

Ancient Siloam Pool road excavation sparking latest political clash between Israel and Palestine

The road, which was at ground level 2,000 years ago, is now under the Arab neighborhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem.

by [Michele Chabin](#) in the [July 31, 2019](#) issue

A recent ceremony marking the excavation of a road that archaeologists believe was used by biblical-era Jewish pilgrims—perhaps even Jesus—has drawn fire from Palestinians, who accuse Israeli and US officials of trying to “Judaize” Jerusalem.

The controversy is the latest political skirmish between Israelis and Palestinians over archaeological excavations.

US ambassador to Israel David Friedman and US Middle East special envoy Jason Greenblatt attended the event June 30 in Jerusalem along with Israeli officials and archaeologists. The City of David Foundation hosted the ceremony.

The road, which was at ground level 2,000 years ago but is now below ground, extends from the Siloam Pool, named in John 9, just outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, to the southern part of the Western Wall. From there, pilgrims would have ascended via a stairway to the Second Jewish Temple, on what is today called the Temple Mount or Haram al-Sharif.

The excavation of the road and Siloam Pool is in the Arab neighborhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem. Palestinians want East Jerusalem to be the capital of a future Palestinian state. Israel captured the area in 1967 and annexed it soon afterward; much of the international community considers the territory occupied.

Riyad Mansour, permanent observer of the state of Palestine to the United Nations, called the road’s inauguration an “illegal act in occupied territory.” Mansour said in a statement that Silwan “has been heavily targeted by illegal Israeli settlement activities, including home demolitions, evictions, and land confiscations across the

years.”

Palestinian officials say Jews have no historical or religious claims to the region. Israeli officials maintain that present-day Israel and the West Bank were part of the biblical Land of Israel and employ archaeology to prove it.

Friedman, an Orthodox Jew who supports Israeli settlements, said the Pilgrimage Road’s existence “confirms with evidence, with science, with archaeological studies that which many of us already knew, certainly in our heart: the centrality of Jerusalem to the Jewish people.”

Ilan Sharon, a Hebrew University professor of archaeology who was not involved in the excavations, said any established scholar believes Jews lived here at some point in history.

“Therefore, there is nothing to prove,” he said. At the same time, “digging under the homes of the people of Silwan without their permission is a political statement and an attempt to Judaize” Jerusalem. “Of course, everything in our world is politicized. Archaeology is no exception.” —Religion News Service

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