

Palestinians claim ownership of Western Wall

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JERUSALEM (RNS) The Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism, is actually a Muslim shrine, according to an official report published Monday (Nov. 22) by the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Information.

The document, which was written by Al-Mutawakei Tahad, a senior ministry official and respected writer, states that the Wall -- long considered the sole surviving piece of the Second Jewish Temple built atop the Temple Mount more than 2,000 years ago-- is actually part of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, built on Haram al-Sharif, the Arabic name for the Temple Mount.

Archeologists maintain that Al-Aqsa was built atop the ruins of the Second Temple, which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. Muslims did not capture Jerusalem until 638 A.D.

The report claims that Jews have lied about the wall's age, and that they never worshipped there prior to 1917.

"Al-Buraq Wall is in fact the western wall of Al-Aqsa Mosque," Taha wrote, according to the Jerusalem Post, which broke the story on Monday.

"The Zionist occupation falsely and unjustly claims that it owns this wall, which it calls the Western Wall or Kotel," the report said.

Taha said that "many studies" published by Jewish experts "have affirmed there is no archeological evidence that the Temple Mount was built during the period of King Solomon."

He added that "no Muslim or Arab or Palestinian has the right to give up one stone of Al-Buraq or other religious sites."

The Western Wall and Temple Mount complex have long been a violent flashpoint between Jews and Muslims. In recent years, Palestinians who want East Jerusalem to be their future capital have tried to undermine Jewish religious and historical claims to the city.

Israelis said Taha's report contained lies that will only serve to undermine the fragile peace process.

"The falsification of history, as done in the report ... is a serious stain on the Palestinian Authority," Geshon Baskin, a peace activist and co-director of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information wrote in a letter addressed to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and other leaders.

Baskin said that "even a non-professional archeologist" knows that the stones used to build the Western Wall "are from the era of Solomon's Temple, which was hundreds of years before Islam appeared on the world stage."