

Fig. 1. NE slope of the hill of Herodium at the end of the 2009 season (view from east) (Pasqual, Doron and Dudi).



Fig. 2. The glacia wall and abutting doorway, first exposed in 1965 (view from east).

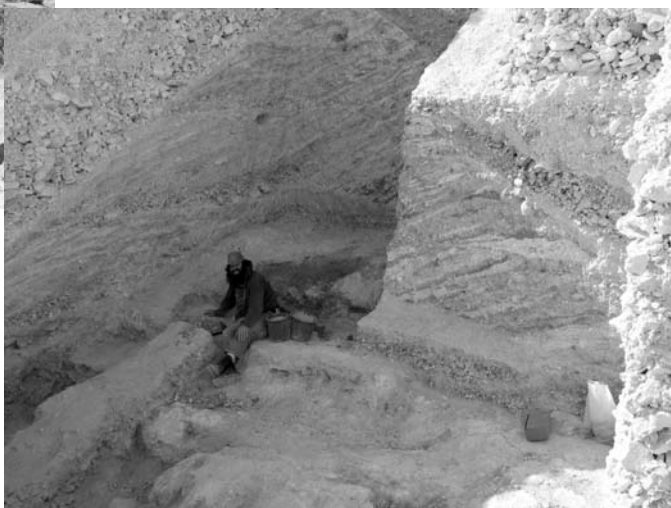


Fig. 3. Trench dug through the artificial fill beneath the eastern round tower (view from north).

Preliminary report on Herod's mausoleum and theatre with a royal box at Herodium

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Introduction

Recent work on the NE slope of the hill at Herodium has changed our conception of "Greater Herodium" in remarkable ways. The excavations conducted by us at Lower Herodium between 1972 and 1987 and again from 1997 to 2000 ended with a question mark with regard to the location of Herod's burial place. We had always tended to reject the likelihood that the tomb was directly connected with the circular mountain palace fortress on top of the hill: not only was no sign of a tomb found within that structure, but the building served primarily as a palace, and the Jewish faith does not countenance a tomb in direct contact with a dwelling. Even the possibility of a tomb set within the solid base of the eastern round tower (the highest landmark at Herodium in Herod's day) seemed to us improbable, in light of the similarity between it and the bases of the three multi-storeyed towers which Herod built in Jerusalem.¹ Therefore for many years we had concentrated our efforts in an area lying southeast of the pool complex and northwest of the meager remains of the "large palace",² an area we have termed the "tomb estate". When the excavations were renewed at the end of 2005, we again made an effort to locate Herod's tomb in the same area in Lower Herodium, but again we failed. Therefore towards the middle of 2006 we decided to shift our efforts to the hill, focusing on its NE slope (fig. 1), close to the remains of the monumental stairway described by Josephus:

... and it has a steep ascent formed of two hundred steps of hewn stone (*AntJ* 15.324),

... and provided an easy ascent by two hundred steps of the purest white marble (*BJ* 1.420)

The first feature to be studied on the NE slope was a sloped wall (a kind of glacis), preserved to a maximum height of 4-5 m and built of courses of ashlar.³ At what was then considered the S end of the wall, and perpendicular to it, a wide doorway (originally arched) was found (fig. 2).⁴ It soon became clear to us that the glacis wall did not end at the doorway but continued southwards, curving around the hill and angling slightly upwards (the wall also continued westwards, beyond the monumental stairway, but that sector had been dismantled at a later stage). Conjecturing that the wall possibly marked a path leading to Herod's tomb, we followed its line, even though, with the exception of its base course at the front, it was robbed in the area beyond the arched doorway. It continued to a point which lay exactly on the E-W axis of the fortified palace (just below the eastern round tower), where all the evidence for it ended. At this point we cut a wide (c.30 m) and deep (c.20 m) trench⁵ into the slope of the artificial hill, stopping when we reached the hill's original surface (fig. 3). Our

1 See E. Netzer, *Greater Herodium* (Qedem 13, 1981) 79-84.

2 E. Netzer, *The architecture of Herod, the great builder* (Tübingen 2006) 195.

3 This wall was first exposed in 1965 in an irregular operation apparently inspired by John M. Allegro following the work at Qumran on the copper scroll. The excavations were made without any coordination with the Franciscan expedition which worked on the hill between 1962 and 1967: see V. Corbo, *Herodion* (Jerusalem 1989) 29-30.

4 It appears that the doorway, and the wall to which it belongs, postdate the glacis wall, but this will have to be verified by excavation.

5 We also dug a deep sounding (4 x 4 m) just west of this trench.



Fig. 4. Herod's mausoleum during excavation (view from west); note architectural elements strewn around.

assumption was that a burial cave might be located nearby, below the round tower, but no doorway or corridor to such a cave was found.

Nevertheless, the trench and a geological survey of the surroundings shed light on the structure of the artificial hill. The massive project of creating the artificial, conical-shaped hill simultaneously involved re-shaping the original NE side of the hill and deepening the valley below it. This work produced a huge quantity of soil and chips of soft limestone to be used in the creation of the artificial hill. The fill was laid down in a systematic manner. First the soil was poured in, with a consolidation repeated every 50 cm or so; then a thick layer of pieces of soft limestone, chips and gravel was poured on top, creating a solid crust for the new cone, which has more or less kept its shape down to the present day. We estimate the materials used in this operation as roughly 450,000 m³. The glacis wall was apparently built at the same time as the fortress palace at an early stage of construction (see below) and served as a boundary wall that probably encircled the entire initial hill. Surprisingly, this wall was dismantled prior to the creation of the artificial conical hill, as is shown by the layers of soil and soft stone which covered it after it had almost completely been taken apart.

Failing to find a burial cave, we returned to explore the surroundings of the arched doorway and the monumental stair. This was an area which also contained three adja-

cent water cisterns, dating to the first Herodian constructions at the site.⁶ We found that the monumental stair had been built abutting, and above, the glacis wall. This proved a relatively late date for the construction of the stair and, with it, the artificial hill itself. It also showed that the arched corridor (containing the upper part of the monumental stairway) that led to the mountain palace fortress was built at the same time that the artificial hill was created, as an integral part of the stairway system. This was later confirmed when some other structures, some of them intentionally dismantled prior to the construction of the conical hill, were exposed: above all they include a straight stairway which predated the monumental one and followed a slightly different alignment, and a small royal theatre to its west. Herod's mausoleum, which was built some time later to the east of those structures, withstood the fate of being dismantled.

In April 2007, below and to the west of the arched doorway and to the east of the monumental stairway, we found a few fragments of a lavish sarcophagus in a reddish limestone. Digging down from that point we soon exposed a structure made of hard white limestone ashlars which turned out to be a podium measuring 10 x 10 m (fig. 4). This is the base of the monument which we have designated Herod's mausoleum. On May 10, 2007, the discovery was announced to the media. Our team has continued to work since then, with only short interruptions, first around the mausoleum, and then to the west where we found, quite unexpectedly, a small royal theatre (fig. 5).

Herod's mausoleum

During the excavation of the huge fill that covered the podium of the mausoleum, we found a large group of architectural elements from the destroyed building (fig. 6), which we presume was deliberately destroyed by the Jewish rebels whose presence is clearly attested at Herodium at the start of the First Jewish Revolt against the Romans; they took over the site in A.D. 66 from the small, local Roman garrison in order to try to withstand the approaching Roman army sent to crush the revolt. Evidence for their presence is found in the layers of garbage and the cooking ovens, dating to this period, within the débris of the mausoleum and to its side. The lack of patina on the stonework hints at the relatively short period of time the monument stood prior to its destruction, and it does not seem to have been previously damaged by an earthquake nor to have been robbed at an early date in order to re-use its materials, even though over a longer period of time some stones were retrieved from the huge pile of débris and from the slope below for secondary re-use.

Study of the elements has allowed R. Chachy-Laureys to reconstruct on the podium a two-storeyed monument, crowned by a concave conical roof (fig. 7). Constructed in the Hellenistic-Roman style, it was close to 25 m in height and contained three superimposed rooms. It is the only building at the site to use a hard white limestone known as *meleke*, the source of which lies a few kilometers to the south of Herodium. The treatment of its stones

6 Two are open to the public today, together with a series of tunnels dating to the time of the Bar-Kokhba Revolt (the second revolt against the Romans). The third, smaller cistern is not open to the public, but it was revealed and surveyed by us in 1974: E. Netzer, "Jewish rebels dig strategic tunnel system," *BAR* 15 (1988) 18-33 = E. Netzer and S. Arzi, *Qadmoniot* 18 (1985) 33-38 [Hebrew]. At that time we did not understand the reason for the two thick (2.5-3.3 m) walls built into the cistern. Today this question has been resolved, since the N and S walls of Herod's tomb stood directly above these massive walls (see below).

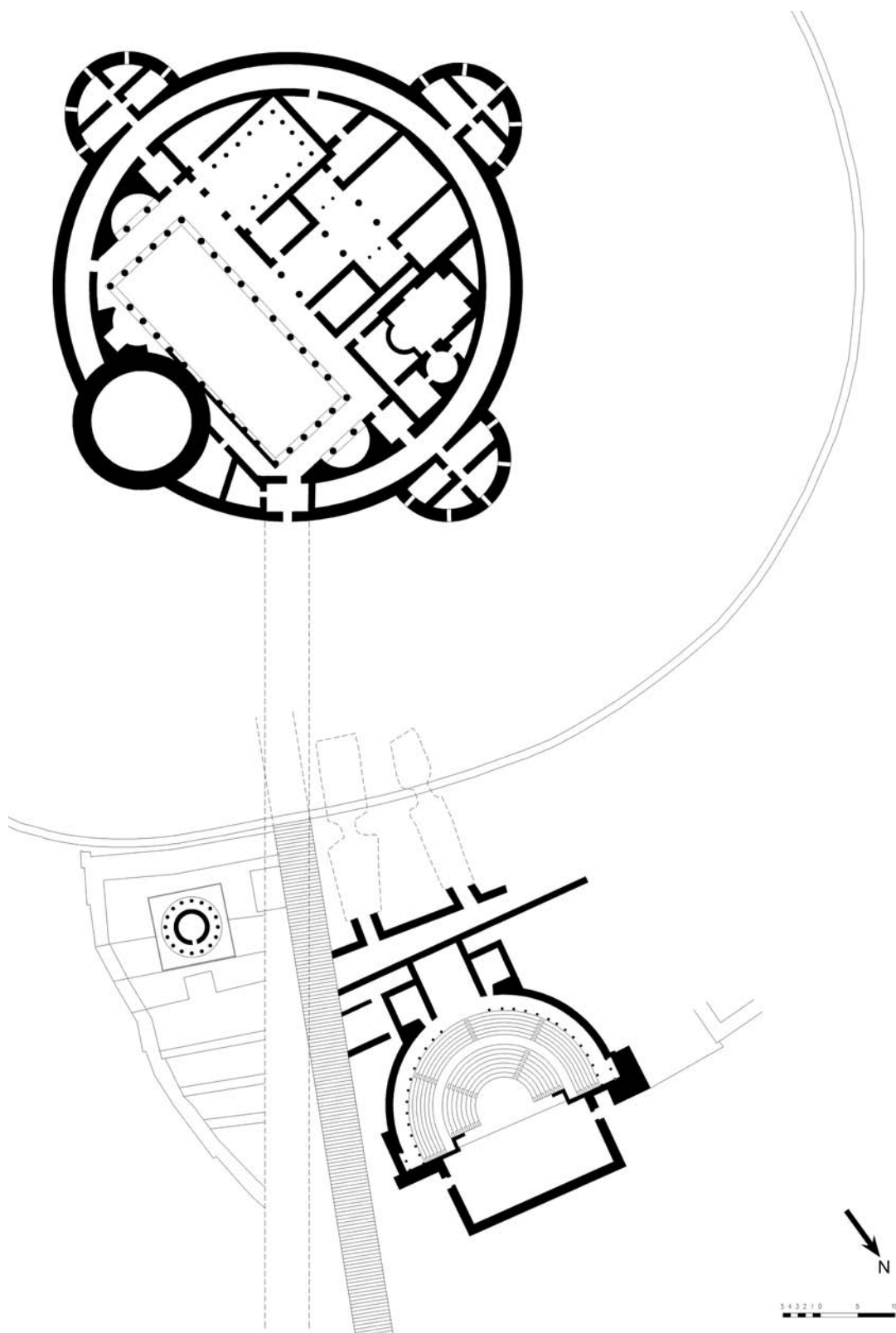


Fig. 5. General plan of mountain palace fortress with, to its north, Herod's mausoleum and theatre.



Fig. 6. Architectural elements as exposed during excavation; note the podium's upper profile *in situ* at the right.

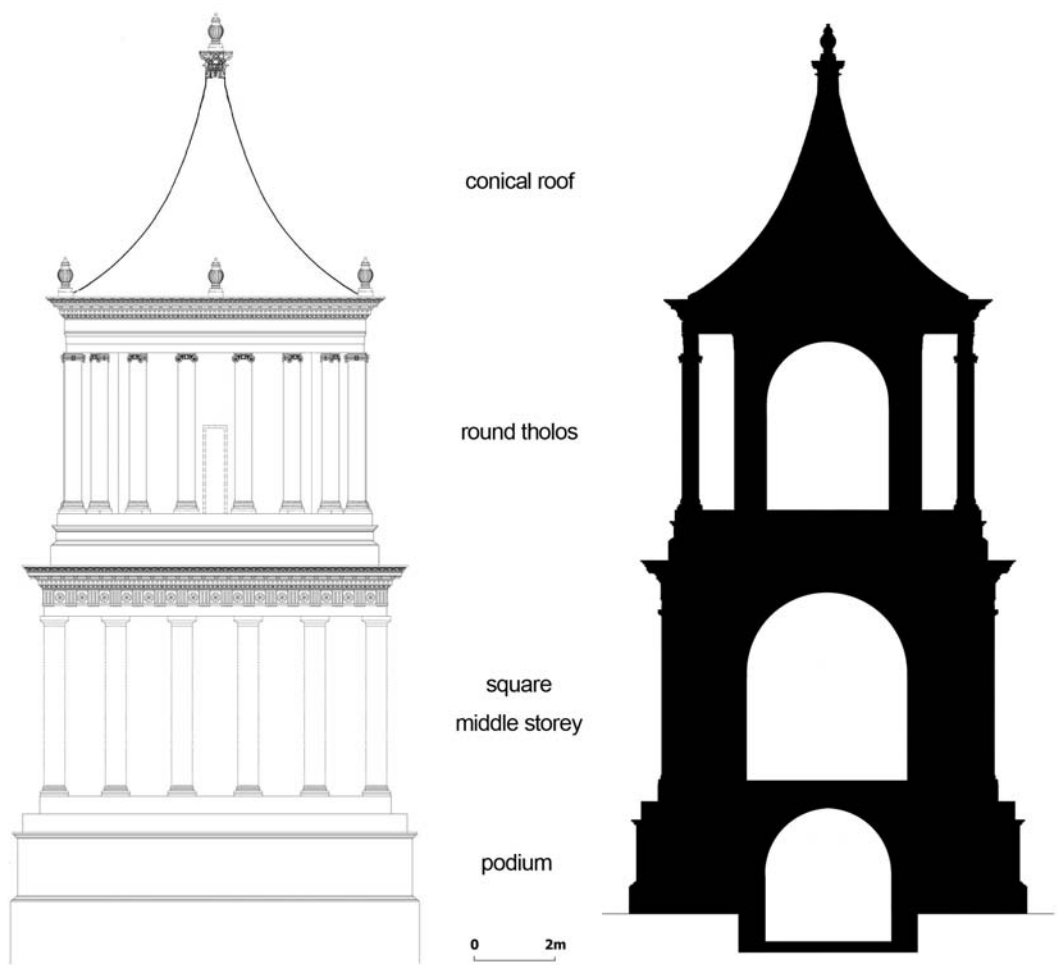


Fig. 7. Elevation (left) and section (right) of Herod's mausoleum (R. Chachy-Laureys).



Fig. 8. Upper profile of the mausoleum's podium; note the carving technique to make adjacent stones fit closely.

by a portico consisting of 18 monolithic columns with Ionic capitals and Attic bases standing on a low podium. The columns bore an entablature consisting of a two-fascia architrave, a blocked-out soffit frieze made of large wedge-shaped stones which formed the ceiling of the portico, and a highly-decorated console cornice with rosettes (figs. 9-11). The outer wall of the domed inner room was decorated with a pilaster opposite each column of the portico and a continuous two-fascia architrave. We may assume that this room held at least Herod's sarcophagus, if not two others (see below).

The *tholos* was crowned with a concave, conical-shaped roof that was adorned with 5 urns (fig. 12), of which four apparently stood at its base while the fifth, supported by a large Corinthian capital, crowned its top. This would have resembled the top of the Khazneh and ed-Deir monuments at Petra.

Since no evidence has been found for a stairway leading to the monument, one should assume that temporary wooden bridges and/or stairs were erected before each burial took place.

The sloping area around the mausoleum was reshaped into a terraced formal garden irrigated by a pool (5.8 x 3 m) to the west of the monument. A layer of dark brown soil, probably brought in especially for this garden, was exposed here on some of the terraces.

Mausolea more or less similar to Herod's are known from all over the Hellenistic-Roman world. The closest geographically and one very similar in shape is Yad-Abshalom

is close to perfect (fig. 8), and the whole excels in its architectural decorations.

The podium featured the characteristic profiles, and contained in its centre the lowest of the three rooms, a vaulted space c.3 m square with a presumed height of c.3.5 m. It was entered from the east via a narrow opening, which was blocked at a later stage.⁷ On top of the podium stood the middle storey 8.5 m square with a presumed height of 6 m. It contained a square vaulted room presumed to measure c.4.5 m square. Its outer walls probably featured pilasters, at least at the corners, and a Doric frieze with rosettes between the triglyphs, topped by a decorated cornice.

Above this stood a *tholos*, a circular structure measuring 7.4 m in diameter (in its outer dimension) and with a presumed height of 7.2 m. It contained a domed inner room with a presumed diameter of 3.5 m² (the room's inner dimension), surrounded

⁷ Evidence shows that the room was also accessible from the storey above, apparently via a passage in its thick S wall.



Fig. 9 [above]. Element from the upper part of the curved cornice of the *tholos*; note mason's mark (G. Laron).



Fig. 10 [left]. Elements of the upper part of the curved cornice of the *tholos*, as found during excavation.



Fig. 11 [bottom left]. Element of the lower part of the curved cornice of the *tholos* (G. Laron).

Fig. 12 [below]. One of the 5 urns of the monument during restoration.



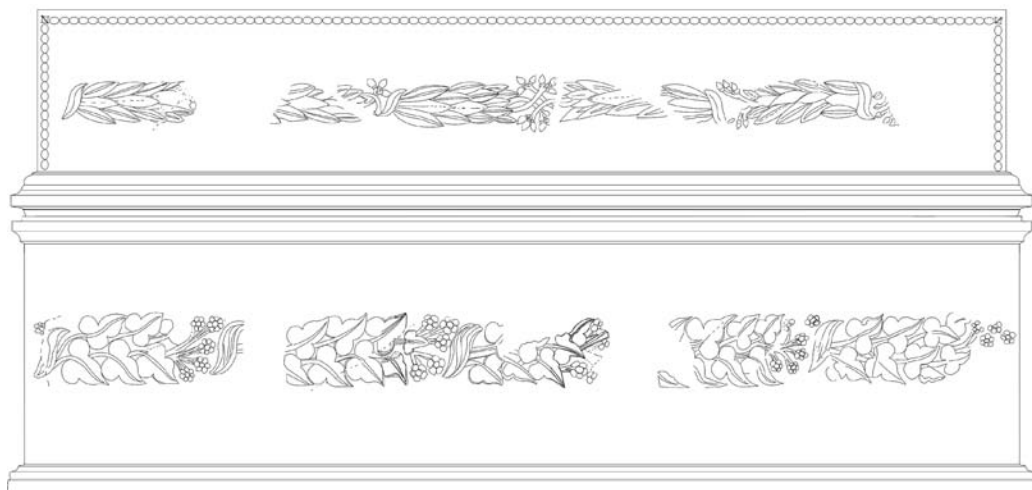


Fig. 13. White decorated sarcophagus after restoration.



Fig. 14. Conservator O. Cohen at work on the cover of the white decorated sarcophagus (G. Laron).



Fig. 15. Laurel berries and leaves on the cover of the white decorated sarcophagus (G. Laron).



Fig. 16. Ivy flowers and leaves on the body of the white decorated sarcophagus.

in the Kidron valley just east of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, but Herod's was larger and more elaborate, as befitted the king's status and taste. Its precise dating will be discussed in more detail below.

Herod was not the only one to be buried in the mausoleum, although he was probably the first, since a large mausoleum (the *opus reticulatum* building) was erected for his family members in a prominent spot just outside the walls of Jerusalem in c.14 B.C.⁸ In addition to the many fragments of the reddish sarcophagus (the first to be exposed), we found large fragments of two more sarcophagi made of white limestone (not of *meleke*). Since no inscription has been found, the questions are: Which of the three sarcophagi was intended for Herod, and who were the buried in the other two? The differences between the three, and in particular the condition in which they were found, may help in resolving the questions. Whereas most of the fragments of the two white sarcophagi were found in one group at the base of the NE corner of the monument, as if the entire coffins had been pushed off the building while it was still standing to crash onto the floor below, the hundreds of relatively small fragments of the reddish one were found scattered throughout the fill covering the destroyed monument, which suggests that it had been intentionally smashed. The rebels of the First Revolt are the prime suspects in the destruction of the monument as a whole and of Herod's sarcophagus itself. Further, this sarcophagus, adorned with rosettes, was carved and polished in a meticulous fashion (colour fig. A). It has a modest yet very elegant appearance (although one cannot deny that the large white sarcophagus, decorated with floral patterns, also shows great elegance) (figs. 13-16). This, together with the condition in which it was found, leads us to attribute the reddish sarcophagus to Herod (colour fig. B). The other two sarcophagi doubtless held members of Herod's family, and their burial should have taken place during the 10 years in which Archelaus ruled over Judea, Idumea and Samaria, prior to his exile forced by the Romans in A.D. 6. A good candidate (perhaps for the decorated white coffin) is Malthace, Herod's sixth wife and mother of Archelaus: she died just a few months after her husband, in Rome, where she had gone with her two sons, Archelaus and Antipas, to settle the succession debacle before the emperor. A second candidate (perhaps for the undecorated coffin) is Glaphyra, the second wife of Archelaus: she died shortly after her arrival in Judea from Mauretania in c.A.D. 6. As the most beloved wife of the ruler, she might have been laid to rest at Herodium. In addition, there is some indirect osteological evidence that a few more individuals might have been buried here, but not in stone coffins. The mausoleum will then have stood intact for some 70 years until its destruction by the Jewish rebels at the time of the First Revolt. It will have been visible from the top of the hills surrounding Jerusalem.

The theatre and royal box

In 2008, while extending the excavation to the west of the mausoleum and the monumental stairway (fig. 17), we encountered a group of rooms adjacent to the early stairway, just below the entrances to the central and western cisterns (see above). The lower parts of these rooms were partly cut into the bedrock, while the upper parts were built of local ash-lars. The entire walls were coated with white lime plaster. A few architectural fragments (e.g., column drums) and painted wall-plaster within the débris pointed to the proximity

8 E. Netzer and S. Ben-Arieh, "Remains of an *opus reticulatum* building in Jerusalem," *IEJ* 33 (1983) 163-75.



Fig. 17. Aerial view of the area of Herod's mausoleum (left) and theatre (right); note the monumental stairway and, partly beneath it, the early stair, separating mausoleum from theatre (Pasqual, Doron and Dudi).



Fig. 18. Cavea of Herod's theatre (view from east); note *parodos* on the north, with ceiling preserved *in situ* (G. Laron).

of an elaborate structure, and continuation of the work brought to light a small, royal theatre with a magnificent royal box.

The theatre comprises a semicircular *cavea* and orchestra, a rectangular stage structure, and narrow *parodoi* (*aditus maximi* or entrance corridors) between the stage and the *cavea* (fig. 18). The *cavea* (diameter 30 m), partly cut into the bedrock, faces north, towards Jerusalem. It contained 12 tiers of seats which were probably made of stone but had been mostly removed before the theatre was intentionally covered by a fill. The seats were arranged in two horizontal blocks (*maenianae*), at least the upper one of which was divided by three flights of steps. The lowest section (*ima cavea*) had 6 rows. It was separated from the *summa cavea*, which also had 6 rows, by a 1.3-m-wide *praecinctio* or passage. Two more flights of steps might have been located at the N ends of the *cavea*, above the *parodoi*. The total number of seats can be estimated to have been about 400, the benches or stepped rows of the *summa cavea* being used alternately for feet and seats (as can be deduced from the narrowness of the rows). The broad (2.4 m) passage above the *summa cavea* might have had a colonnade (*porticus in summa cavea*), except for the area directly in front of the royal box. Unusually, several rooms connected to this passage at this level.

The rather narrow (1.15 m wide) *parodoi* at either side of, and at the same level as, the orchestra were built of neatly-cut ashlars, and their ceilings were made of large stone slabs, of which 6 were preserved *in situ*. One of these entrances had been blocked sometime during the lifetime of the theatre (or perhaps even right from the start), when reinforcing had to be done adjacent to the NW corner of the *cavea*. It was replaced by a doorway breached in its northern wall, immediately west of the stage structure.

Most of the stage structure (23 x 11 m) was destroyed below its floor level. It seems that its rear wall (the *scaenae frons*) featured the main decoration, which consisted of columns on pedestals in two storeys, the upper one perhaps forming a visual continuation of the presumed *porticus in summa cavea*. The ground floor probably included curved or rectangular niches in different sizes. Two wide doorways provided access from the east and west. The richness of the stage is indicated by many architectural elements (column drums of various widths, Attic bases, Doric and Corinthian capitals and pedestals, some *in situ*; fig. 19), some of which are still covered with painted plaster and even gold (fig. 20 and colour figs. C1-C2).



Fig. 19. Corinthian capital apparently from the *scaenae frons* (G. Laron).



Fig. 20. Upper part of Corinthian capital apparently from the *scaenae frons*; note gold paint on the scroll and volute (see colour fig. C1).



Fig. 21. A pilaster of the theatre's royal box (G. Laron).

Of special interest to students of Roman theatres is the group of rooms attached to the upper part of the *cavea*, an arrangement which is rare elsewhere. Some of these rooms were undecorated, while others had a modest stucco decoration. One of the rooms, the one directly west of the central room, accessed by a doorway from it, did not have a doorway connecting to the *cavea*, but it did have a window which might have allowed women, for example, to watch the events on the stage while keeping themselves suitably secluded and out of sight.

The central, the largest (8 x 7 m, c.6 m high) and most impressive room, which we term the royal box, was fully open to the north towards the *cavea* and the stage. The W, S and E walls of this room were splendidly adorned with wall-paintings and stucco decorations of the highest quality (colour fig. D). Most of these paintings are not in the common *fresco* technique but in *secco* (painting on top of a dry surface, rather than a wet one). The walls were divided vertically into three by a series of pilasters set on top of tall pedestals. Whereas the pedestals were marked only by a slight projection from the wall, and were treated in orange *secco*, the pilasters themselves were framed with a stuccoed profile (fig. 21). This profile surrounded a flat area which featured an elegant floral decoration in stucco on a white background framed with light blue and orange strips in *secco* technique (colour figs. E-F). They were topped by a stylized version of Corinthian capitals in stucco. Between these pilasters and pedestals the wall surfaces were divided horizontally again into three. The lowest part (1.85 m high) was painted with a black dado (35 cm high), with structural panels in orange and red-brown above (colour fig. H), a style that is quite common in Herod's building. Above it, the walls (up to c.5 m above the floor) were left white but featured a series of *pinakes* (pictures hung on the walls), each measuring c.70 x 50 cm. Above the pictures are painted strings (shown as held by a nail; colour fig. J). To the sides are painted shutters, folded outwards, held by two painted iron hooks, both emphasizing the place of the pictures on the upper part of the white wall. *Pinakes* with painted shutters are known from the late Second Pompeian Style in Italy. The closest parallels to our examples come from early Third Pompeian Style examples such as those in the Villa Imperiale at Pompeii, datable to between 15 and 10 B.C. In contrast to the typical *pinakes* that usually depict still-life or theatre scenes, our *pinakes* display a series of views of various naturalistic landscapes.⁹ The latter include the countryside with trees, animals (colour fig. L), and even humans (colour fig. G),¹⁰ a Nilotic scene including a crocodile (colour fig. J), and a nautical scene featuring a large boat with sails. Only a few of the original 9 scenes have survived: some are still

⁹ See S. Rozenberg, "Landscape paintings from Herodium", forthcoming.

¹⁰ This is an exceptional instance of human beings and animals being depicted in Herod's palaces, or for that matter in the Hasmonean ones.



Fig. 22. Floral scroll in stucco of the frieze, as preserved *in situ* (G. Laron).

in situ, while others are being restored from the many fallen fragments retrieved from the débris in the room. The walls are topped by an entablature with fine stucco decorations (combined with some painted strips; colour fig. K), which include cymatium mouldings, a frieze featuring a floral scroll (fig. 22), and a console cornice. The quality of the paintings and the stucco, and the close parallels in Italy, point to a Roman or Italian origin of the artists.

The location of the theatre, half way up the hill, and close to Herod's private fortified palace, was a perfect one. There can be no doubt that the royal box played host to Herod and his close friends and family members during theatrical activities held there. Since the style of the wall-paintings offers a very precise chronology, it seems reasonable to suppose that construction of the theatre might be linked with the visit by Marcus Agrippa to Judea and to Herodium in 15 B.C. No doubt this visit was planned a year earlier, during Agrippa's meeting with Herod at Mytilene on Lesbos (Jos., *AntJ* 15.350: 'As he [Agrippa] was wintering in Mytilene, Herod, who was one of his closest friends and companions, went to meet him there and then returned to Judaea'); possibly the construction of this theatre was mentioned during that meeting, as a result of which a team of Roman artists may have been sent to Judea to participate in its decoration. In any event, the construction of the theatre is testimony to the active pulse of life at Herodium since its foundation more than 10 years earlier (see below). On the other hand, the proximity of the theatre to the mausoleum, which seems to have been built slightly later, does not, in our view, in any way tie the theatre to the tomb or the burial ceremonies.

Remarkably, the whole theatre was 'sacrificed' not long before Herod's death, as part of the creation of the conical artificial hill. It was nearly fully dismantled and its remains covered by building débris and fill. Yet life within the theatre structure did not end immediately, since for a period that might have lasted for several months parts of the theatre were occupied, probably by a group of workers who were involved in constructing the hill and the monumental stairway nearby. The royal box itself was subdivided into small rooms by rough narrow walls, and the new rooms were provided with cooking installations and



Fig. 23. Theatre's royal box, walls and baking oven of the later (builders') phase (G. Laron).

baking ovens (fig. 23). The evidence from this brief period includes quite a few inscriptions incised or drawn on the walls, as well as drawings, including one of a boat. One find in this context is an Aramaic inscription incised on a wall in the room directly east of the royal box. According to E. Eshel,¹¹ it may be translated as:

(My) father, who was a Hav[er] ...
on the 22nd of Adar, in the 22nd year, Shlam[yah...],
in Jerusalem.

It was apparently written by one of the builders who lived temporarily in the theatre, as a memorial to his father (who was a 'member' (= Haver) perhaps of the masons' guild); the father probably died on the 22nd of the Hebrew month Adar during the 22nd year of Herod's reign, which is 15 B.C.

The phases of construction and destruction on the NE slope

It is difficult, at this stage of the research, to establish a firm stratigraphic sequence for the structures on the NE slope of the hill. It would appear that the earliest features here are the glacis wall which seems to have encircled the entire hill, and the three large cisterns lying some 10 m lower down. We are still lacking data on the original paths of access to the fortified palace on top of the hill. Was there a single winding footpath, or were there several paths? In either scenario, were stairways integrated into the paths? Certainly one of these hypothetical paths must have led via the cisterns, necessary to provide the summit with water. Also worth mentioning here is the evidence for shallow stone quarries over

11 E. Netzer, Y. Kalman, R. Porath, R. Chachy, L. Di Segni and E. Eshel, "Two inscriptions from Herodium," *Judea and Samaria Research Studies* 18 (2009) 85-103, ills. 9-10 [Hebrew].

much of the exposed area. Some of the stones quarried might have been used to construct the fortified palace on top. Worth noting too is a cave, perhaps intended as a burial cave, that was filled in and blocked during construction of the glacis wall; this cave was revealed by our trench dug below and to the east of the eastern round tower. It might have been connected chronologically to the little-investigated structure that stood on top of the hill prior to the fortified palace. The first evidence for such a structure was found by V. Corbo. We re-opened some of his soundings, including a medium-sized cistern at the SE corner of the courtyard, and exposed some further signs of the existence of a structure that preceded the fortified palace. Possibly the remains belong to a small fortress built by Herod at the beginning of his rule, staking his claim to, and signaling his future interest in, this site.

To a fairly early date belongs the straight stairway, at least 60 m in length and 6.1 m wide, of which a part is preserved leaning against the glacis wall. This early stairway was aimed towards the N edge of the eastern round tower. The stairway was rather steep and not very easy to climb, but apparently it was intended to create an impressive 'royal ascent' to the hilltop. However, the fortified palace on top was no doubt entirely freestanding for a period of some 20 years; its lowest storeys became subterranean only at a late stage in Herod's life.

Slightly later than the early stairway came the creation of a wedge-shaped area to its east, evidently used primarily for services. It was bounded on its NE side by a wall 2.5 m wide and about 50 m in length, on its W side by the early stairway, and on its S side by a narrow corridor or passage along the face of the glacis wall. This corridor ran at right angles to the early stairway and was reached from the east through an arched doorway (the exact dating of which, and the wall to which it belongs, remain unclear). There are several phases of activity within this wedge-shaped area; the latest phase during Herod's day is marked by the construction of Herod's mausoleum within its upper part.

Most of the structures exposed in this area were built with the early stairway, some of them perhaps even before it, including a small but well-equipped ritual bath carved as a cave into the bedrock, with a built room in front and a group of small basins at its entrance (fig. 24). In another phase, a series of parallel terrace walls was constructed; some of them were later integrated into the formal garden that encircled the mausoleum. Also falling within the confines of the wedge-shaped area is the eastern and smallest of the three cisterns, located right below the mausoleum. When the mausoleum was being built, this cistern ceased being used while two thick walls were built into it, to prevent the collapse of its ceiling from the weight of the mausoleum on top; yet both walls incorporated an arched passageway, indicating that the cistern was not expected to go out of use entirely. Possibly the other two cisterns, to the west of the stairway, might have been extended at this point; the extended rear parts of those cisterns have higher floors than the original ones and steps are lacking, so that the manner in which the connection was made between the two parts gives the impression that the rear parts were later additions.

On the W side of the early stairway the stratigraphy is clearer. The two large cisterns and the glacis wall constitute the earliest features. Later came the theatre, built some time after the early stairway. That it came later is shown by the rooms built to the east and above the *cavea*, since they abut the W face of the stairway, while their lower parts are cut into the bedrock (at some points to a depth of c.2.5 m below the base of the stairway). If we are correct in dating the construction of the theatre to not before but equally not long after 15 B.C. (see above), the early stairway must have come before that.

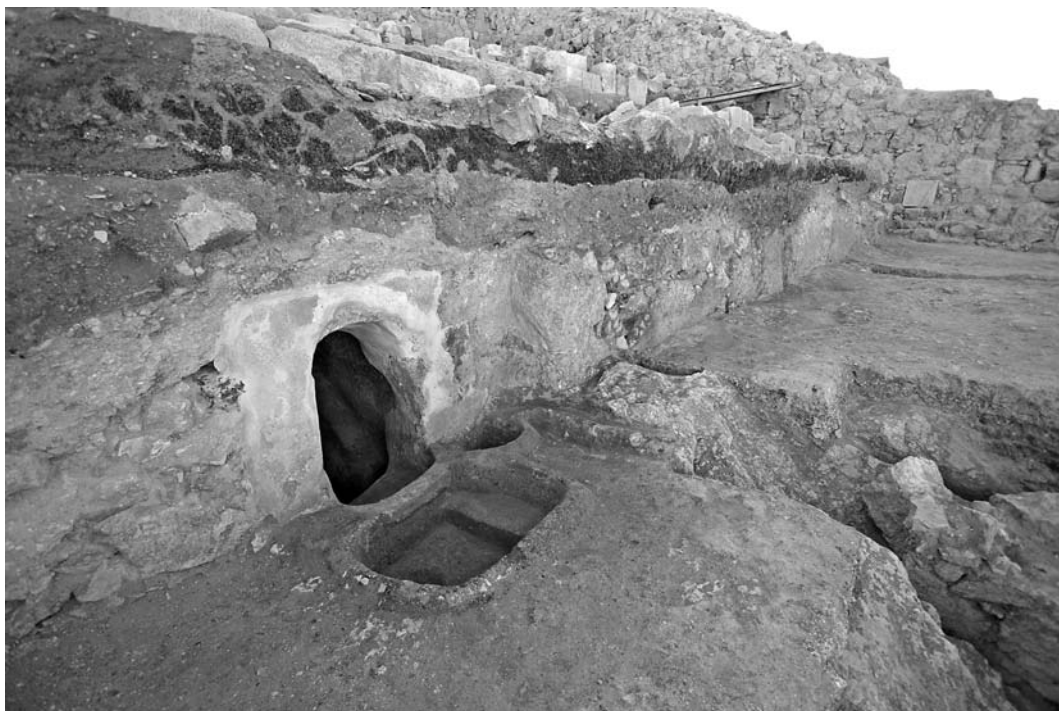


Fig. 24. Entrance into the early ritual bath east of the stairway (view from east); note the layer of brown garden soil above it, originating from one of the terraces around Herod's tomb (G. Laron).

Absolute dating evidence for the construction of the mausoleum is still lacking. We also do not know whether its location was determined or reserved some time before actual construction began. In any event, we have no reason at present to link the construction of the mausoleum to that of the theatre. If one takes into consideration Herod's busy building programme, it seems to us that the most appropriate date is *c.*10 B.C. (see below). Once the construction of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and the inauguration festivities at Caesarea were behind him, Herod could devote his attention fully to his real plan for Herodium, his chosen final resting-place; no less importantly, the best builders and stonemasons were now free. This is when the mausoleum was probably built on the wedge-shaped plot east of the theatre, beyond the early stairway.

In this period, when Herod was growing in age and his mental state was starting to deteriorate, the idea of raising the existing hill in height and constructing a monumental stairway to replace the early one might have taken shape. Builders were housed in and around the theatre, which was dismantled, its stones being re-used to construct the monumental stairway. The stairway was exposed to the elements above ground in its lower section, while its upper section 'disappeared' into the artificial hill by means of the construction of two retaining walls (the side walls of a corridor), built to withstand the pressure of the cone's fill, and a system of arches above them (fig. 25). The construction of the stairway resulted in damage to some of the garden terraces around the mausoleum and they were not repaired, perhaps a sign of hastiness of work still being done during Herod's last days. At the same time that the stairway was being built, most of the glacis wall around the hill was dismantled (except in the sector behind the mausoleum), to use its blocks in the construction of the corridor going into the artificial hill. Once the theatre and adjacent structures were dismantled and the stairway had been built, the artificial hill was



Fig. 25. System of arches and retaining walls of the monumental stairway where it disappeared into the artificial hill (view from northwest).

built up, covering all of the earlier remains in the area under discussion with the exception of the mausoleum. In order to have continued access to the two large cisterns, vaulted corridors were built rather like sleeves going into the artificial hill to the cistern entrances, and a new path must have been created to connect them with the palace on top. In the area of the theatre, the bottom part of the artificial mound was sealed over with an extended surface of large stones.

Shortly before Herod's death his entire burial complex was more or less finished. It included structures built at Lower Herodium — the lavish *triclinium*, the large ritual bath, and the funeral course — overlooked by the highly decorated mausoleum against the backdrop of the artificial conical hill, a monument in itself (fig. 26). All was now ready to receive the funeral parade, which marched, according to Josephus, all the way from Jericho, the oasis where Herod had passed away. The structures at Lower Herodium, and especially the funeral course, suggest a grandiose ceremony held below. Then those bearing the body, the family and Herod's bodyguards will have continued their way up the hill via the monumental stairway to the mausoleum itself. Part or all of the army might have followed in a procession that could have lasted many hours.

After Herod's death, the fortified palace was kept in use. During the First Revolt, the rebels who settled in the palace were also active in the area of the mausoleum, which they deliberately destroyed, leaving behind coins struck during the Revolt, arrowheads and

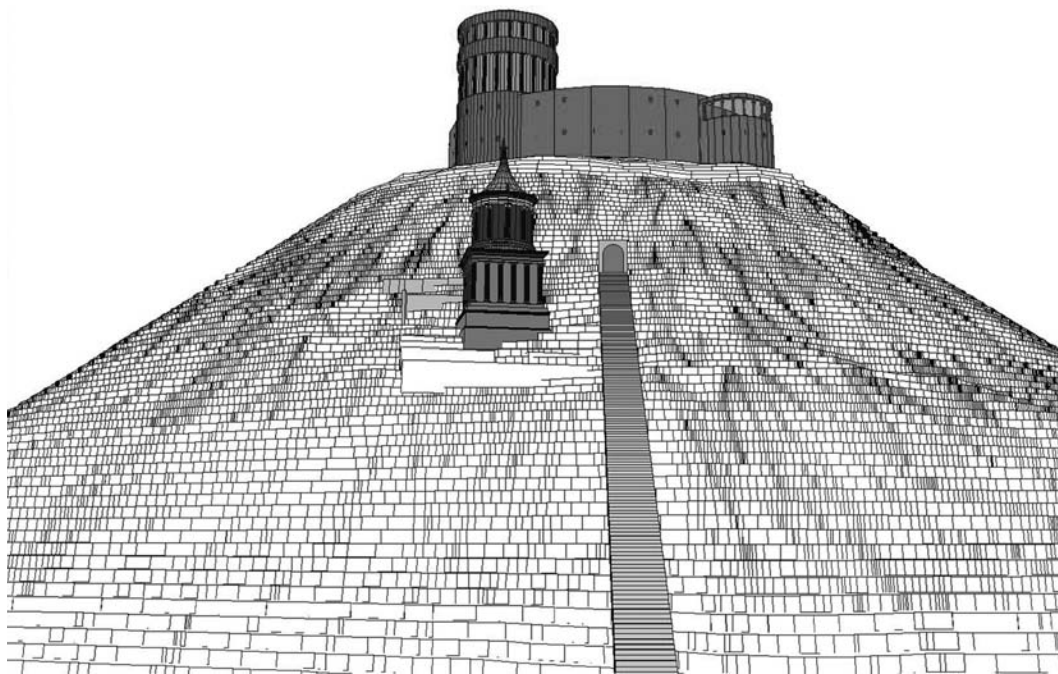


Fig. 26. Perspective view of the mausoleum against the backdrop of the artificial conical hill and the mountain palace fortress (M. J. Edelcopp).

slingshots, and huge garbage dumps to the west of the ruins of the mausoleum. During the Second Jewish Revolt, the rebels were active building a system of tunnels beneath the fortified palace. Some of them penetrated the artificial mound and some went deeper into the bedrock. These tunnels led from the fortified palace to camouflaged exits on the hill slopes below. The tunnels surfaced at different levels: one of those exits surfaced directly above the ruined mausoleum, another in the cistern below it, while a third was dug into the bedrock beneath the E side of the podium of the mausoleum. There are still more tunnels that await full exposure.

A revised dating of Herodium in the context of Herod's building programme

The several phases detected on the NE slope of the hill, as well as the various phases at Lower Herodium in the area of the 'tomb estate', point to a longer period of construction during Herod's lifetime than we had previously assumed. Based on the work of various historians, we had assumed that Herodium was founded in 23 B.C. after Herod's wedding with Mariamme II. Now we prefer to accept the theory of N. Kokkinos that this wedding took place in c.28 B.C.¹² and that the building of Herodium began some 5 years earlier than we had assumed. Herod's marriage to three women (Mariamme II, Malthace, Cleopatra) in a relatively short period of time (28-27 B.C.) might reflect a more stable psychological state of mind following the tragedy that ended with the death of Mariamme I than that referred to by Josephus. In this case Herodium was being built simultaneously with several other projects (the main palace at Jerusalem, the second palace at Jericho, the northern palace at Masada) whose common element was their rôle as palaces, whereas in the years 37-28

¹² N. Kokkinos, *The Herodian dynasty: origins, role in society and eclipse* (Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha, Suppl. Ser. 30, Sheffield 1998) 206-40.

B.C. his main efforts had been invested in constructing fortresses (first Antonia in Jerusalem, then the desert fortresses of Alexandrium, Doq, Cypros, Machaerus, and Masada) and then the central, fortified city of Samaria-Sebaste (c.27-24 B.C.).

We assume that the first burst of activity at Greater Herodium (the palatial fortress, Lower Herodium) occurred before Herod launched his two largest projects, the Temple Mount and Caesarea, which chiefly occupied him during the years from 22 to 10 B.C. Although the focus during the construction of Lower Herodium seems to have been the creation of a 'country club' of sorts, the erection of a small but symbolic burial place here was important too, for Herodium was already envisioned as his own final resting-place. The U-shaped remains of a structure (25 x 9 m) with adjacent ritual bath may be interpreted as an entrance structure in the shape of a portico to a future burial site.

The second and more significant phase in the construction of the 'tomb estate', which erased the porticoed building and adjacent ritual bath, apparently took place around the years 22-20 B.C. By now the site must have been receiving many guests and Herod was ready to build a much more prominent 'tomb estate', which included the funeral course (350 x 30 m), the 'monumental building' at the W edge of the latter (a lavish *triclinium* which might have had a pyramidal roof that could be seen from as far away as Jerusalem), a huge ritual bath, and a large building similar in size to the previous portico entrance that again seems to have been intended to serve as an entrance to a tomb not yet built. In any event, the tomb estate did not focus solely on the burial place *per se* but rather on the ceremonies of the funeral. Now other parts of Lower Herodium also seem to have been re-organized, such as the garden around the pool complex which was enlarged to the east, to flank the modified tomb estate.

The theatre, apparently not part of Herodium's original master-plan, was built at the earliest in 15 B.C. during the period when Herod was still chiefly focused on the Temple Mount and Caesarea. Its erection points to the pleasant and cultured lifestyle that had meanwhile developed at Herodium. It shows that the plan, masterminded by Herod himself, to establish an extended palace in the 'middle of nowhere' as a backdrop for his own burial place had already succeeded. Perhaps the idea to construct a mausoleum, instead of arranging for burial in a cave, came into the king's mind during the long years dedicated to the Temple Mount and Caesarea. In any event, the realisation of this revised plan took over once the inauguration ceremonies at Caesarea had been held in 10 B.C. (Unfinished work on the E side of his multi-purpose stadium/hippodrome and promontory palace at Caesarea may indicate a shortage of time to complete the works before the inauguration festivities took place.) Now the main focus of his building projects would be Herodium, and the best masons could be shifted there. If the above scenario is correct, some 5 or 6 years remained between construction of his mausoleum and his death. The king's relationship within his extended family was worsening, and his psychological condition deteriorated, creating the possible context for his decision to build the artificial conical hill and monumental stairway. In theory, both might have been built slightly later by his son and heir in Judea, Archelaus. But in view of the plausible relationship between the monumental stairway and the funeral ceremonies, it seems better to suppose that the work was Herod's own. Why the theatre was destroyed — to allow the mausoleum to dominate the view, or simply for Herod's own egotistical reasons? — we will probably never know, but Herodium has not yet finished giving up its secrets.

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