papyrus on which the name of our capital Jerusalem is written is further tangible evidence that Jerusalem was and will remain the eternal capital of the Jewish people,” said Israeli Culture Minister Miri Regev, in comments included in an Antiquities Authority announcement of the find.

Saeb Erekat, secretary general of the Palestine Liberation Organization, accused Israel of waging an campaign of “archaeological claims and distortion of facts” to try to cement its claim to the holy city. {eo}

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