

2000-year-old gold earring found in Jerusalem

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A luxurious gold, pearl and emerald earring provides a new visual clue about the life of the elite in Jerusalem some 2,000 years ago.

And its discovery was a true eureka moment for excavators.

The piece was found beneath a parking lot next to the walls of Jerusalem's Old City. It dates to the Roman period just after the time of Jesus, said Doron Ben-Ami, who directed the dig.

The earring was uncovered in a destroyed Byzantine structure built centuries after the piece was made, showing it was likely passed down through generations, he said.

Archaeologists came upon the earring in a corner while excavating the ruins of the building under a parking lot. "Suddenly one of the excavators came up shouting 'Eureka!'" said Ben-Ami.

The find is eye-catching: A large pearl inlaid in gold with two drop pieces, each with an emerald and pearl set in gold.

"It must have belonged to someone of the elite in Jerusalem," Ben-Ami said. "Such a precious item, it couldn't be one of just ordinary people."

Archaeologist Shimon Gibson, who was not involved in the dig, said the find was truly amazing, less because of its Roman origins than for its precious nature.

"Jewellery is hardly preserved in archaeological context in Jerusalem," he said, because precious metals were often sold or melted down during the many historic takeovers of the city.

"It adds to the visual history of Jerusalem," Gibson added, saying it brings attention to the life of women in antiquity.

Ben-Ami the piece's placement in the destroyed building protected it from looters and kept it preserved. Its location also showed that it must be older than the house itself.

The Israel Antiquities Authority said the earring appeared to have been made using a technique similar to that depicted in portraits from Roman-era Egypt. Experts were able to date the earring by comparing it to similar finds in Europe.

In a statement released Monday, the Antiquities Authority said the earring was "astonishingly well-preserved." Finds from the Roman period are rare in Jerusalem, Ben-Ami said, because the city was destroyed by the Roman Empire in the first century AD.

Though Gibson dates the piece slightly later than the antiquities authority, to sometime between the second and fourth centuries AD, he said its quality and beauty were impressive.

And Ben-Ami said he expects more small, luxury items to turn up in future excavations.

AP