

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Legacies of Herod the Great

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Herodium from below. Photograph courtesy of Ian Scott, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Herodium.jpg.

In January 2012, Kathryn Gleason and I organized a colloquium, “The Archaeological Significance of Herod the Great,” for the Archaeological Institute of America’s annual meeting at Philadelphia. We designed it as a memorial for our colleague Ehud Netzer, the world’s authority on Herod’s architectural program (fig. 1).¹ Ehud excavated at just about every site Herod built on, including Masada, Jericho, Cypros, Baniyas, Caesarea, Jerusalem, and Herodium, where his over-50-year career reached its peak with the discovery of what he identified as Herod’s tomb complex. It was also there that he met his tragic death, in the midst of planning the landmark exhibition at the Israel Museum, “Herod the Great: The King’s Final Journey.”²

¹ Burrell 2011a.

² The catalogue of the exhibition is Rozenberg and Mevorakh 2013.

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This issue of *Near Eastern Archaeology* collects some of the papers from that colloquium, exploring a topic that still needs consideration. Archaeology is usually a matter of the *longue durée*, and we find few individuals powerful enough to affect material remains so thoroughly that things made after their lives look different than they did before. Herod the Great, however, was undoubtedly one of these few. As king of Judaea from ca. 40 to 4 B.C.E., he had to reconquer his own kingdom, rule hostile as well as friendly populaces, and balance alliance with the Romans against defending and extending the borders of his domain (fig. 2). To accomplish all this, he built prodigiously, founding fortresses, palaces, and entire cities, and endowing architectural and cultural projects even outside his realm. When you compare the pre-Herodian landscape with that of Herod's time, there is sudden, enormous growth in both urbanism and public architecture, and the King was central to both.

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There has been a great deal of debate on whether Herod's projects were influenced most by Rome, the Hellenistic East, or Jewish traditions.³ But there has been little attention to his influence on the people and projects that followed. This issue of *Near Eastern Archaeology* will examine that theme, from large-scale architectural remains (Gleason and Weiss on monumental buildings), to interior decor (Rozenberg on painting), to portable finds (Berlin on tableware and luxury style, Kahn on glass). Considerations of Herod's influence on coinage (Donald Ariel), architectural decoration (Orit Peleg-Barkat), and wall decor (Richard Teverson) will appear in other venues.

My purpose here is to give an overview of the questions and problems that still confront archaeologists exploring the time of Herod and its aftermath. As you will read, Herod introduced new trends in almost every sphere that archaeology can document. Sometimes, and in some places, those trends were followed, but sometimes they were ignored or refused; it is as important to track one as the other, and to try and understand why Herod was such a force to be imitated or resisted.

Literature after Herod

Herod was not blind to the literary legacy he would leave. He not only wrote his own memoirs (unfortunately lost), but kept at his court the philosopher Nicolaus of Damascus, whose historical works gave an understandably favorable view of the King's actions. They survive only in fragments, but they strongly influenced Flavius Josephus (ca. 37–100 C.E.) in producing his *Jewish War* and later the *Antiquities of the Jews* (fig. 3).

Josephus' writings are so detailed on the subject of Herod and his works that they have almost been used as guidebooks to his projects. Yet it is dangerous to take Josephus too

³ Recently, e.g., Regev 2010.

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literally. He was not writing a disinterested summary of Herod's reign, but showing his view of it as a watershed into the First Jewish Revolt (see below). Many of his numerical estimates are in error, and certain allegations, as when he said that Herod used imported white marble in his building projects, have been proved wrong.⁴ Also, the commonly-used translations of Josephus' Greek texts were generally made by philologists rather than archaeologists, and can be anachronistic in describing actual buildings.⁵

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Josephus was writing dramatic history, and varied his characters according to literary tropes, as shown by comparing his (at first) rather heroic Herod in the *Jewish War* with the brooding, almost demonic king of the *Antiquities*, who oppresses the Jews at home even while he defends them abroad.⁶ Yet many blur the differences by combining Josephus' accounts as if they were uninflected facts.

Too partial a reading of Josephus can also lead to anachronistic psycho-history, given away by the use of modern terms like "paranoia" or "megalomania." Josephus called Herod's chief characteristic *megalopsychia*, "greatness of spirit/generosity," though at the same time he censured the King for the *philoneikia*, "love of competition," and *philotimia*, "love of glory," that accompanied this merit.⁷ Josephus contrasted Herod's rather Hellenic traits with the one that the Jews consider most desirable, that is, *to dikaion*, "righteousness." And it was Josephus, not Herod, who had the last word.

History after Herod

Undoubtedly Herod's reign was full of conspiracies and suspicion. Herod could not trust even the closest members of his family, and executed not just his wife Mariamme but three of his sons. It may be this that led to Herod's portrayal in the Gospel of Matthew as slaughterer of the innocents.⁸ Yet such tragedies were common among contemporary monarchs; the Hellenistic Ptolemies, Seleucids, and the Hasmoneans of Judaea all had their fatal familial conflicts. Among the Parthians, king Orodes II (58/7–38 B.C.E.) first conspired with his brother Mithridates to murder their father Phraates III, then fought him for supremacy and eventually executed him. Like Herod, king Phraates IV (38–3/2

⁴ Richardson 2004: 255–69; Foerster 1996: 61–62; Fischer and Stein 1994. Numbers are exaggerated even in an event that Josephus personally experienced: Aviam in Berlin and Overman 2002: 131–33. I stand aside from the debate on whether Josephus' accounts of mass suicide are factual or not.

⁵ For example, where the popular Loeb edition, Thackeray et al. 1926–65, 3.253, describes Herod's palace in Jerusalem (JW 5.180): "all around were many circular cloisters," it is properly "many porticoed courtyards led around from one to another," Burrell 2011b.

⁶ Rajak 2007.

⁷ *Ant.* 16.136–41, 152–59.

⁸ Matthew 2:1–23. For Herod's wives and children, see Kokkinos 1998, esp. 245.

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B.C.E.) willingly sent both his sons and grandsons as hostages to Rome in order to get them away from possible conspiracies against him.⁹

Herod's elimination of his stronger heirs, the incompetence of his eventual successor Archelaus, the compromised character of a "Herodized" elite in Jerusalem, and a corresponding rise in Jewish resistance via stricter religious observance and zealotism, evident even under Herod's own rule, led to increased unrest once the King died, and especially after Judaea was made directly subject to Rome. One pretender to power looted and burned the palace at Jericho, along with many other royal estates.¹⁰ The varied populations that Herod had held in check came to clash under Roman governors who ranged from dutiful yet dense to local sensitivities, to actively corrupt or hostile. All these were among the factors that led to and exacerbated the First Jewish Revolt.¹¹

Archaeology after Herod

In that war, the rebels took Herod's fortresses as strongholds; the strength of their resistance at Masada might be called a legacy of Herod, as he was the one who had built that extraordinary fortification and endowed it with the means of withstanding siege (fig. 4), while their hatred of him and his alliance with Rome probably led to their despoiling and destruction of his tomb structure and its burials, once they had occupied his fortress at Herodium.¹² They could not, however, erase the immense amount of fill that made the hill of Herodium itself into a cone that echoed the cone atop the tomb (fig. 5).

On the other side, Roman governors inherited and inhabited Herod's palaces, especially those in Jerusalem and Caesarea, the chief city and the main port of Judaea. Sebaste and Caesarea, cities that Herod had founded with primarily non-Jewish

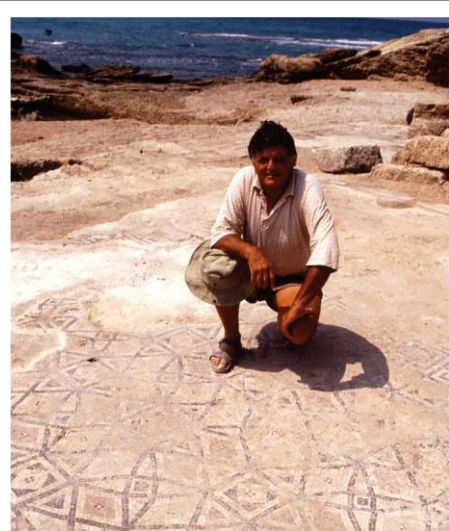


Figure 1. Ehud Netzer at the Promontory Palace at Caesarea, 1992. Photograph courtesy of the Promontory Palace Excavations at Caesarea Maritima.

citizenry and had centered on the cult of Augustus, supplied the bulk of local troops on the Roman side, according to Josephus (*Ant.* 20.176). That is why the rebellious Jews

⁹ Wiesehöfer 1998: 289, 298–300, 313; Sullivan 1990: 304–06, 313–18.

¹⁰ Josephus, *JW* 2.57, *Ant.* 17.273–74.

¹¹ There were, of course, a multiplicity of other events and causes, and considerable regional and group diversity: see the articles in Berlin and Overman 2002.

¹² Netzer et al. 2010: 87, 93, 105–06.

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sacked Sebaste, while Caesarea became the headquarters for the invading Romans, where the general, later emperor, Vespasian quartered the fifth and tenth legions. It is in this context that we have found changes made in the Promontory Palace at Caesarea, such as the addition of a small Roman bath complex (using stamped bricks of the tenth legion Fretensis) to the private reception suite, and it is likely that Vespasian used, or even lived in, the building.¹³

Another result of the Revolt had repercussions that went far beyond Herod's legacy: the destruction of Herod's magnificent Temple in Jerusalem. As well as erasing all but the platform of one of Herod's most famous and imposing projects, it changed the nature of Jewish practice, and the face of the city of Jerusalem, up to our own day (fig. 6).¹⁴



Figure 2. Map of Herod's realm, with cities and areas mentioned in this article. Illustration by J. Wallrodt.

¹³ Burrell 1999: 231, 243–44.

¹⁴ Saldarini in Berlin and Overman 2002: 222–23; Silberman in Berlin and Overman 2002: 237–52.

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Archaeologists after Herod

An Islamic authority, the Waqf, now controls the top of the Temple Mount; the Dome of the Rock stands where Herod's Temple stood, and the al-Aqsa mosque over the Royal Stoa which was Herod's special contribution to the complex. Construction works on the Mount and archaeological excavations and explorations around, under, and outside it are hot-button issues to this moment. Scholars who might expect to study Herod's projects in systematic excavations or quiet libraries are being swept up in religious and political, as well as archaeological, debates. Personnel of the Palestinian Authority have questioned whether objects from the West Bank, including the Herodium tomb, should have been allowed in the Israel Museum show, and experts are even quarreling over whether the tomb building was Herod's at all.

So what are archaeologists to do? The first part of our job, of course, is to speak for what cannot speak for itself, the archaeological heritage, wherever it is in danger. This could mean making diplomatic efforts to persuade the relevant authorities to modify or stop construction projects that might obliterate precious evidence for Herodian (or other ancient) buildings, as on the Temple Mount. This sounds politically naive, and it is rare that academics can affect such polarized situations, but letters of concern from international archaeological associations and/or eminent scholars worldwide might work better than angry outbursts in the newspapers or tit-for-tat responses.

The second action is one that is enforced upon us anyway: to publish our finds, and to make sure that they reflect the truth of the archaeological picture first, with our own interpretations afterwards. This is one that I and my colleagues are trying to practice now, in assembling the materials for the Promontory Palace publications. We name it the Promontory Palace, rather than the Palace of Herod, at Caesarea, because the latter is not a fact but a hypothesis, part of our interpretation of many archaeological finds that indicate that it is a palace, that it dates to Herod's time, and that it stands on a site that only he could have commanded, in the city he founded (see Gleason 2014: 88f., figs. 26–29).

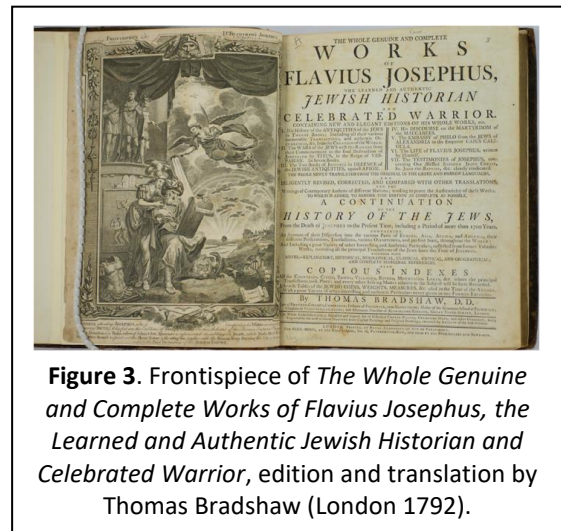


Figure 3. Frontispiece of *The Whole Genuine and Complete Works of Flavius Josephus, the Learned and Authentic Jewish Historian and Celebrated Warrior*, edition and translation by Thomas Bradshaw (London 1792).

It is perhaps this nomenclatural problem that has led to the dispute over the tomb at Herodium (see Weiss 2014: 104, fig. 6). It was acclaimed in the press as Herod's tomb

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before the excavations were complete, much less published. Certainly Herod's name was not found on it; but Herod's name has not been found on any of the projects or palaces we attribute to him, from "Herod's First Palace" at Jericho to the "Northern Palace" at Masada to whatever we can reconstruct of the Herodian Temple Mount; such building inscriptions were not the tradition in this time and place. It is only by archaeological evidence, ranging from particular architectural styles, to amphora sherds painted with Herod's name, to the historical evidence of Josephus and his sources, that we can make our case that any of these things were made by Herod.



Figure 4. Aerial view of Masada from the north; the Northern Palace at cliff edge, foreground, 2013. Photograph by A. Shiva.

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It was Ehud Netzer who put together the archaeological data from so many sites in order to write the great work on Herod's projects.¹⁵ But that is a book of synthesis and hypothesis, based on his own immense knowledge, experience, and authority, and no one should take it as anything else. Certainly some of his points can be challenged, but the challenge must be argued as an independent hypothesis. For example, if the tomb building at Herodium is not Herod's, whose is it? One cannot simply negate a hypothesis without proposing an alternative that fits the facts better. Only further excavation will clarify the relationship among the tomb building, fortress, staircases, and earthworks that made the hill of Herodium into Herod's monument; that must be left for Netzer's successors, Roi Porat and Ya'akov Kalman, to do and publish.



Figure 5. Ehud Netzer showing the depth and extent of the artificial fills on the hill of Herodium, 2008. Photograph by K. Gleason

¹⁵ Netzer 2006; also see his chapters in Rozenberg and Mevorakh 2013.

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Herod's Influence Beyond his Realm

What you will read here abundantly illustrates the unique status of Herod in the archaeology of his realm, and his substantial influence even after his death. But did he have an effect outside that realm? According to Josephus, he gave or funded a huge number of foreign buildings and projects, including things like gymnasia, stoas, temples and theaters for many cities in the province of Syria; one was Antioch's famous colonnaded street (an early example of the type, though no longer considered the first).¹⁶ Herod rebuilt the Pythian sanctuary at Rhodes and gave "most of the public buildings" for Augustus' foundation Nikopolis, though his other dedications in Greek cities, including Athens and Pergamum, are only vaguely described.¹⁷ Unfortunately no trace of Herod's hand has yet been discovered in any of these places, though he was honored in an inscription in Athens as "Friend of the Romans."¹⁸



Figure 6. Aerial view of the Temple Mount, Jerusalem, from the south, 2013; al-Aqsa mosque in foreground of platform, the Dome of the Rock in center. Photograph by A. Shiva.

Where preserved, Herod's buildings are a rare archaeological resource: reliably identified and rather firmly dated remains of palaces, fortresses, and cities from the late Hellenistic and early Augustan world. In fact, archaeological exploration of his domain can offer a wealth of evidence for all strata of society, from the palace to the farmhouse. By contrast many Italian sites were excavated long ago and dated only by style and inference;

¹⁶ Butcher 2003: 247.

¹⁷ Josephus, *JW* 1.422–28; *Ant.* 16.146–49. See Richardson 2004, 264–65.

¹⁸ *IG II²* 3440 = *OGIS* 414.

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archaeologists are only now looking for more solid criteria, which sometimes contradicts long-held assumptions. What is usually termed “Augustus’ house on the Palatine” in Rome, and considered a source for Herod to copy, is now seen by some as a late Republican domicile that Augustus demolished.¹⁹

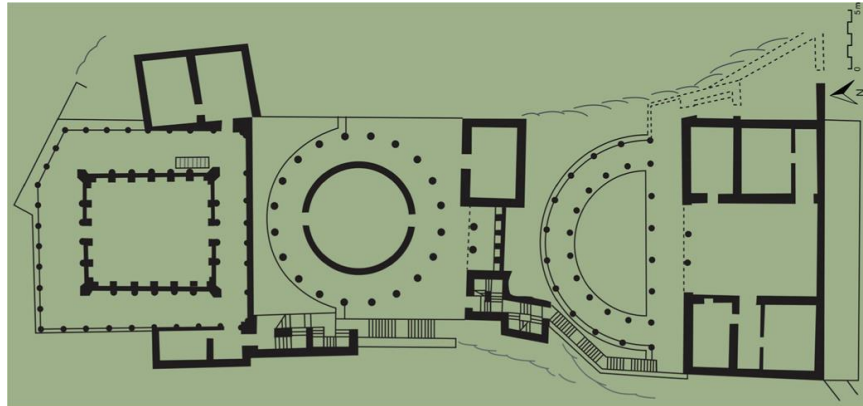


Figure 7. Plan of the Northern Palace, Masada. Illustration by J. Wallrodt.

Such new interpretations of chronology might show Herod’s influence on Rome, as well as Rome’s on Herod. For example, take the Northern Palace at Masada, built around 25 b.c.e., according to Netzer’s chronology (figs. 4, 7).²⁰ A prominent feature is its semicircular room on the upper terrace, offering panoramic views not just of the desert far below, but of the roofs of the precipitous palace itself. After 22 B.C.E., a similar curved room formed the end of the residential part of the Promontory Palace at Caesarea, facing out over the sea (see Gleason 2014: 88f., figs. 26–29). The Roman parallel closest to these is the “Villa della Farnesina” in Rome, whose semicircular room overlooked the Tiber river in a positively Herodian manner (fig. 8).²¹ This structure was found in 1878, stripped of its spectacular wall paintings (sent to the Terme museum), and destroyed to build the Tiber’s flood barriers, leaving us little chance of re-examining its constructional details or finds. Scholars now date its paintings to 28 B.C.E.; it has long been attributed to Augustus’ comrade Agrippa, but there is no real evidence tying him to the complex, and no satisfactory explanation of why this fabulous house was deliberately destroyed only a few years after it was built, when its paintings were still fresh.²² A three-year difference between ascribed dates is nothing; the “Villa della Farnesina” should be classed as contemporary with Masada’s Northern Palace, so we can’t tell which was a precedent for

¹⁹ Wiseman 2009.

²⁰ Netzer 2006: 18, 20, 27–32.

²¹ Foerster 1996: 58, 61. The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii had a semicircular belvedere, but this was part of its latest phase, perhaps after the earthquake of 62 C.E.; see Richardson 1988: 171–76.

²² Mols and Moorman 2008: 7–11, 77–80. Some of the scenes (figs. 23, 52) feature painted shutters like those in the “Royal Box” at Herodium; Rozenberg (in Rozenberg and Mevorah, eds. 2013: 187) has noted the similarities, and that the Herodium paintings are in *secco*, the Roman in *fresco*, technique.

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the other. For all we know, both might have been inspired by some pavilion in the lost palace districts of Antioch or Alexandria.

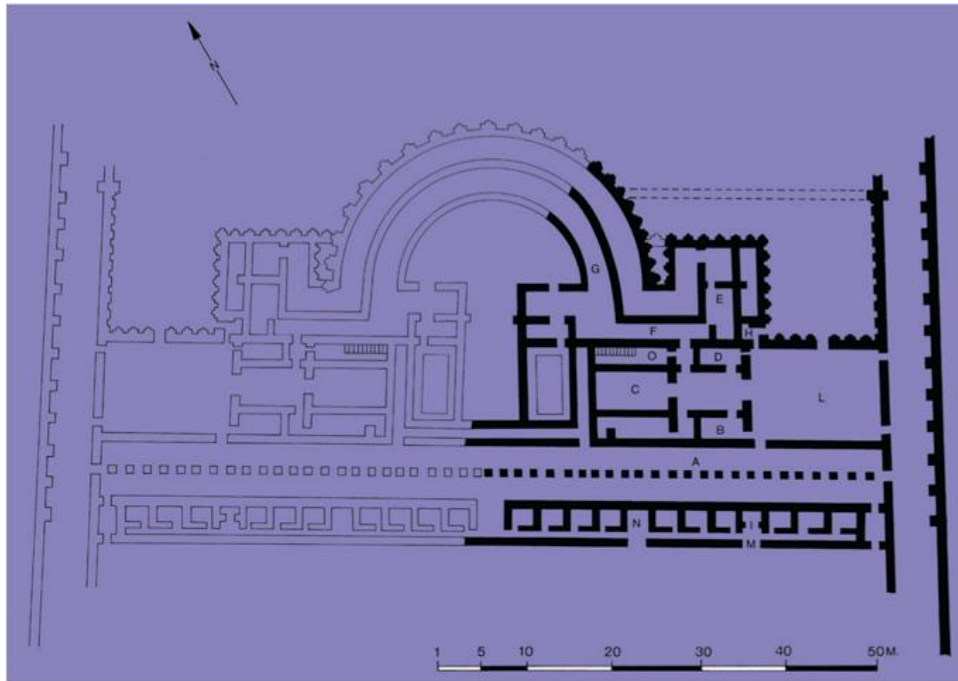


Figure 8. Plan of the “Villa della Farnesina,” Rome. Mols and Moorman 2008: 11, fig. 4.

I hope that this short summary shows that there are still controversies left to wrestle with when we consider Herod the Great’s, and Ehud Netzer’s, legacies. Ehud, if he were here, would have very much enjoyed debating them with us.

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²³ Burrell, B. (2014). "The Legacies of Herod the Great." *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 77(2), 68-74.