

= Robinson 's Arch =

Robinson 's Arch is the name given to a monumental staircase carried by an unusually wide stone arch , which once stood at the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount . It was built as part of the expansion of the Second Temple initiated by Herod the Great at the end of the 1st century BCE . Recent findings suggest that it may not have been completed until at least 20 years after his death . The massive stone span was constructed along with the retaining walls of the Temple Mount . It carried traffic up from ancient Jerusalem 's Lower Market area and over the Tyropoeon street to the Royal Stoa complex on the esplanade of the Mount . The overpass was destroyed during the Great Jewish Revolt , only a few decades after its completion .

The arch is named after Biblical scholar Edward Robinson who identified its remnants in 1838 . Excavations during the second half of the 20th century revealed both its purpose and the extent of its associated structures . Today the considerable surviving portions of the ancient overpass complex may be viewed by the public within the Jerusalem Archaeological Park . As it is adjacent to Jerusalem 's Western Wall worship area , a portion is used by some groups as a place of prayer .

= = History = =

Robinson 's Arch was constructed as part of King Herod 's renovation and expansion of the Second Temple , announced in 20 ? 19 BCE . It was built to link the Tyropoeon Valley street , a major traffic artery in the Second Temple Period , with the Royal Stoa at the southern end of the Temple Mount platform .

The site abuts a major ancient intersection . Opposite lay a large public square fronting the Temple 's main Hulda Gates . The Tyropoeon street itself was lined with shops and formed part of the city 's Lower Market . The Royal Stoa , an exceptionally large basilica complex which served various commercial and legal functions , looked down on the intersection from atop the Temple platform . Although the Stoa stood on the Temple esplanade , it was constructed upon an expansion added by Herod . It was therefore evidently not considered sacred by some at the time , allowing it to be used for mundane activities . The heavy public traffic to and from this edifice accounts for the width of the stepped street , which approximates that of a modern four @-@ lane highway .

Fragments of a gate once located at the top of the overpass have been recovered . From these , the gate 's width has been calculated at 5 metres (16 ft) . Due to the few extant gate remnants , it has not been established whether there may have been more than one gate . There may have been a single gate , a double gate , or even a triple gate opening into the Royal Stoa complex at this point . This was one of four gates along the western wall of the compound :

Now in the western quarters of the enclosure of the temple there were four gates ; the first led to the king 's palace , and went to a passage over the intermediate valley ; two more led to the suburbs of the city ; and the last led to the other city , where the road descended into the valley by a great number of steps , and thence up again by the ascent for the city lay over against the temple in the manner of a theater , and was encompassed with a deep valley along the entire south quarter .

The conventional view of modern @-@ archaeologists is to reckon the counting of these four gates (e.g. 1 , 2 , 3 and 4) from left to right , as one would count in Western societies , making Robinson 's Arch the fourth and last in a row , counting from left to right . The question , however , which arises is whether or not Josephus , a Hebrew who was accustomed to reckon numbered objects while counting them from right to left , intended that this gate should , in fact , be the first gate mentioned in his description of the gates leading into the Temple Mount enclosure on its western side . According to the Mishnah (Middot 1 : 3) , a compendium of oral teachings received and compiled by Rabbi Judah the Prince in 189 CE , only one gate on the western side of the Temple Mount was actually in use and " served for coming in and for going out , " namely , the Kiponus Gate . The other gates , presumably , had been sealed earlier . It is of singular importance that Josephus notes that of the gates built into the western enclosure of the Temple Mount , there was a bridge that also ascended to one of these gates and which same bridge was broken @-@ off by the insurgents during their war with Rome , most likely the bridge leading to the only serviceable gate .

== Construction ==

The arch was built as part of the Temple Mount 's massive western retaining wall , which forms its eastern support . The voussoirs spring from a row of impost blocks which were cut to produce a dentil pattern . There have been some theories which speculate that the dentils were employed as part of a system used to shore up timber forms used during construction . However , this was a common decorative element employed in the region at the time , and archaeologists have noted that in this region of limited forests it is much more likely that packed earth , rather than expensive timbers , was used to support the form on which the arch was constructed .

Upon completion the arch spanned 15 metres (49 ft) and had a width of 15 @. @ 2 metres (50 ft) . The stepped street it bore over a series of seven additional arches was more than 35 metres (115 ft) in length . Robinson 's Arch itself stood 12 metres (39 ft) to the north of the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount 's retaining wall , soaring some 17 metres (56 ft) over the ancient Tyropoeon street that once ran along the Temple Mount 's western wall . It was among the most massive stone arches of classical antiquity .

Although Herod 's renovation of the Second Temple was initiated in late 1st century BCE , excavations beneath the street near the arch revealed three oil lamps of a type common in the first century CE and 17 identifiable coins , several of which were struck by Valerius Gratus , Roman procurator of Judea , in the year 17 / 18 CE . This means that the arch and nearby sections of the Western Wall were constructed after this date .

== Destruction ==

The destruction of Robinson 's Arch occurred during the events surrounding the Roman sacking of Jerusalem in 70 CE . It has traditionally been blamed on the Roman legions which destroyed the Temple Mount enclosure and eventually set fire to the entire city . More recently , this has been attributed to the Zealot factions which had wrested control of the Temple Mount and fortified it prior to its fall . Some of these continued to hold out in Jerusalem 's Upper City for a month after the city had been breached by the Romans . By wrecking the overpass , as well as the viaduct at Wilson 's Arch to the north , the defenders made access to the Temple platform much more difficult for besieging forces .

South of the Temple Mount , excavators have uncovered an inscribed Roman milestone bearing the names of Vespasian and Titus , fashioned from one of the staircase handrails which stood on top of the arch . This places the destruction of the arch at no later than 79 CE .

== Rediscovery and excavations ==

Four stone courses of the eastern spring of the arch , consisting of a row of impost blocks and three layers of voussoirs , have survived to modern times . This remnant was first identified in 1838 by Biblical scholar Edward Robinson and now bears his name . At that time , prior to any excavations , remains of the arch were at ground level . The ancient street level lay far underground , buried by debris from destruction of structures on the Temple Mount and later fill dumped into the Tyropoeon Valley over the centuries . Robinson believed he had identified the eastern edge of a bridge that linked the Temple Compound with the Upper City which lay on the ridge to the west . During his investigations of 1867 ? 1870 , Charles Warren noted the presence of a large pier 13 metres (43 ft) west of the wall and the remains of the arch . Warren concluded this was but one of many supports for a supposed series of arches supporting a bridge spanning the valley . He subsequently dug a series of seven shafts to the west at regular intervals , yet found no evidence of additional piers .

Only during Benjamin Mazar 's excavations between 1968 and 1977 was it discovered that the pier was in fact the western support of a single great arch . The uncovered pier , 15 @. @ 2 metres (50 ft) long and 3 @. @ 6 metres (12 ft) wide , was preserved to a height of 5 metres (16 ft) . Within its base were found four small hollow spaces , possibly for shops opening onto the Herodian ? era

Tyropoeon street that passes beneath the arch . The lintels of these survive in place and are themselves arched to relieve pressure from the weight of the pier 's superstructure . Mazar 's excavations have revealed that the same pier was also the eastern external wall of a monumental building which Mazar suggested was the archives of Jerusalem mentioned by Josephus . South of the building , excavators found the remains of six vault ? supporting piers , gradually decreasing in height southwards over a distance of 35 metres (115 ft) . These vaults , the building and Robinson 's Arch , all supported a monumental flight of stairs which led the street up and over the Tyropoeon street to the gate of the Royal Stoa at the top of the Temple Mount platform . Numerous stone steps , some still adjoined , were also found nearby .

Excavations near the arch resumed between 1994 and 1996 , directed by Ronny Reich and Yaacov Billig . These have uncovered much of the debris from the collapse of the arch . The remains include both stairs from the staircase and stones from its rounded handrails . Some of these are still visible where they were found , at the Jerusalem Archaeological Park now occupying the site .

= = Egalitarian prayer site = =

The location of the arch along the western wall of the Temple Mount , yet at a distance from the Western Wall plaza , has prompted the Israeli Government to allow the area to be used for alternative services . In 2003 Israel 's Supreme Court disallowed women from reading the Torah or wearing traditional prayer shawls at the plaza itself , yet instructed the Israeli government to prepare the site of Robinson 's Arch to host such events . The site was inaugurated in August 2004 and has since hosted services by Reform and Conservative groups , as well as by other movements , such as Women of the Wall activists . This has resulted in the location being referred to as " HaKotel HaMasorti " .

The court @-@ ordered compromise , however , continues to be contentious . Reform and " Women of the Wall " activists consider the location to be unsatisfactory , in part due to the designation of the park as an archaeological site and the resulting restrictions on access and worship , and in part due to their perceived treatment as " second class @-@ citizens " and their exclusion from the Western Wall plaza . Eric Yoffie , president of the Union for Reform Judaism , has also expressed the opinion that " The wall as it 's been understood by the Jewish people does not mean Robinson 's Arch ... It just doesn 't . "

In April 2013 Jewish Agency chairman Nathan Sharansky proposed a solution for resolving the controversy over female prayer at the Western Wall , calling for the renovation of the site at the foot of Robinson 's Arch to make it accessible to worshippers at all hours of the day . On 25 August 2013 , a new 4 @, @ 480 square foot prayer platform was completed at Robinson 's Arch , with access at all hours , as promised . The area is named " Azarat Yisrael " (or in more proper pronunciation , " Ezrat Yisrael ") . After some controversy regarding the question of authority over this prayer area , the announcement was made that it would come under the authority of a future government @-@ appointed " pluralist council " that would include non @-@ Orthodox representatives .