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Building Stones from a Quarry in Northern Jerusalem Probably Used in the Temple Mount: 5 Years After the Discovery

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BUILDING STONES FROM A QUARRY IN NORTHERN JERUSALEM PROBABLY USED IN THE TEMPLE MOUNT: 5 YEARS AFTER THE DISCOVERY

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During the summer of 2009 a quarry was unearthed in the Ramat Shlomo neighborhood, northern Jerusalem, during land development for the construction of a new school. The excavated area of the quarry was about one acre and is indicative of substantial mining activity in the Turonian (Bina Formation) white limestone beds (known locally as “meleke” = king) from which blocks up to 8 meters in length and 1-2 meters in width were excavated. The dimensions of the large blocks are very rare in known domestic ancient quarries, and thus were considered to be relocated for use in the construction of the walls of the Temple Mount. The distance from the quarry (eastward) to the main North-South old (Nablus-Jerusalem) road is around 600 m at the same topographical level (~795 m asl). Along the main road it is about 3 km further south to the Temple Mount, located around 50-70 m lower. The heavy blocks were probably carried by carts driven by oxen, sloping down to the huge Herodian construction project. Today most of the unearthed site is a school but a small part of the excavated old quarry was preserved in the eastern yard of that new complex. Recent examination reveals that the original quarry was probably much larger than the excavated site. The uninhabited and overgrown area between Ramat Shlomo and Shuafat has numerous remnants of quarried walls. Preliminary field evidence and aerial photos indicate a contiguous quarrying area some 350 m long along strike (SSW-NNE) and about 150 m wide. Thus it appears that the ancient area that was quarried was about 50,000 m². Since the original dimensions of the quarry are uncertain it is, at this time, difficult to estimate the amount of stone that was actually mined. However, it is probable that this area was an important source of high quality building stone for the construction of the Second Temple.

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