

## Chapter 8

### Herodium – Palace, Burial Site and Memorial to the King’s Name

The mount of Jebel Fureidis to the southeast of Bethlehem, on the fringe of the Judaeen Desert, has the form of a truncated cone (resembling a volcanic crater) that is visible from afar. Early explorers of Palestine were aware of the presence of impressive remains of a round structure within the “crater,” as well as other ancient structures extending to the north of the mount (“Lower Herodium”), including a large pool. E. Robinson, who visited the site in 1836, was the first to clearly identify Jebel Fureidis as Herodium (Plate 22).<sup>1</sup> Also worthy of mention, among the first scholars to study the site, are F. de Saulcy,<sup>2</sup> C.R. Conder and H.H. Kitchener,<sup>3</sup> and C. Schick.<sup>4</sup> De Saulcy even attempted, during his survey (in 1863), to locate Herod’s tomb at the center of the large pool, below the mount.

The Franciscan Father Corbo launched the first orderly excavations on the mount in 1962–1967. He exposed most of the round palace within the “crater,” as well as parts of the walls and towers around it.<sup>5</sup> G. Foerster carried out supplementary excavations on the mount in 1969.<sup>6</sup> The excavations in Lower Herodium, under my direction, were conducted between the years 1972 and 2000.<sup>7</sup> They included numerous soundings in all parts of the site and several larger areas of excavation, mainly at the center of Lower Herodium, in the vicinity of the large pool.

Herod and his architects undoubtedly devoted great attention to the function, planning and potential role of Herodium, and there was a good reason for this. Herod certainly felt a special attachment to this site in view of the dramatic events that had taken place there in 40 B.C.E. during the course of a single day. On

<sup>1</sup> Jebel Fureidis, the Arabic name of the hill, preserves the name Herodis, as it was called in documents from the time of Bar Kochba; see Y. Yadin, *Bar Kochba, the Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt Against Rome* (1971), 182–187 (in Hebrew).

<sup>2</sup> F. de Saulcy, *Voyage en Terre Sainte* 1 (1865), 171–176; 2, 332–335.

<sup>3</sup> C.R. Conder and H.H. Kitchener, *Survey of Western Palestine*, Memoirs 3, III (Judaea) (1883), 315, 330–332.

<sup>4</sup> C. Schick, “*Der Frankenberg*,” *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 3 (1880), 88–99.

<sup>5</sup> Corbo 1989.

<sup>6</sup> On behalf of the National Parks Authority; see G. Foerster, “Herodium,” *IEJ* 19 (1969), 123–124.

<sup>7</sup> On behalf of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; see Netzer 1981; *idem*, *Herodium – An Archaeological Guide* (1999b); *idem* 2001a, 90–108.

that day he and his entourage had secretly fled from Jerusalem after Mattathias Antigonus, the last Hasmonaean ruler, had joined forces with the Parthian conquerors of Syria and thus revolted against the Roman administration. Antigonus and the Parthians pursued Herod and his followers and caught up with them close to the site under discussion, where a battle was waged. Herod prevailed and was thus able to escape to Rome where the Senate appointed him king of Judaea.<sup>8</sup> While on flight, prior to the battle, Herod had witnessed a traumatic accident in which his mother fell under the wheels of her chariot, and his anguish almost led him to commit suicide. These three dramatic events (the secret flight, the accident and the battle), in close succession, evidently gave rise to his deep, personal attachment to the site that was later to bear his name.

More than 15 years were to pass before the king's architects and masons set out for the "battlefield," in order to erect this huge, remarkable complex. It seems that during this interval Herod devoted much thought to how he should honor the events of that fateful day on which he had come very close to forfeiting both his political career and his very life. The driving force was evidently the desire for perpetuation – an eternal memorial.<sup>9</sup> It seems that from an early stage, Herod entertained the idea of being buried at the site of the battle. But this had a problematic aspect: what was the sense in having a tomb in a remote, unknown and unfrequented spot? The solution was evidently found in building a large palace at this "out-of-the-way" site. The chosen spot was only ca. 12 km from Jerusalem, a 3–4 hour journey from the capital, and lay against the background of an impressive landscape – the Judaeian Desert and the mountains of Moab. At the same time, Herodium enjoyed a temperate, dry climate with pleasant summers; even the winters are not particularly severe in these surroundings. On the other hand, a monument on a hill here would be visible from the immediate surroundings of Jerusalem.

A number of problems had yet to be solved: a source of water for the site; daily maintenance; and general security. Water was led to Herodium via an aqueduct from a spring ca. 5 km away, located in the present-day village of Urtas close to Solomon's Pools.<sup>10</sup> The large and dependable staff required for the maintenance of the site probably became available as a result of the transfer of the district (toparchy) capital from Beth-Zur to Herodium.<sup>11</sup> If this was the case, the toparchy's trusted officeholders could have participated in the maintenance of the huge complex. The problem of general security was solved by the decision to incorporate the palace within a fortress.

<sup>8</sup> *AJ* 15.359–360; *BJ* 1.265.

<sup>9</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.359–360.

<sup>10</sup> Mazar 2002, 243–244. A different opinion about the water sources is presented by Amit (see Amit 2002, 256–261).

<sup>11</sup> This can be learned indirectly from the historical sources – Josephus (*BJ* 3.55) and Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* 5.14); and see J.E. Vardaman, "History of Herodium," in E.J. Vardaman and J.L. Garet Jr. (eds.), *The Teachers Yoke: Studies in Memory of Henry Trantham*, (1964), 69–72.

The solution was a proof of Herod's ingenuity. By erecting the summer palace complex, he brought this remote site to the awareness of everybody of note living in Jerusalem; the latter must eagerly have sought invitations to visit it. Moreover, by building the outstanding round monument high above an artificial mount, he brought this site (visually speaking) into the immediate setting of the capital.

I am sure that the primary purpose of the fortress, within the frame of the extensive complex at Herodium,<sup>12</sup> was to ensure the safety of the king and his entourage in the event of unexpected unrest during their sojourns there. Moreover, Herod would not have chosen to build a fortress at this site were it not for the presence of a huge summer palace there.<sup>13</sup> In this respect, I do not accept the opinion that Herodium was intended to serve as part of the system of desert fortresses,<sup>14</sup> as did Alexandrium, Hyrcania and Masada (see Chapters 2 and 9).

Before dealing with the site itself, I shall cite Josephus' description,<sup>15</sup> amalgamating the two almost identical passages, *BJ* 1.419–421, in italics, and *AJ* 15.322–325):

But while he thus perpetuated the memory of his family and his friends, he did not neglect to leave memorials of himself. *When the wedding ceremonies were concluded, Herod constructed another fortress in the region where he had defeated the Jews after his expulsion from the realm, when Antigonus was in power, and called it after himself. This fortress, which is some sixty stades distant from Jerusalem, is naturally strong and very suitable for such a structure, for reasonably near by is a hill, raised to a (greater) height by the hand of man and rounded off in the shape of a breast.*

The crest he crowned with a ring of round towers, *at intervals*, the enclosure was filled with gorgeous palaces, the magnificent appearance of which was not confined to the interior of the apartments, but outer walls, battlements, and roofs, all had wealth lavished upon them in profusion. *It has a steep ascent formed of two hundred steps of hewn stone, of the purest white marble; the mound though entirely artificial, being of a considerable height.*

Around the base (of the hill) he erected other palaces for the accommodation of his furniture and his friends. *There are pleasure grounds built in such a way as to be worth seeing, among other things because of the way in which water, which is lacking in this place, is brought in from distance and at great expense. The surrounding plain was built up as a city second to none, with the hill serving as an acropolis for the other dwellings; this stronghold resembled a town, in its restricted area a simple palace.*

<sup>12</sup> *BJ* 1.265: "...adorned it with the most costly palaces, erected a citadel of commanding strength, and called it after his own name Herodion."

<sup>13</sup> Netzer 1981, 102–105.

<sup>14</sup> Such as the point of view expressed in Tsafir 1982, 120–145. In any event, Herodium did not exist in the Hasmonaean period, when this system of palatial fortresses came into being.

<sup>15</sup> In *BJ* 1.419 Josephus mentions that Herod built another fortress called Herodium "on the Arabian frontier" (apparently in Trans-Jordan), but there should be no doubt to my mind that another Herodium never existed. See Netzer 1981, 103; Roller 1998, 168–169; Lichtenberger 1999, 113–115.

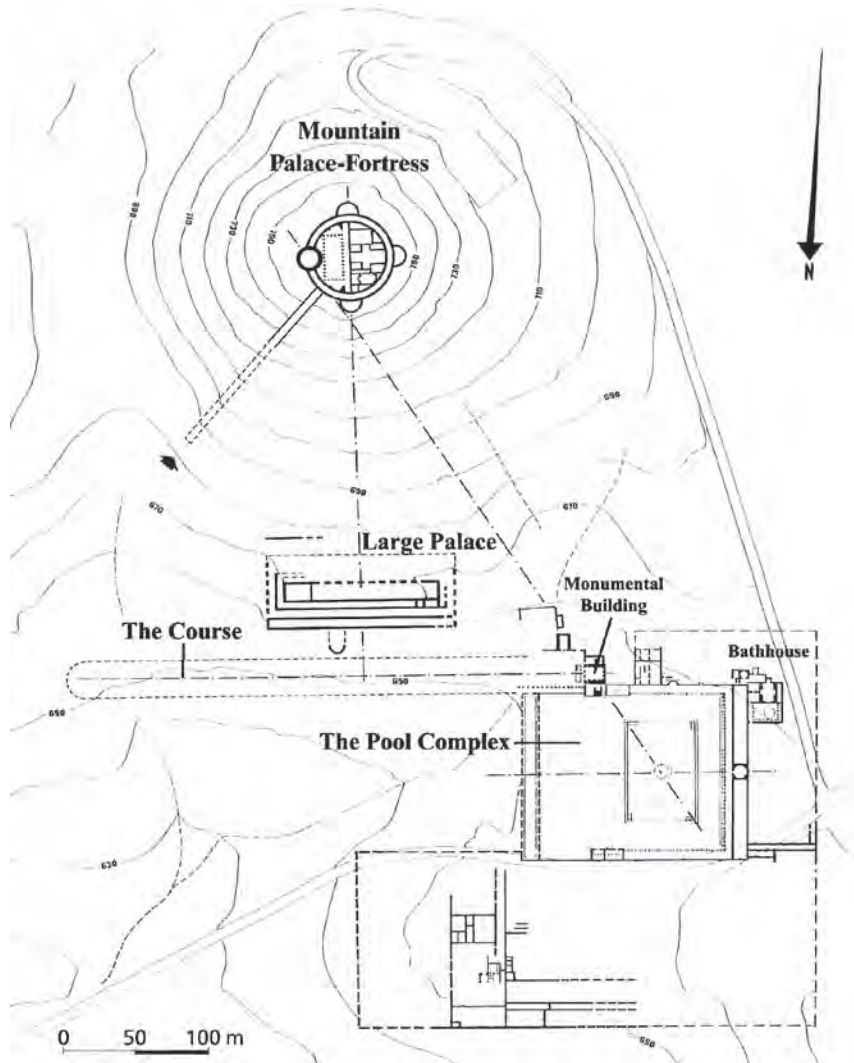


Figure 40: General plan of Greater Herodium.

The above-quoted text gives expression to the basic idea underlying the planning of the site: its subdivision into two parts – a fortified palace on the hill (the “Mountain Palace-Fortress”), and a complex of buildings at its foot (Lower Herodium) (Fig. 40). It is not known where the fateful battle was waged, and

it is actually insignificant whether it took place 1 km to this or that side.<sup>16</sup> The main consideration in determining the final location of the site was evidently the desire to create a monument of imposing height, which would not only command a view of an extensive area but would also be visible from afar, in particular from Jerusalem, the capital. The highest of the hills in the vicinity of the battle site was chosen for this purpose, and the round building, surrounded by the conical fill (the so-called artificial mountain), was erected on top of it.

### *The Mountain Palace-Fortress*

The special combination of a round structure that served as a palace, fortress and monument, and the artificial slopes that were piled up around it led me to term this unusual building the "Mountain Palace-Fortress." The building, whose remains are presently concealed within the mountain, is surrounded by a cylindrical "casing," whose outer diameter is 63 m. (In the past this round structure projected above the truncated cone.) The casing served as the frame for the entire building. Towers protruded from it, and earth was piled up all around, in order to create the artificial mountain. A royal mansion, part of the large palatial compound that was erected here, occupied the interior of the casing (Figs. 41–42, Plate 23).

The round building was erected on a natural hill, without any preliminary digging or leveling operations.<sup>17</sup> The casing around it consisted of two parallel walls, 3.4 m apart.<sup>18</sup> Originally, it rose to the considerable height of ca. 30 m and was divided into several stories. The two lowermost ones, below the level of the mansion inside the casing, were underground cellars. These two stories were covered by barrel vaults and evidently served as storerooms. The other five stories had flat ceilings made of wooden beams. Remains of the lower three were found *in situ*. The missing upper stories can be reconstructed on the basis of an architectural-structural analysis of the building's shape and the quantity of debris found at the site.<sup>19</sup> Each of these five stories was actually a ring-shaped hall that evidently served both as a corridor and a storeroom, for the needs of the Mountain Palace-Fortress.

Four towers protruded from the casing structure – on the east, south, west and north. The eastern tower was round while the other three were semicircular. Whereas the latter towers only projected outwards, the round one also projected inwards, into the area inside the casing, the walls of which approached it on

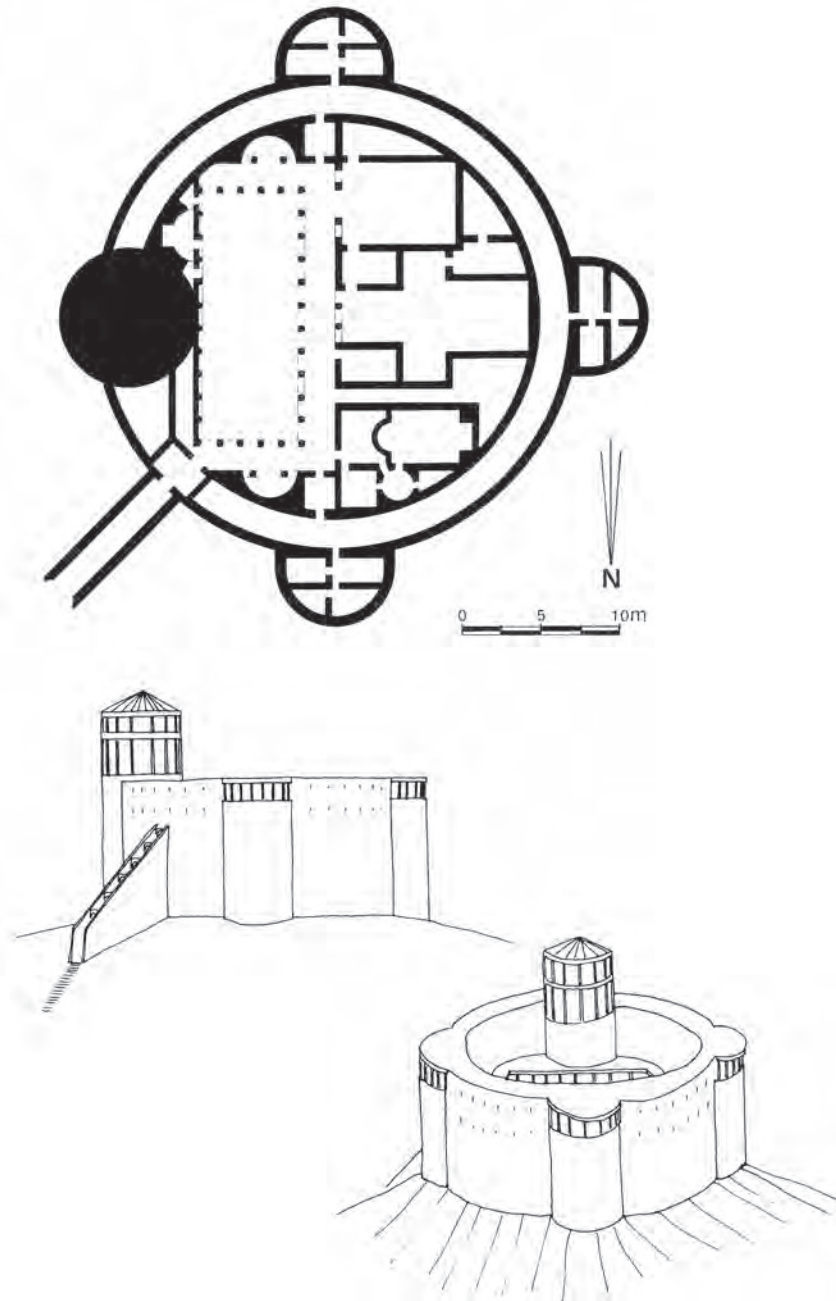
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<sup>16</sup> The valley to the north of the mount, in which Lower Herodium was built, might have been the location of the battleground.

<sup>17</sup> Contrary to Segal's assumption; see A. Segal, "Herodium," *IEJ* 23 (1973), 27–29.

<sup>18</sup> The outer wall was 2 m wide, and the inner one 1 m.

<sup>19</sup> For the various considerations, see Netzer 1981, 91–96.



*Figure 41:* Reconstructed plan and views (prior to the dumping of the fill around the building) of the Mountain Palace-Fortress at Herodium.

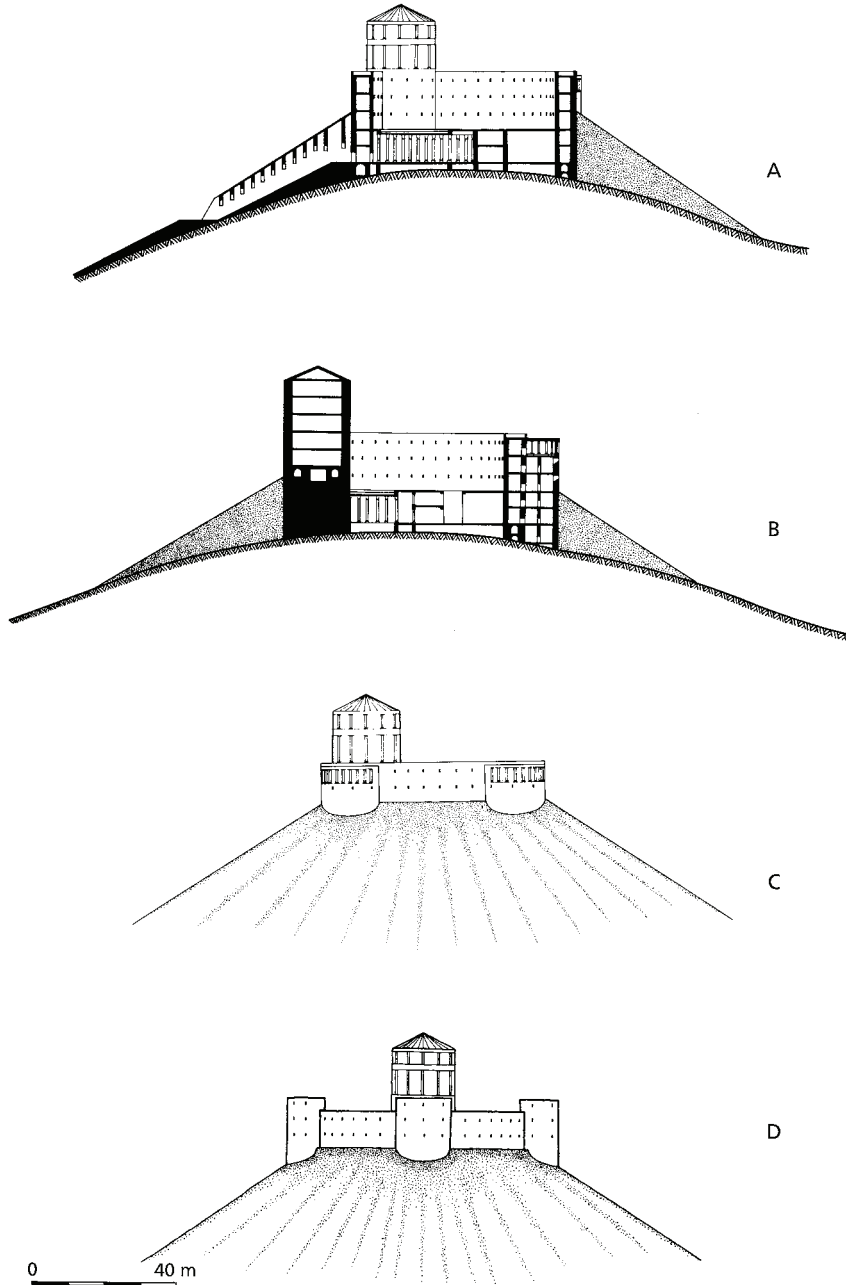


Figure 42: Reconstructed sections and elevations of the Mountain Palace-Fortress at Herodium.

either side. The surviving part of the eastern tower is mainly solid, up to a height of ca. 20 m above the original hill (but only 16 m above the floor level of the mansion at the hill's highest spot, inside the casing structure). At its top, within the solid mass, are located a cistern covered by a barrel vault and two small rooms, cellars of sorts. The only remains above the solid base were a few walls and a small section of a mosaic floor.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike the eastern tower, the three semicircular ones were hollow from the bottom and contained many rooms – four in every story of each tower. Entry to each story was from the corridors within the casing. Some of these rooms probably served for storage (in particular those that were ultimately “buried” by the outer fill) and others as living quarters for the palace staff and guards. However, at the time of construction, each story of these towers had the form of a single, semicircular hall; the subdivision into rooms was carried out slightly later, probably at the time when the fill was piled up around the round building.<sup>21</sup>

A comparison with the three towers (Phasaël, Hippicus and Mariamme; see Chapter 6) built by Herod adjacent to his central palace in Jerusalem led me to the assumption that the surviving part of the round tower at Herodium was the base of several stories that are now missing.<sup>22</sup> According to my estimate, there were apparently five stories here, which rose to a height of ca. 25 m above the level of the central courtyard. (The upper three projected above the top of the casing structure.) As in the case of the three towers in Jerusalem, here too there were evidently elaborate royal chambers, a small roof mansion of sorts, which enabled the king and his escorts to enjoy the view of the striking landscape that was hidden from the rooms within the casing, and also to benefit from the breeze on hot summer days. The roof of this multistory tower probably also served as a watch and signaling post.

Unlike the casing and the four towers, which were curvilinear in form, the royal mansion at its center was basically built as an orthogonal building, which was “squeezed” into the round shape. It was divided into two equal parts. The eastern one consisted mainly of a large courtyard surrounded by colonnades, whereas the western part, which will be described first, contained the residential wing. The mansion's *triclinium* (ca. 15 × 10 m) was at the latter's southern end. At the northern end were the five rooms of a bathhouse in the Roman style. The largest of these was the *caldarium*. Next to it was revealed a very small *frigidarium* with a distorted form, owing to its adaptation to the round casing. Beside these two rooms was a round room, 4.2 m in diameter, which served as the *tepidarium*. Preserved intact, above this room, was a dome built entirely of

<sup>20</sup> Part of which was transferred to the Louvre in Paris in the 19th century by de Saulcy. This mosaic floor, in theory, might be from the Byzantine period.

<sup>21</sup> In Corbo's opinion, this partitioning was introduced during the Great Revolt against the Romans, roughly a century after the palace-fortress was built.

<sup>22</sup> Netzer 1981, 79–84, 91–96.



hewn stones, one of the earliest ones of this kind known in Palestine, with a round window (*oculus*) at its top. The other two moderately sized rooms served as the entrance-cum-dressing rooms (*apodyteria*). The floors of the bathhouse were paved with mosaics. Its walls, like those of the rest of the palace, featured well-executed frescoes in the style customary in Herod's palaces.<sup>23</sup> The mansion's bedrooms and living quarters,<sup>24</sup> built around a cruciform central space, were located between the bathhouse and the *triclinium*.

The mansion's courtyard (40 × 17.5 m), to the east of the living quarters, was surrounded by colonnades on three of its sides (Plate 24). The fourth, eastern, side was bounded by a wall from which engaged columns projected – a substitute for the missing colonnade, to disguise the lack of space.<sup>25</sup> At either end of the courtyard were semicircular exedras, which, as a result of the round casing, were not set on axis. The peristyle courtyard undoubtedly served as a formal garden, as evidenced by the garden soil that covered the area between the colonnades.

The ascent to the Mountain Palace-Fortress was on the northeast via a monumental stairway. The entrance room at its top end was incorporated within the casing, next to the northeastern corner of the large courtyard (an inconvenient location from an architectural viewpoint). However, the placement of the stairway was probably an outcome of the site that was chosen for hewing the cisterns, at a level beneath the artificial fill, in order to shorten the route of the water-bearers ascending to the top of the mount.<sup>26</sup> The stairway rose in a straight line, as described by Josephus, from the foot of the mount to the round building erected on its summit. The steps themselves are missing,<sup>27</sup> but most of the 6.5-m-wide foundation that supported them has been preserved. Up to the bottom of the artificial fill, the steps were open to the sky. However, in order to prevent the infiltration of unwanted persons, fences (in the form of walls) might have been built on both sides of the stairway. For the same reason, a guardroom could have been located at the stairway's bottom. Within the fill, on either side of the stairway, retaining walls buttressed by a series of arches were built.<sup>28</sup> There should be no doubt that a barrel vault, or a ceiling laid on top of wooden beams, originally covered this section, once again for safety reasons.

<sup>23</sup> Corbo 1989, frescoes: photos 41, 43, 45, 77, 78, 79, 84, 85, 91, 92, 128, col. tab. I, II, IX, X, tab. V, stucco: photos 44, 93, mosaic: photos 88, 89; Fittschen 1996, 139–161; S. Rozenberg, "The Wall Paintings of the Herodian Palace at Jericho," in Fittschen and Foerster (eds.) 1996, 121–138.

<sup>24</sup> At least some of these rooms had a second story.

<sup>25</sup> The round eastern tower meets this wall at its center.

<sup>26</sup> The cisterns were probably located in the most suitable rock formation, as determined by the Herodian builders. In any event, they were built prior to the dumping of the fill around the hill; see Netzer 1981, 96.

<sup>27</sup> Josephus mentions 200 steps made of white marble, but he is notorious for his misnaming of stone masonry (see Burrell and Netzer 1999, 714).

<sup>28</sup> Foerster (see above, note 6) exposed three of these arches in 1968–1969.

The above-mentioned cisterns (altogether three,<sup>29</sup> with a combined capacity of ca. 2,500 cubic meters) were cut into the rock on either side of the monumental stairway. They were primarily fed by runoff from the slopes of the artificial mound. From here the water was carried manually by servants to a smaller, higher located cistern (the “intermediate cistern”), which was hewn immediately below the summit, close to the stairway. Via an opening in the ceiling, water was drawn directly from the intermediate cistern into the mansion’s courtyard by means of a bucket and rope. This arrangement averted the need for water-bearers to enter the palace itself.<sup>30</sup> Other, fairly small cisterns were revealed beneath some of the rooms of the royal mansion, in addition to the above-mentioned one on top of the solid base of the round tower.

On completion of the round building’s construction, earth and gravel (apparently excavated from a nearby hill) were piled up around it, creating steep slopes and the unique conical shape. The fill covered not only most of the exterior of the building (the two cellar stories and three of the five corridor stories of the casing structure, attaining an overall height of ca. 20 m!), but also the upper part of the original hill’s slopes, around the building. Thus was created the truncated cone, whose base diameter measures ca. 180 m, and whose height is ca. 35 m. The gradient of the cone was ca. 32°, thus obviating the need for retaining walls at its bottom or the employment of other means of stabilization. The dumping of the massive earth fill was in all likelihood planned from the outset. However, it seems that Herod’s engineers were unable to determine in advance its maximum height. The eliminated windows, blocked by the fill at the top of the second of the five corridor stories of the casing and in the semicircular towers (above the interior palace’s floor level), serve as proof of this. In any event, the first floor’s outer wall does not contain windows; the engineers had apparently estimated, in advance, that it would be completely buried.

The dumping of earth around the impressive building evidently had two purposes. The primary aim was to enhance the monumental appearance of the Mountain Palace-Fortress. The second goal was to increase the impregnability of the building as a fortress.<sup>31</sup>

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The available data make possible a fairly accurate reconstruction of the shape of the Mountain Palace-Fortress.<sup>32</sup> As mentioned above, the reconstruction of the

<sup>29</sup> More might be revealed in the future.

<sup>30</sup> The water was led into the intermediate cistern via a pipe between it and the stairway, evidence of which was found during the excavation of the cistern; see E. Netzer and S. Arazi, “The Tunnels of Herodium,” *Qadmoniot* 18, 1985, 34 (in Hebrew); E. Netzer, “Jewish rebels dig Strategic Tunnel System”, *BAR* 15, 1988, 23.

<sup>31</sup> The steep slopes were not easy to climb and above them the casing structure rose, like a wall, to a height of ca. 10 m.

<sup>32</sup> Netzer 1981, 79–101.

round eastern tower is based on data pertaining to the three multistory towers built by Herod in Jerusalem. As to the heights of the three semicircular towers, we lack the data necessary to establish whether they rose above the casing structure or were perhaps even lower than it.

It is difficult to point to the architectural model on which this original and extraordinary building, unique in the Hellenistic-Roman world, was based. One school of thought regards the mausoleum of Augustus, built a few years earlier, as the source.<sup>33</sup> The conical shape could also possibly have been influenced by *tumuli* structures, such as the tomb of Nimrud Dagh at Commagene, which was also built in the first century B.C.E.<sup>34</sup> However, not only has no tomb been discovered within the structure, but the building itself served primarily as a palace, and the Jewish faith does not countenance a tomb in direct contact with a dwelling. On the other hand, one can mention several points of similarity between the Mountain Palace-Fortress at Herodium and the Antonia in Jerusalem (also a palace and fortress), if one relies on the detailed descriptions provided by Josephus. The Antonia, which was erected at the start of Herod's reign, was thus a reasonable model to serve as the prototype for the building on the mount of Herodium (see Chapter 7).<sup>35</sup>

### *Lower Herodium*

At the center of Lower Herodium, which extends over an area of ca. 15 hectares, is located the pool complex – a large formal garden surrounding a huge pool (Fig. 40, Plate 22). This complex was surrounded on three sides by longitudinal blocks of structures, and in its southwestern corner a bathhouse of the Roman style was located. The largest and most prominent building in Lower Herodium, the Large Palace, was built on a higher level than the pool complex and its related structures at the foot of the hill. It overlooked the course, a substantial artificial terrace, ca. 350 m in length, at the western end of which a monumental building was built. These are the main elements of Lower Herodium. Its construction called for the erection of retaining walls, cutting into the rock, and the extensive dumping of fills.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See Segal 1973, note 17, above; also Roller 1998, 165; J. Magness, "Where Is Herod's Tomb at Herodium," *BASOR* 322 (2001), 43–46.

<sup>34</sup> J. Wagner (ed.), *Gottkönige am Euphrat* (2000) and, in particular, B. Jacobs, "Das Heiligtum auf dem Nemrud Dağı," in J. Wagner (ed.) 2000, 27–35.

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion concerning the resemblance between the Antonia and the Mountain Palace-Fortress at Herodium; see Netzer 1981, 100–101.

<sup>36</sup> For example, a section of the valley to the north of the hill was blocked and filled in order to build the "pool complex."

### *The Pool Complex*

A substantial section of Lower Herodium was built around a large pool, which was surrounded by a formal garden – the pool complex. The main part of the garden, 110 m long and 57 m wide, was to the east of the pool. On all the other sides narrower, 18-m-wide strips of garden fringed the pool.<sup>37</sup> Colonnades 5.5 m wide were erected beyond the last-mentioned strips. (The combined length of these three colonnades was 250 m.) The dimensions of the entire garden complex, with the pool at its center, were ca. 130 × 110 m.

The pool itself measured 69 × 45 m and was 3 m deep. Most of it was built on top of the fill blocking the former wadi, but part of it was hewn into bedrock. The walls and bottom of the pool were coated with gray hydraulic plaster, typical of water installations in the Herodian period. The pool, having a bench extending along the sidewalls and flights of stairs leading down to the bottom, was similar to those of the other palaces, in Jericho and Masada.<sup>38</sup> Here, probably because of the pool's vast size, there were four flights of stairs, one in each corner.

In the center of the pool was a round building, only the foundation of which has survived (Plate 25). There is no doubt that this foundation was totally submerged when the pool was full. It seems that a building in the shape of a *tholos*, which probably served as a pavilion, was located here. This pavilion was apparently reached with the aid of small boats. (Round structures at the center of pools are a common motif in Roman wall paintings found in Campania.<sup>39</sup>)

The pool itself had several functions: it served as a water reservoir,<sup>40</sup> provided swimming and boating facilities; and was a distinct landscape feature. Herodium's pool might not have been the largest one built by Herod (the pool south of Wadi Qelt in Jericho is bigger), but it was undoubtedly the most impressive one, due not only to the garden and colonnades surrounding it, but also to its striking appearance against the background of the arid Judaeian Desert.<sup>41</sup>

Along the eastern and western sides of the pool complex were halls, each ca. 105 m long and 10 m wide. However, while the hall on the western side was located beyond one of the above-mentioned three colonnades, the one on the eastern side bordered on the garden itself. From the outset, or at some later stage, the western hall was subdivided into two halls of equal length (each

<sup>37</sup> In contrast to some of the gardens exposed in Jericho, we lack any data about the layout of the Herodium garden. One can merely mention that the upper layer of fill consisted of dark earth apparently deposited for the purpose of planting.

<sup>38</sup> Only in Caesarea's Promontory Palace was such a bench absent.

<sup>39</sup> See M.I. Rostovtzeff, "Die Hellenistisch-Römische Architekturlandschaft," *RM* 26 (1911), Abb. 19, 22, 25.

<sup>40</sup> In contrast to the swimming pools in Jericho, which were intended solely for recreation, here in Herodium, the pool also served as a reservoir for irrigation, as indicated by an outlet revealed close to its bottom on its eastern side.

<sup>41</sup> In particular, when viewed from the Mountain Palace-Fortress or from the Large Palace.

47 m)<sup>42</sup> by an octagonal hall featuring engaged columns on rounded pedestals along the walls. On the eastern side there were, in fact, two halls — one above the other. The lower hall was below the level of the garden and it was possible to breach windows only in its eastern side.<sup>43</sup> It formed part of the “earth dam,” a wide platform of sorts intended to support the massive fill on which the garden was located. No information about the upper elongated hall is available; however, it seems that in general lines it might have been similar to its western counterpart.

The pool complex was surrounded on the north, west and south by various structures which apparently formed different wings of the palace complex, whereas on the eastern side, a lower area was located, which was irrigated and planted with orchards.<sup>44</sup> It can be assumed that not only the area close to the pool complex benefited from such irrigation, but also more distant fields, in the lower part of the wadi.

The northern wing was the largest of the three built sectors. Only a small part of it has been studied, but according to the meager data, it contained both living quarters and service facilities (such as storerooms and a stable). We learn of the presence of living quarters from the two small Roman-style bathhouses, which were revealed here, as well as some other remains. These living quarters were apparently used not only by the senior staff of the palatial installations but also by the administration of the toparchy, the capital of which had been moved here, as mentioned above. It is possible that the northern wing, like the other two wings of Lower Herodium, contained units for the reception of occasional guests, in addition to the living quarters of the permanent staff. One should also take into account the living quarters of the retinue that frequently accompanied the king or members of his family. In contrast to Jericho, there was no permanent settlement in the vicinity of Herodium where some of the staff could have taken up residence.

Of the southern wing, only a few parts have been exposed, but it is rather difficult to define their functions. Further excavations will be necessary in order to arrive at a better definition of the type of buildings that existed here.<sup>45</sup>

The western wing, the smallest of the three, is also the one least explored. In fact, only the two ends of this wing have been exposed. The remains at the northern end indicate the presence of service facilities, storerooms and appar-

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<sup>42</sup> The poor state of preservation and the partial nature of the dig prevent us from adding further details, but it seems likely that the ceilings of these halls were supported by a row of columns or pillars along the longitudinal axis.

<sup>43</sup> The only known entrance into this hall was from the course, not from the pool complex.

<sup>44</sup> As a matter of fact, this was the original wadi, the western part of which had been filled with earth in order to house the pool complex.

<sup>45</sup> At its western end, this wing borders the monumental building, located on a lower level and belonging to the group of structures at the southern end of the course.

ently also a stable for horses, whereas at its southern end, at the point of contact with the southern wing, was revealed a bathhouse in the Roman style, the largest one exposed at Herodium (Fig. 43). Worthy of note are the two clear stages that were discerned here, both of which date from Herod's time.<sup>46</sup>

*The bathhouse – first stage:* The bathhouse was entered via a courtyard (*palaestra*, 24 × 14 m) surrounded on three or four sides by colonnades (Plate 26).<sup>47</sup> The fairly large entrance-cum-dressing room (*apodyterium*) was followed by a *tepidarium* of similar size. The largest room was the *caldarium* (ca. 13 × 8, without the niches) to the west of the two aforementioned rooms, access to which was gained via the *tepidarium*.<sup>48</sup> It contained four large niches, the one on the south being apsidal. This large room was heated by two *praefurnia* located in an elongated service courtyard on the western side.<sup>49</sup> The *tepidarium* also provided access to a cold room (*frigidarium*), most of which was occupied by a stepped pool.<sup>50</sup> The bathhouse was richly decorated. Its walls were adorned with frescoes which have been preserved in some of the rooms, and most of the rooms were originally paved with mosaics. Worthy of note is a fairly large square panel in the middle of the floor of the *tepidarium*, featuring a round geometric pattern at its center and pomegranates in the corners. *Opus sectile* might have covered the *caldarium*'s floor.<sup>51</sup>

*The bathhouse – second stage:* It seems that the main motivation to change the structure of the bathhouse was the wish to introduce into it a heated, indoor, bathing pool (*calida piscina*). The pool (10.5 × 5.2 m) was constructed at the expense of the hypocaust of the *caldarium*, and instead of the two original *praefurnia*, a new one was now built in the middle of the room's western wall.<sup>52</sup> A new *caldarium*, round in shape (in a square plan) and much smaller (4 m in diameter), was now added in the southeastern corner of the bathhouse (Plate 27). It had niches on all four sides, two of which contained windows, the third a bathtub and the fourth the entrance door. Access to the *caldarium* was via a small, secondary

<sup>46</sup> E. Netzer, Y. Kalman and R. Laureys, "Lower Herodium's Large Bathhouse," in *Judea and Samaria Research Studies* 9 (2000), 113–120 (in Hebrew).

<sup>47</sup> The existence of a southern colonnade is questionable.

<sup>48</sup> It is the largest *caldarium* revealed to date in Herod's palaces, e. g., double the size of the ones exposed at Masada (the large bathhouse) and in the Mountain Palace-Fortress here at Herodium.

<sup>49</sup> It seems that even these two *praefurnia* were insufficient, and a third one was added in the course of time (still during the first stage), at the expense of part of the *palaestra*.

<sup>50</sup> The bathhouse included two more rooms, small ones, whose function is unclear.

<sup>51</sup> This assumption is based on the *opus sectile* floor revealed *in situ* in the apsidal niche. However, as the standard of execution is fairly poor, it might belong to the second stage, and the *caldarium* could initially have been paved with a mosaic floor.

<sup>52</sup> At expense of the niche which existed here. Evidence of a cauldron for heating the water of the pool was found.

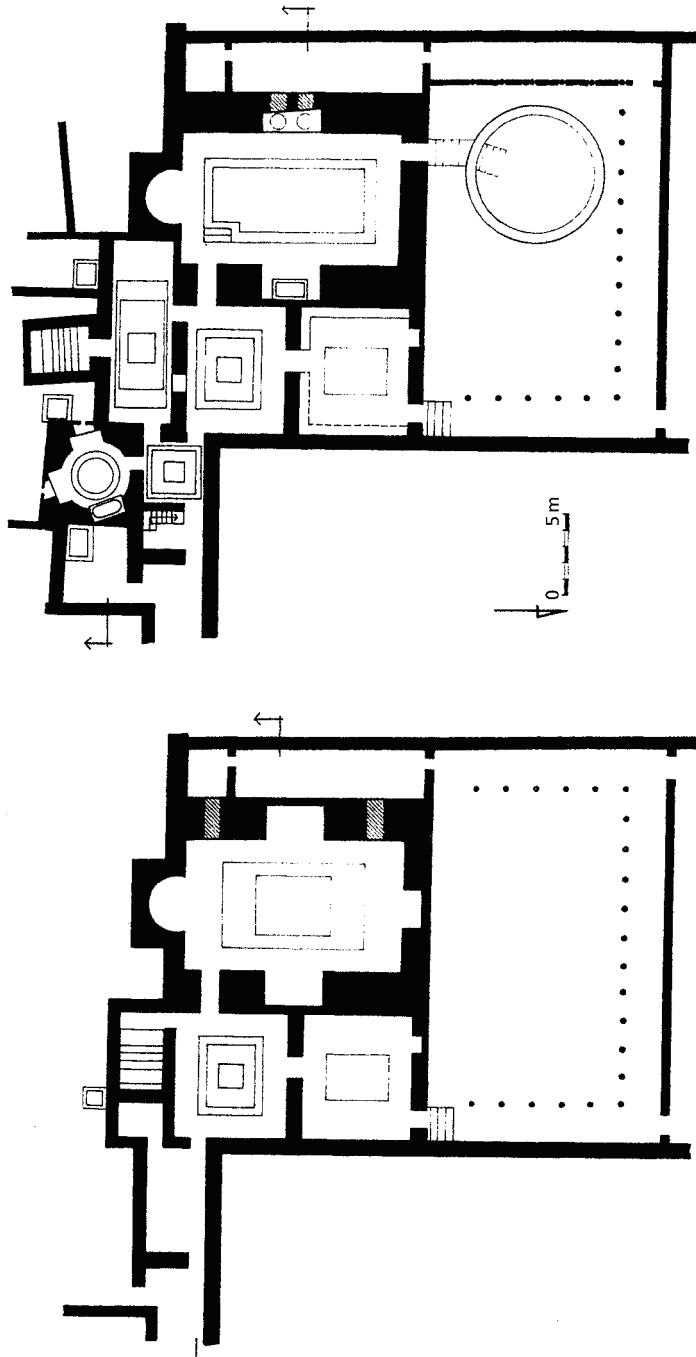


Figure 43: Reconstructed plans of the two phases of the bathhouse in Lower Herodium.

*tepidarium*.<sup>53</sup> It was decorated with frescoes (which were twice renewed) and had a mosaic floor. The floor's main ornamentation was a ring-shaped panel featuring vine scrolls bearing bunches of grapes.<sup>54</sup> To the east of the *caldarium* and secondary *tepidarium*, in a small courtyard, a *praefurnium* was carved into the bedrock. It provided hot air to the *caldarium*'s hypocaust, and warm water to the bathtub there.

Changes were also introduced with regard to the *frigidarium*. The initial one was eliminated and replaced, together with a small adjacent room,<sup>55</sup> by an elongated, third *tepidarium*.<sup>56</sup> To its south, and reachable from it, a new *frigidarium* (fully occupied by a stepped pool) was now constructed. The second-stage changes included decorations of the same style as the first stage – frescoes on the walls and mosaics on the floors. Worthy of note is a small square panel, imitating *opus sectile*, in the room in front of the new *caldarium*, and a larger panel, decorated with a red circle filled with designs in white on a red background, in the room in front of the new *frigidarium*.

The immediate surroundings of the bathhouse yielded fragments of an exquisite water basin (*labrum*) made of imported marble, a characteristic example from the Augustan period, with the heads of the Greek demigod Selinus carved on its handles.<sup>57</sup> Herod might have imported it; however, the high standard of this basin suggests that it was a royal gift, perhaps a personal one from Marcus Agrippa following his visit to Herod's kingdom in 15 B.C.E., which, according to Josephus, included a stay at Herodium.<sup>58</sup> Hypothetically, the round *caldarium* was built in order to place the *labrum* at its center. The very presence of a "graven image" here is unusual, since Herod's court mainly adhered to the third commandment of the Decalogue, as had the Hasmonaeans earlier on. To date no other human or animal figure has been discovered among the remains of the numerous wall decorations in the palaces of both these dynasties. In my view, this is the exception that proves the rule.

The *palaestra* also underwent significant changes during the second stage. The major one was the construction of a round, open-air swimming pool, 7 m in diameter (Plate 26). A door breached between the *calida piscina* and the *palaestra* enabled the bathers to choose (probably according to the hour of the

<sup>53</sup> This room was built in the western half of a room from the first stage whose function is unknown (a service room?). The eastern half of the latter room was now converted into a corridor-cum-stairwell.

<sup>54</sup> It also had a simple monochromatic ring around, and in theory might have had a round panel in the center, which is now missing.

<sup>55</sup> This room was initially entered from the one mentioned in note 53.

<sup>56</sup> In order to free sufficient space for this elongated room, the wall between it and the major *tepidarium* was shifted ca. 80 cm to the north, at expense of the latter and on top of its mosaic floor.

<sup>57</sup> The dating and the artistic study are the contribution of S. Rozenberg.

<sup>58</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 16.13. I thank D. Mevorah, curator at the Israel Museum, for his suggestion that the basin could have been a royal gift.



day and the weather) whether to bathe/swim indoor or outdoor. The round pool was integrated into a water system that irrigated the nearby garden of the pool complex. As the new heating system for the inner pool probably required more fuel, the *palaestra*'s western colonnade was blocked and appended to the above-mentioned elongated service courtyard.

In my opinion, the changes in the bathhouse reflect the conditions of the local climate. Summer days at Herodium (as in the vicinity of Jerusalem) are rather hot and suitable for outdoor swimming. However, during the afternoons, cool breezes detract from the enjoyment of this pleasure. It seems that this factor provided the king with a good reason to prefer indoor bathing and swimming.<sup>59</sup> (Naturally, it might have been the sole option on cooler days, during the spring, fall or winter.)

### *The Large Palace*

Only the foundations of this rectangular building (ca. 130 m long and 55 m wide) have survived (Fig. 40, Plate 22). The Large Palace was built on a slope, thus necessitating the erection of a large substructure. The southern part of this substructure consisted of earth fill, while underground halls were built in the northern part. Notable among them is a pair of halls extending along the building's entire length, each having a width of 5 m. At least one of them was originally covered by a barrel vault. These two halls evidently served as huge storerooms.<sup>60</sup> Remains of other substructural halls were found at the eastern end of the building. The barrel vault covering one of them has been preserved intact.<sup>61</sup>

Nothing remained of the floors and walls of the huge building that once stood on this substructure. Its function can thus merely be surmised. In our opinion, it served as the main palace wing of Greater Herodium. In any event, its importance is indicated not only by its size, and by the fact that it overlooked Lower Herodium (without being located on top of the hill), but also by its location on the same axis of symmetry as the Mountain Palace-Fortress.

### *The Course and the Monumental Building (the Burial Compound?)*

As mentioned above, an elongated level terrace – the course – is located to the north of the Large Palace (Fig. 40, Plate 22). This platform, 350 m long and 30 m

<sup>59</sup> The present author witnessed a similar phenomenon in Jerusalem and its vicinity during the 1950s and 1960s. The pleasure of outdoor swimming was sometimes marred in the windy summer afternoons, and over the years, pools were gradually covered by roofs.

<sup>60</sup> The capacity of these two storerooms alone is approximately two-thirds that of Masada's central storerooms.

<sup>61</sup> This hall, which is rather narrow, might have served as a link between the substructure and the main floor above. Its use as a stable by the local Bedouins inspired de Saulcy to term the entire building the "stable."

wide, was too narrow to serve as a hippodrome and too long to be a stadium. In any event, such structures were built by Herod only in cities.

At the western end of the course, 3–4 m lower than the level of the pool complex, the monumental building was exposed. This impressive structure (15 × 14 m in size) is an elaborate hall whose interior is surrounded by niches with engaged columns standing on pedestals between them (Fig. 44, Plate 28). The building's northern and southern walls were particularly thick (2.6 m). Possibly these thick walls were intended to support not only a vaulted ceiling but also a monumental roof. The building itself faces the course and is located on the same axis of symmetry. The monumental building's eastern, main facade is missing, but on the basis of an architectural analysis of the structure of the interior niches in the other walls, one can reconstruct three entrances here, in addition to the two side entrances that were revealed, one on each side. Worthy of note is a narrow, elongated pool (12 × 3 m) that was built in front of the building and parallel to it, 1.8 m away. Its function is uncertain, but it seems that a reflecting pool is the most reasonable option.<sup>62</sup>

The monumental building had two side units. In the northern one, behind a vestibule, was located a stairwell, linking the monumental building and the course with the pool complex. The southern unit also had a vestibule, behind which was a square room originally covered by a stone vault.

Skirting the northern side of the course, in the area to the east of the monumental building, was a colonnade, ca. 3 m wide and 40 m long, with the pool complex's boundary wall on its rear. Opposite it, on the eastern side of the course, a rectangular building containing a large, stepped pool (9 × 6 m, ca. 2.5 m deep), apparently a ritual bath (*mikveh*) was built near the monumental building. This building, part of which was hewn into the natural slope, was entered through two doorways, a characteristic feature of various ritual baths.<sup>63</sup>

One learns of the former presence of another monumental building, which must have stood nearby, from a large group of ashlar blocks made of hard limestone, with chiseled margins and projecting bosses similar to those on the Temple Mount, the Phasaël Tower and the monument above the Cave of Machpelah at Hebron (Plate 29). These stones, which were not meant to be covered by plaster, are the only ones of this type found at Herodium (see Part II). The ashlar blocks under discussion were found in secondary use in a Byzantine church that was revealed

<sup>62</sup> In theory, the reflection pool could have been built slightly later than the monumental building, or perhaps even after Herod's death, e. g., at the time when the grooves in the columns inside the building were carved (they do not appear to be an original feature of the building; Netzer 1981, 39). Only the full exposure of this pool and its surroundings might clarify this issue. During the reign of Archelaus, or later during the days of the procurators, the monumental building might have been converted into a *nymphaeum*.

<sup>63</sup> R. Reich, "Mishnah, *Shekalim* 8:2 and the Archaeological Evidence," in A. Oppenheimer *et alii* (eds.), *Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period: Abraham Schalit Memorial Volume* (1980), 225–256 (in Hebrew).

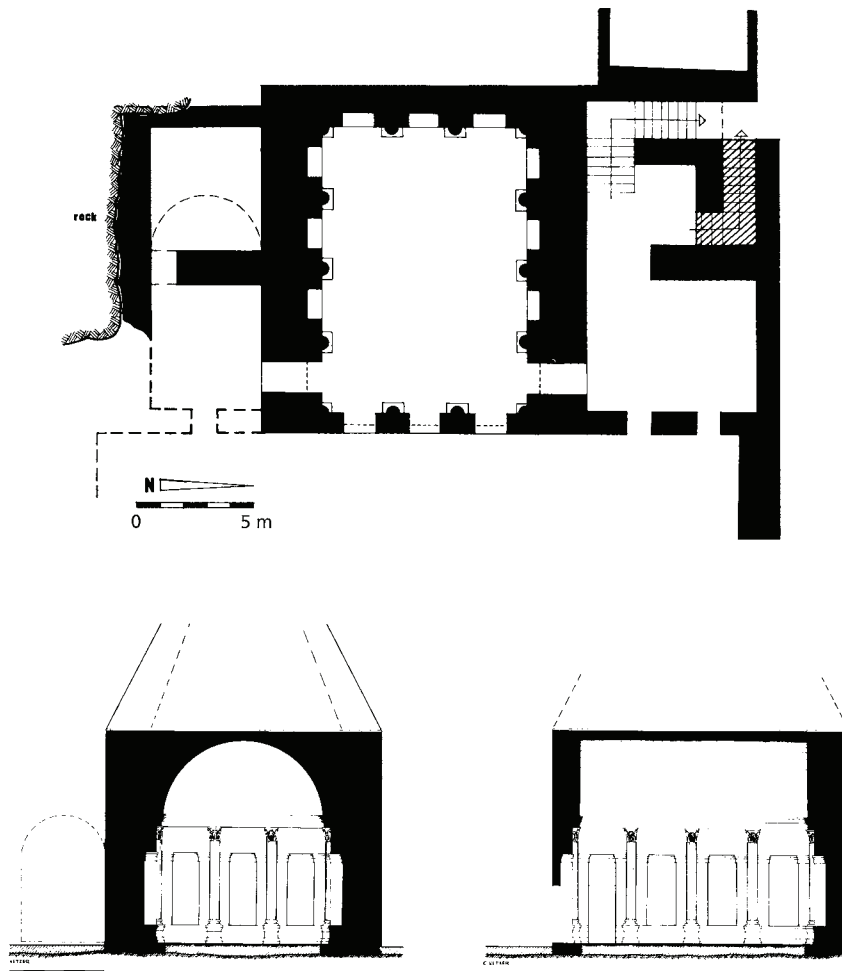


Figure 44: Reconstructed plan and sections of the monumental building in Lower Herodium.

close to the monumental building and the *mikveh*. Some of them had once formed part of a Doric frieze decorated with triglyphs and metopes, common in tombs of the Second Temple period in Judaea, or with floral designs which were also characteristic of that time (see Appendix 2).<sup>64</sup> They were taken, no doubt, from a Herodian monument that once stood close to the monumental building;

<sup>64</sup> R. Hachlili, *The Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (1988), 103–113.

perhaps they originated from the facade of Herod's missing tomb or constituted the monument proper.<sup>65</sup>

Further excavations conducted in 1997–2000 have brought to light additional data that tend to corroborate the presence of a tomb compound. The foundations of a U-shaped structure, 24.5 m long and having a maximum width of 6.8 m, with walls 1.2 m wide, were exposed beneath later Byzantine remains, ca. 55 m southeast of the monumental building (Fig. 40). In theory, these foundations might have borne the structure built of the well-dressed Herodian ashlar (with the Doric frieze, etc.). However, no evidence of a burial chamber or an opening leading into an underground cavity has been found. To the west of the U-shaped structure, a ritual bath composed of two pools was exposed. On the other hand, and apparently not by chance, the remains under discussion are located on a diagonal architectural axis, which also bisects the huge pool, the round structure at its center and the round eastern tower of the Mountain Palace-Fortress (see below). The U-shaped structure might have been intended to serve as a vestibule through which the hypothetical tomb could be entered. It seems that during Herod's lifetime, the conception of the tomb compound underwent changes, and both structures (the U-shape one and the *mikveh*) were eliminated.

In any event, clear evidence of changes during the construction of Lower Herodium was noted in the pool complex, in particular in its southern colonnade. I tend to link these changes with the elimination of the U-shaped structure and the adjacent ritual bath. In any event, the monumental building was also part of the revised plan.<sup>66</sup>

Josephus mentions the fact that Herod was interred at Herodium but unfortunately he does not describe the tomb itself. On the other hand, he gives a detailed description of the king's splendid funeral procession (*BJ* 1.667–669):

The king's funeral next occupied attention. Archelaus, omitting nothing that could contribute to its magnificence, brought forth all the royal ornaments to accompany the procession in honour of the deceased. The bier was of solid gold, studded with precious stones, and had a covering of purple, embroidered with various colours; on this lay the body enveloped in a purple robe, a diadem encircling the head and surmounted by a crown of gold, the scepter beside his right hand. Around the bier were Herod's sons and a large group of his relations; these were followed by the guards, the Thracian contingent, Germans and Gauls, all equipped as for war. The remainder of the troops marched in front, armed and in orderly array, led by their commanders and subordinate officers; behind these came five hundred of Herod's servants and freedmen, carrying spices. The body was thus conveyed for a distance of two hundred furlongs to Herodion, where, in accordance with the directions of the deceased, it was interred. So ended Herod's reign.

<sup>65</sup> Another option previously suggested by me is that the tomb itself existed deep in the ground, beneath the hill, and was entered via a tunnel which started in the tomb compound under discussion. Only further excavations might solve this riddle.

<sup>66</sup> See forthcoming final publication of the excavations at Lower Herodium.

It thus seems very reasonable to conclude that the course was especially built for this occasion, while the monumental building at its western end served as a *triclinium* in the king's burial compound.<sup>67</sup> The *mikveh* revealed to the east of the monumental building was most probably also part of the same compound, like those exposed in the Tomb of Queen Helene of Adiabene ("the Tomb of the Kings") in Jerusalem,<sup>68</sup> or in Jericho's "Goliath Tomb."<sup>69</sup> Obviously, the discovery of Herod's burial cave or monument in the vicinity would corroborate our assumptions with regard to the purpose of the course and the monumental building.

Five arguments support the claim that the above-discussed elements formed part of Herod's tomb compound: (1) the course was probably built especially for the funeral procession so vividly described by Josephus; (2) the uncommon position of the monumental building, partially cut into the rock and at the end of a long, open course and, moreover, the fact that it was not an integral part of a larger building (therefore without a clear function, such as a regular reception hall or a library<sup>70</sup>); (3) the proximity to a large ritual bath, so rare in Herod's building projects; (4) the outstanding group of ashlar, characteristic of tomb monuments, which are remnants of a missing monument; (5) this is the only location in Lower Herodium from which Jerusalem (the Mount of Olives) is visible.

\* \* \*

Greater Herodium extends over a considerable area of ca. 25 hectares, and all of it was built according to a master plan based on a single grid system (Figs. 40, 45).<sup>71</sup> The site has two obvious architectural foci – the Mountain Palace-Fortress and the large pool at the center of Lower Herodium. The Large Palace, directly below the hill, might have been a third focal point. A notable feature of the site's planning is its excellent layout, and one can discern a series of architectonic axes:

1. a north-south axis of symmetry linking the Mountain Palace-Fortress with the Large Palace, thus creating a connection between the two parts of the site;
2. an east-west axis that bisects the pool complex and the valley to its west;
3. an east-west axis extending along the course and passing through the monumental building;

<sup>67</sup> For a discussion (including a comparison of the monumental building with the *triclinium* of the Roman Soldier's Tomb compound at Petra), see Netzer 1981.

<sup>68</sup> M. Kon, *The Tombs of the Kings* (1947), 31–38 (in Hebrew).

<sup>69</sup> E. Netzer, "Mourning Enclosure of Tomb H (Goliath Tomb)," in R. Hachlili and A. Kiliebrew, *Jericho, the Jewish Cemetery of the Second Temple Period, IAA Reports 7* (1999), 45–50.

<sup>70</sup> A comparison with the Tempio di Diana, in which the niches were used for the storage of scrolls (library), is invalid since the structure at Herodium was cut into the ground and did not have any special arrangement to protect it against moisture.

<sup>71</sup> In this context, I disregard the above-mentioned changes in the tentative tomb compound.

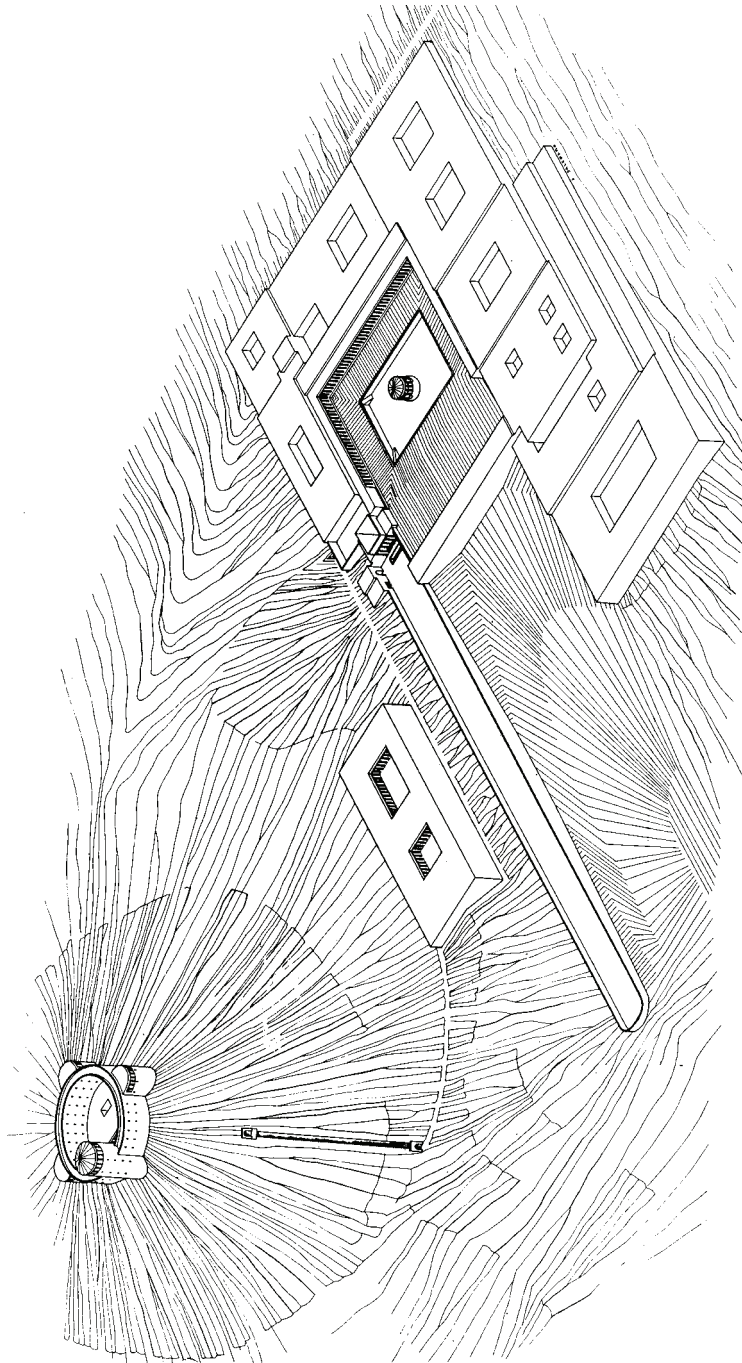


Figure 45. Isometric view of Greater Herodium (from northeast).

4. a diagonal axis linking the pavilion at the center of the large pool with the tentative burial compound (initially represented by the U-shaped structure and later by the monumental building) and the round eastern tower of the Mountain Palace-Fortress.

The last-mentioned axis lends support to the hypothetical location of the burial compound. There is no doubt that most of Lower Herodium was planned and built at one and the same time (with the above-mentioned changes introduced during Herod's lifetime).

From an architectural and engineering viewpoint, the construction of Greater Herodium can certainly be regarded as one of Herod's greatest achievements in the field of planning and designing complexes. In Part II I shall further discuss the virtues of Herodium as a huge planned complex; I shall also present the hypothesis of Herodium being the "ideal city" in Herod's mind.