

FINDING DESIGN WITH EHUD NETZER, THE ARCHITECT OF HEROD'S BUILDING PROJECTS

Architects who strove to obtain practical manual skills but lacked an education have never been able to achieve an influence equal to the quality of their exertions; on the other hand, those who placed their trust entirely in theory and in writings seem to have chased after a shadow, not something real. But those who have fully mastered both skills, armed, if you will, in full panoply, those architects have reached their goal more quickly and influentially.

— *Vitruvius 1.1.2 (I. Rowland, transl.)*

Introduction

A commonplace definition of a great architect is one who designs everything from the city to the building and on down to the coffee cup. Ehud Netzer reached across these material scales, and more: he sought an equally expansive diachronic scope that reached back two millennia and forward into the next. Such a scope of vision is often highly theoretical, and yet few of my colleagues were more pragmatic. I would like to pay tribute here to both the archaeologist and the architect, who brought his deep understanding of the design processes required for successful construction projects to bear on the buildings, cities, and designed landscapes of Herod.¹ As the title suggests, for those of us who worked with him, it took all of one's critical faculties to remember that Ehud was not, in fact, Herod's architect. As he admitted himself:

It seems that my personal experience in the field of modern architecture has also influenced the analysis of these ancient building

projects. The conception developed by me over the years — that Herod not only showed interest in the field of construction but also had a profound understanding of planning and architecture, and therefore took an active and important part in the erection of many of his buildings — was undoubtedly drawn from the line of thought of a nowadays architect.²

My own work with him considered landscape architectural issues ranging from pre-Roman flower pots to the construction of a palace in the surf at Caesarea to future national parks. While I teach contemporary design, I am not a practicing landscape architect; and in my experience, architectural and landscape historians, if they had a design education, do not practice due either to the academic structure of their universities or their own inclination. Similarly, practicing modern architects and landscape architects of Ehud's generation generally have had very little interest in bringing their experience to bear on design problems of the past. Ehud, if not unique, was exceptional and a model of the kind of innovative thinking and advancements in scholarship that can be made when a talented designer is engaged in archaeology and contemporary building projects throughout a career. Whether we were discussing an excavation, tourism plan, or scholarly interpretation of Herod's intentions, Ehud's views on design always began with logistical issues to be considered for the accomplishment of the project, while his long experience with renovating neighborhoods in Jerusalem and planning national parks gave him experience with landscapes that went well beyond the design of individual buildings.³ What Ehud

ultimately concluded about Herod's temperament quite well describes Ehud himself:

If it is possible to learn about Herod from his projects, then he was practical and thorough man, with a broad world view, outstanding organizational talent and improvisational ability (in the best sense of the term), able to adapt himself to his surroundings and to changing situations — a man who anticipated the future and had his two feet planted firmly on the ground.⁴

I am honored to pay tribute my mentor and colleague, and in doing so would like to highlight the important contributions his working method as an architect made not only to architecture and planning, but also to the closely related, and still emerging, archaeology of gardens and designed landscapes, one of the areas to which his fieldwork, scholarship, and mentorship has made a seminal contribution.

Beginning to Dig Design

Finding evidence of Herod's design projects with Ehud Netzer was challenging and often exhilarating work, and for the overseas scholar arriving for a short season, he got the program underway without delay. Our joint quest for the gardens of Herod began at four o'clock AM in early April 1985, when, fresh off a red-eye flight, my Nesher cab wound its way through Jerusalem and dropped me off at Midbar Sinai, 36. I pulled my suitcase across the sidewalk and under a trellised carport where its wheels faltered in what appeared, by streetlight, to be pottery sherds! Descending the stone steps, I passed through the lush garden towards a door that had just opened. Ehud stepped out in a band of welcoming light and quiet greetings, as the family was all asleep. As I entered a small kitchen with a wooden table, a tea kettle whistled gently. An imam cried the call to prayer from a distant neighborhood. As he introduced himself, Ehud moved efficiently about the kitchen. Bread, olives, white cheese filled the table, as he minced tomatoes, onion, and cucumbers and squeezed a lemon on top. "Eat quickly," he said, "We must go get the others." I ate hastily and gulped down the hot *botz*... and, like every newcomer to the stuff,

the "mud" at the finish. Ehud already had the dig gear packed outside in the Volvo.

In the breaking light of dawn, we descended through the Judean Wilderness. As the sun rose, the hills glowed with the delicate purple and green washes of a desert in spring bloom. The Bedouin were up, shifting their flocks, strands of grey smoke rising from their tea fires, sleepy children emerging from tents. Descending below the sea level markers, we turned off the main road onto a dirt track, first over the hills, then along the deep gorge of Wadi Qelt below the St. George monastery. The track deteriorated and jostling some distance further, we paused the car beneath Cyprus to take in the extraordinary sight of the gorge opening out onto the plain of Jericho. Ehud pointed out the Winter Palaces of the Hasmonean and Herodian royalty. A few minutes later, greeted by the Bedouin guard, Ali Salman Salameh Adulam, and several of his children, we crossed Wadi Qelt and arrived at the small, partially restored complex of *opus reticulatum* walls beside the wadi bank. Here a camel would surprise us with its newborn calf a few days later. Entering a restored peristyle, Ehud explained that the now-weathered trench through the center of the courtyard had, in 1978, revealed lines of ceramic planting pots — clear evidence of a densely planted garden. Having sought a garden specialist for nearly a decade, he was now ready to hear my reading of the stratigraphy of the old baulks that he was quickly scraping down with his *patish* as he talked. Less than three hours had passed since my arrival in Jerusalem. I doubt I had even changed my clothes.

This trip was the first of twenty-five years of work with Ehud on the gardens and landscapes of Herod's palaces. Wilhelmina Jashemski had pioneered garden archaeology in the exceptional preservation conditions of the region buried by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, and my goal was to develop a systematic method of excavating the remains of Roman-era gardens under more common preservation conditions.⁵ Herod's palaces presented a wide range of landscape settings and garden remains. Ultimately, the focus of our collaboration, with Barbara Burrell, was Herod's promontory palace at Caesarea, arguably the complex with the poorest evidence for gardens but the

richest for landscape architecture and urban planning. Ehud's archaeological and interpretative process for Herodian architecture provided a rigorous context within which I was able to seek the design of landscapes and gardens. He was a kind, demanding but patient mentor. Over the years I was welcomed into the circle of his family, students and colleagues who continue to inspire me, as they will all those who read this volume.

Drawing towards Research

When he would return from the excavation, Ehud would sit in his regular seat at the kitchen table, clear everything off the table, and explain to me what they had seen and found in that day. He did not shower; he did not relax at the end of a long day's work, but sat and reconstructed for himself everything they had done that day. Ehud would sketch Herodium and its buildings over and over again, trying to figure out, trying to crack the secret of Herod's mind.

— *Dvorah Netzer*⁶

Drawing in archaeology is often understood to be a process of documentation rather than interpretation. The interpretative aspect of drawings is often seen as the illustrative end point of a process of research, writing, and discussion, the drawings themselves providing an artistic vision that evokes the past without containing an inherent rigor of argument or proof. However, fine measured drawing, even sketching, has the same capacity for rigorously furthering research, interpretation and argumentation as writing does. Disciplined development of architectural plans, perspective, elevations, and models — the very tools that Vitruvius describes for the original process of design — brings the archaeologist from scattered robber trenches and ruined walls of today back in time to the original conception for the project, as well as its subsequent use and development. There are few archaeological architects who could see the ancient whole from a few ruined parts better than Ehud Netzer.

Reconstructing Herod's buildings with Ehud began with two necessities: the site and Josephus' texts about Herod. Netzer could assess the program

implied or spelled out in the historical evidence against the lay of the land, and begin to frame the scope of work and the demands the project required. Usually he began by working out the water system, often with maps and evidence from earlier excavations and surveys, as well as his own observations in the field, to establish water use for both the construction and the inhabitation of the site. Where possible he observed the cutting away of rocks for platforms, terraces, and cisterns, the approximate volume of stone this effort produced for the building construction, and the likely routes across the topography for roads and water channels.

The surveying and stone-by-stone plans came next. As he stood in the field with his drawing board, stones became walls became rooms became ordered complexes, the fragmented remains gaining an order that enabled reconstruction and interpretation. His discussions of his theories began on the site — any rock or dig table became a conference table as the stone-by-stone plan and levels began to develop on the page. Ehud sought diverse perspectives and input from the excavators, wanting to know what the pottery dating or coins might support for the phasing or cancellation of rooms or floors. These discussions usually confirmed his interpretations, but occasionally we could get beyond “maybe” (said in that particular way) to shape his conclusions.

The field drawings then went back to the drawing boards at his house. Dvorah Netzer (above) and Rachel Chachy can best describe the full process of developing an architectural reconstruction with Netzer. If you could draw, it was a visual conversation, back and forth on layers of tracing paper or scribbling on prints. Much of the time, however, it was hard to keep up with him — it was astonishing how quickly Ehud came to an interpretation that he would sketch out as he talked. In terms of formal architectural relationships, there were few elements that he did not see almost immediately if they could be derived from known principles and any kind of evidence on the ground. He welcomed and was stimulated by ideas he had not thought of before, but there were not many of those, and he dismantled half-baked theories with a couple of pencil strokes. Barbara Burrell and I found that he

readily responded to the suggestion that the Lower Promontory at Caesarea needed a second story and a western apse, and after he made sketches, then measured drawings, we were all pleased with the result. On another occasion I objected to his axonometric of the Lower Promontory being devoid of water and surf. He handed me a pen, I sketched in some surf on a photocopy to show him what I would suggest — that drawing went straight to press. On the other hand, I tried taking him out on a boat to discuss the visibility problems of a flat roof on the Promontory Palace, only to find he was too seasick to observe my carefully prepared points. All of Herod's other palaces (like the indigenous architecture of the region today) were flat-roofed and he never saw the Promontory Palace in any other way. He could be stubborn.

As a director, Netzer strategized the placement of trenches to quickly determine the original lines of a building through all of its later accumulations, studying the emerging elements to fill in details and work out how the building was constructed on its site, from quarrying to terracing and then building and finishing. The reconstruction drawings he made from the field drawings were lean and modern, focusing on the main bones of the project in their relationship to the evidence from the ground and from an understanding of the building processes required for builder's intentions to be fully realized. While he appreciated the discoveries of stuccoed details and other finishes, he focused on the emerging lines of the architecture and what they said about Herod's intentions and the strategy behind the whole project.

As Dvorah Netzer has repeatedly said to scholars wary of presenting discordant views, getting to the heart of the building is what Ehud valued most. With the main outlines established, the building identified, and its main phases interpreted, further refinements of the interpretation could proceed, even if they reshaped the original interpretation. Ehud has left a legacy of architectural drawings that are not only a foundation for future scholarship, but a guide to the steps of scholarly argumentation through drawing. New interpretations need to be demonstrated in plan, section, elevation and models, as well as from the artifacts and texts.

Landscape

The good building is not one that hurts the landscape, but one which makes the landscape more beautiful than it was before the building was built.

— *Frank Lloyd Wright*

Born in Palestine, Ehud lived or worked in the many landscapes and changing political territories of Israel over the course of his life, much like Herod.⁷ In his writings, he addressed the scope of landscape architecture in Herod's building projects, from the original siting of a complex, provision of water, and terracing, to the layout of the gardens. As he explored designed landscapes archaeologically, Ehud immediately saw the design and Herod's intentions in lines of planting pots or rock cuttings. However, the process of gathering and assessing the environmental evidence needed to fully envision the design and cultivation of Herod's gardens, to illuminate the landscape terminology of Josephus, extended beyond the archaeology of architecture. He sought interdisciplinary collaboration. As with the other areas of material study on his excavations, he was supportive and encouraging. For years his home office and dig storerooms were filled with bags, large and small, of my soil samples, vials of carbonized plants, and flower pots. Dvorah patiently allowed me to "water" her garden with my bucket flotation operations until there remained no spot uncovered by the silt and heavy fractions.

Herod's gardens and landscape features were harder to find than his walls and pavements. While the remains at Jericho are among the best preserved anywhere in the world, the planting designs of Herodium, Masada, and Caesarea proved more elusive. Our drawings at the table remained inconclusive without better comparative evidence. I sought out other gardens of the period at Petra (2001–2014)⁸ and in Italy at Horace's Villa (1998–2001), Lago di Nemi (2001), and the Villa Arianna at Stabiae (2008–2012), which proved to be a "rosetta stone" of garden features. In the summer of 2010, I brought this evidence back to Israel and sat down with Ehud to suggest presence of strolling-type gardens (*ambulationes*) in

Jericho's swimming pool and sunken garden areas (where there was neither the evidence nor the opportunity to fully open the areas to excavation) and by the pool at Herodium. He not only took out the tracing paper and plans but also some excavation equipment to test trench for clues at Herodium. That summer he was pleased by a major advance in the archaeobotany of gardens by Israeli palynologist Dafna Langgut, who developed a method of retrieving ancient pollen from the plaster of garden walls at the Persian palace site at Ramat Raḥel.⁹ Ehud did not live to see the rapid developments in garden archaeology as discovery of the Villa Arianna garden and other new gardens in Italy came together with his own syntheses of Herod's architecture, nor the first new interpretative plans of Herodian gardens.¹⁰

Ehud's publications discuss gardens, nature, and the landscape briefly and quite pragmatically, and his descriptions and plans do not fully capture the sublime nature of Herod's landscapes. For this he turned to photography. Anyone who paused to rest or eat a meal beside him at the cliff edge of Masada overlooking the desolation of the Dead Sea shores, in the ruined tower at Zippori gazing at lush orchards filled with families picnicking, looking beyond the blue surf of Caesarea to boats on the western horizon, or over the Judean hills at Herodium to the hazy Moab range of nearby Jordan, felt his profound appreciation for the power that the landscape gave to Herod's building projects. Herod's palaces, even as ruins, make the experience of that landscape as heightened today as when they were first built, deeply immersing us in the landscape rather than simply frame a view or photo opportunity. Perhaps this is why Ehud's writings rarely analyze aesthetics or phenomenology, such as changes in scene or light, or the inevitable awe one feels after the arduous journey to this or that Herodian palace. Yet Ehud seemed to artlessly time visits and tours to provide the most spectacular experience, not only to his colleagues and visitors, but to the public as well.

As Herod built palaces to mark the districts of a unified Judea and address its diverse and conflicting populations, Ehud Netzer built National Parks. His tireless efforts to preserve his archaeological sites did not give them the form of outdoor

museums, but living places for recreation. While Masada held a particularly sacred place in the formation of Israeli national identity, Ehud imagined that the site, along with Herodium, Jericho (both the Winter Palaces and Hisham's Palace), Baniyas, Caesarea, and Sepphoris would become contemporary landscapes of enjoyment, education, and economic value for residents of the area, as well as tourists, school groups, and visitors from abroad.

International Collaboration

It is impossible to conclude this tribute without acknowledging Ehud Netzer's generosity in international collaboration. His vision for international engagement once again recalls Herod himself (although Herod's ability to raise funds far exceeds that of any archaeologist.) Ehud strategically balanced a systematic, step by step process of excavation, interpretation, and publication with international dissemination of his theories, travelling abroad annually to participate in conferences and study at various research institutions. I recall a fax I received in 1992, asking whether I would mind if he shared the early results of my studies on gardens with Inge Nielsen, who was preparing a survey on Hellenistic palaces. He had already decided to share a great deal of his own material even before publication, so that Herodian palaces could take their place among other royal complexes of their time. The resulting volume, *Hellenistic Palaces: Tradition and Renewal*, and Nielsen's edited work, *The Royal Palace Institution in the First Millennium B.C.*, brought up-to-date information about Herodian palaces to wide international attention.¹¹ There are many other instances in which Ehud generously shared plans and unpublished ideas to further knowledge of Herodian archaeology on the international scene.

The reach of his contributions was evident during the Mediterranean Villas Conference in 2009 when a large group of preeminent Roman archaeologists (among them John Clarke, Guy Métraux, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Roger Wilson, Annalisa Marzano, and Thomas Noble Howe) came to Jerusalem to visit Herod's projects for the first time. Well-informed by Ehud's publications, they were nonetheless unprepared for the profound

experience of these buildings in their landscape settings — few Roman villas in Italy compare to Herod’s in this regard.¹² Their responses to this visit foreshadowed the success of the Herod exhibit at the Israel Museum, in planning at the time.

It is difficult to imagine a more perfect celebration of Ehud Netzer’s work than the Israel Museum exhibit on Herod the Great. The meticulous conservation and restoration of the fragmentary architecture, wall paintings, and furnishings of Herod’s palaces, made whole again for the exhibit, together with superb associated publications, brought to life Ehud’s architectural vision. As the record-breaking crowds of visitors to that historic exhibit showed, not only was Israel ready to appreciate the legacy of Herod, but so was the world at large. Scholarship integrating Herod’s building projects, including their gardens, is now burgeoning both at

home and abroad.¹³ As Barbara Burrell has noted, Netzer’s projects and publications also make possible new interpretations of the old excavations of Roman villas and palaces in Italy by offering more tightly dated and phased archaeological evidence together with a solid chronology of interaction between Herod and Rome’s leaders.¹⁴

Like all of my colleagues and friends, every time I get out a plan annotated by Ehud (as so many are), I feel our profound loss. There was so much more for him to do, not the least of which would have been to witness and enjoy the impact of his remarkable program of publications and the Herod exhibit. This volume attests to his enduring legacy, continuing here in the contributions of his many students and colleagues.

Kathryn Gleason

NOTES

- 1 For a full account of his career in English see Barbara Burrell, “Obituary of Ehud Netzer 1934–2010” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 24, 2011: 922–927.
- 2 E. Netzer, *The Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006: xi.
- 3 Ehud, in his own distinctive way, has joined Yigael Yadin among the “ranks of those few who can predict the elements and grand designs comprising the march of history...” A. Malamat, “Yigael Yadin — Archaeologist, Historian and Soldier,” *Eretz-Israel. Yigael Yadin Volume*, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989: xiv.
- 4 E. Netzer, *The Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006: 308.
- 5 Gleason, Kathryn. “Detecting and Documenting Archaeological Features of a Garden through Excavation” *A Sourcebook on Garden Archaeology*, Amina-Aïcha Malek, ed., Bern: Peter Lang, 2012: 217–256.
- 6 Dvorah Netzer as quoted by Yadin Roman, “The Three Dimensional Archaeologist” in *Herod: The Life and Death of the King of Judea* (Eretz Classic Album), Tel Aviv, 2013: 87.
- 7 Dvorah Netzer beautifully situates Ehud’s career into the landscape of Israel in her conversation with Yadin Roman, “The Three Dimensional Archaeologist” in *Herod: The Life and Death of the Kind of Judea* (Eretz Classic Album), Tel Aviv, 2013: 74–89.
- 8 Leigh Ann Bedal’s garden discovery of the garden and pool complex at Petra (1998– present) interested Ehud intensely, and few of her field seasons passed without a visit, when he would share observations.
- 9 After years with inconclusive results from the analyses, he shared in the exciting news of the discovery of ancient pollen from the plastered walls of the Persian garden in the Tel Aviv University excavations at Ramat Rahel. Yuval Gadot took us on a memorable tour of the garden in 2010, where we were able to envision displays of imported citron, myrtle, walnut, birch, and Cedar of Lebanon in the same featureless brown soils that have long exasperated the archaeologists at Herodium. D. Langgut, Y. Gadot, N. Porat, and O. Lipschits, “Fossil Pollen Reveals the Secrets of the Royal Persian Garden at Ramat Rahel, Jerusalem,” *Palynology* 37, 2013: 115–129.
- 10 In his memory, I have applied my first conclusions from these studies in Kathryn Gleason and Rachel Bar Nathan, “*Paradeisoi* of the Palace Complex at Jericho” in *Jericho Final Reports*, vol. V, Rachel Bar Nathan and Judit Gärtner, eds. Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem, 2014: 317–366; and in a special issue of *Near Eastern Archaeology* on Herod’s landscape palaces based on the Archaeological Institute of America session Barbara Burrell and I organized in Ehud’s memory in January 2012. Kathryn Gleason, “The Landscape Palaces of Herod the Great” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 77,2, 2014: 76–97. Langgut’s first tests have revealed the pollen of cypress, hazel, and garden plant species in the courtyard of the upper Promontory Palace at Caesarea, where no sign of a garden before

the Byzantine era had previously been evident. Dafna Langgut, Kathryn Gleason and Barbara Burrell, "Pollen Analysis as Evidence for Herod's Royal Garden at the Promontory Palace, Caesarea," *Studies in Botanical Archaeology Honoring Professor Daniel Zohary, Israel Journal of Plant Sciences*, forthcoming. Ehud's own contributions on the gardens of Herod's palaces are to be published in Wilhelmina Jashemski's *Gardens of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.

- 11 Inge Nielsen, *Hellenistic Palaces: Traditional and Renewal*, Aarhus, 1994; Inge Nielsen, ed. *The Royal Palace Institution in the First Millennium BC*, Aarhus, 2001. For the first time in the 20th century, the gardens and landscape features of royal palaces were presented systematically, not simply as artistic flourishes in the interpretative drawings, in an architectural survey.
- 12 The conference has resulted in the preparation of the first pan-Mediterranean volume on Villas: Guy

Métraux and Annalisa Marzano, *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin*, in preparation.

- 13 In addition to the publications of the Herod exhibit see most recently: Rachel Bar-Nathan, Guy Stiebel, and others in "Royal Gardens: Water Systems and Gardens" in *New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and Its Regions*, G. Stiebel, O. Peleg-Barkat, D. Ben-Ami, S. Weksler-Bdolah, and Y. Gadot, eds. Jerusalem, 2013. Rona Evyasef, "Gardens at a Crossroads: The Influence of Persian and Egyptian Gardens on the Royal Hellenistic Gardens of Judea," *Proceedings of the International Congress of Classical Archaeology, Rome, Bolletino di Archeologia* online 1/volume special D/D9/5:27-36. Rabun Taylor, "Movement, Vision, and Quotation in the Gardens of Herod the Great" in *Le Jardin dans Antiquité*, Kathleen Coleman, ed. Vandoevres, Fondation Hardt, 2014.
- 14 Barbara Burrell, "The Legacies of Herod the Great," *NEA* 77/2, June 2014: 72-73