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A Note on the Location of Herod's Western Palace in Jerusalem

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King Herod is considered the greatest builder the Land of Israel ever knew, including in the modern era. The list of Herod's construction projects in the Land of Israel, and in neighboring countries as well, is surprising in its length and detail (War 1, 401–425). It is also supported by the built remains that have been preserved at various sites and the surprising extent of their preservation (e.g., Netzer 1999). Among all of the king's construction projects, the expansion of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is rightly considered his greatest achievement. That was his own opinion, as attested by the ancient texts (War 1, 401; Ant. 15, 380), and a conclusion that also emerges from the extensive built remains preserved at the site (e.g. Ritmeyer 2006). The walls of the Temple Mount were partially destroyed by the Romans, and yet considerable portions survived. The Temple itself was destroyed to the foundations with not one stone that could be said to have been left in situ. Flavius Josephus mentions additional structures built by Herod in Jerusalem, but either they have left no remains or architectural hint at all, or the remains that are left are very meager and dubious. This is somewhat unexpected, because all the buildings that Herod built in Jerusalem were large-scale. Ehud Netzer entitled the chapter in his book about King Herod's palaces in Jerusalem: "The Missing Palaces in Jerusalem" (Netzer 1999: 115–122). The remarks below seek to shed light on one issue with regard to Herod's western palace. They offer a possible alternative to the general opinion about its location, to resolve the problem of its absence on the commonly presumed site.

■ Herod's Palace

According to the accepted definition, wine is an alcoholic beverage produced from grapes that have been tread and fermented by metabolic processes by yeast and bacteria in anaerobic conditions. These processes are discussed below.

King Herod's palace is mentioned a few times by Josephus. In a few places it is mentioned as being in "the upper city" (i.e. Wars 1, 402; 2, 530; 5, 245) or in the western part of the city (ibid. 6, 376; Ant. 17, 255) or west of the Temple Mount (War 2, 44). However, in most references, the palace's exact location cannot be known.

Josephus provides a detailed description of Herod's palace in Jerusalem (War 5, 176–183). He begins by noting: "Adjoining and on the inner side of these towers [Hippicus, Phasael and Mariamne], which lay to the north of it [that is, abutting the wall on the south] is the king's palace" (War 5, 176).

Michael Avi-Yonah (1956: 319) posited that "the location of the three royal towers should be identified as inside or near the present-day citadel; it is therefore clear that Herod's palace extended south and southeast of this citadel, where the police barracks were located during

the British Mandate and the location of the buildings and gardens that now belong to the Armenian community; although no tangible remains have yet been discovered from this palace." While Avi-Yonah noted that the building extended from the citadel to the south and the southeast, in the Holyland Model, built under his guidance, he seems to have extended the building only from the citadel southward, that is, along the western wall of the city.

■ The Findings from the Archaeological Excavations

Fortunately, Herod's palace was ostensibly identified by scholars in the western part of the city, in an area that was largely very accessible to archaeological excavations, a rare situation in Jerusalem's Old City. That accessibility stems from its location within the Armenian Garden abutting the Old City wall on the west.

In the 1960s, Kathleen Kenyon excavated a large area (Area L) in the abovementioned Armenian Garden, with the goal of locating parts of Herod's palace that are described by Josephus, but according to Kenyon, she did not find them (Kenyon: 1974: 225; Tushingham 1985). She presumed that the palace was located north of the area of her excavation, nearer to the citadel. Mentioning the first reports of the excavations of Ruth Amiran and Avraham Eitan in the citadel (see below), Kenyon noted their conclusion that they had found part of the retaining walls of the podium on which the palace stood.

The rescue excavations carried out by Magen Broshi and Dan Bahat in the Armenian Garden in 1970–1971 were published in brief (Bahat and Broshi 1972). The excavators noted that they had found four retaining walls, three on a north–south axis and one perpendicular to them. They concluded that these might have served as foundations of the palace. No remains of a superstructure were found.

A few excavations were undertaken in the citadel courtyard: Johns (1950), Amiran and Eitan (1970), Geva (1983), Sivan and Solar (1985). More recently, A. Re'em excavated in the Kishle, slightly south of the citadel (Re'em 2011: 99; 2018: 239–248). All the excavators identified the walls they uncovered as walls of the palace's podium (see, recently, Re'em 2018: Plans 1.2, 1.12, Sections 1.3, 1.4, Stratum VI, Walls W1 and W3). I daresay that if we did not have Josephus' description regarding the location of Herod's palace in the western part of the city, none of the abovementioned excavations would have proposed that these finds attest to the existence of a palace, not to mention one built by King Herod.

King Herod's palaces in sites outside of Jerusalem are well known. They include the palaces at Jericho, Machaerus, Masada, Herodium (upper and lower), and Caesarea (Netzer 1999). In none of these sites did construction continue after the time of Herod as was the case in Jerusalem, destroying many of the previous remains in the process. Nevertheless, we would

have expected that at the site in Jerusalem where the palace was built, a few remnants would have survived as waste, destruction debris, etc. We would expect these remnants to include mosaic tesserae, fragments of fresco and stucco, terra sigillata ware, glassware and coins from Herod's time, among other artifacts. However, in the excavations in the Armenian Garden and the Kishle, no such remains survived. As for the subterranean retaining walls, these could have been used for another type of public structure, such as the upper market. In my opinion, the abovementioned excavations did not find remains of Herod's palace, because the building was not located there. In summarizing the archeological remains mentioned briefly above, it may be said that Herod's palace is missing, as if the earth had swallowed it up (literally).

■ A Proposal for Partial Resolution of the Problem

I would like to bring readers back to the beginning of the article, which mentions the fire that was started at the beginning of the revolt. It broke out in the Antonia and moved on to the palace, devastating it, and from there spread to the three towers: "The conflagration beginning at Antonia, passed to the palace, and spread to the roofs of the three towers" (War 5, 183). This reading and the description, taken simply, shows a certain proximity between the king's palace in the west of the city and the Antonia near the Temple Mount in the east of the city, near enough so that the fire that broke out at the Antonia could have spread to the palace.

There is no doubt that the palace was in the western part of the city and near the three towers, and the three towers were said to be close to the northern wall (War 5, 176). The only surviving element of the three towers is the solid base of a tower at the edge of the citadel courtyard, built of typical Herodian stone, identical to the construction of the walls of the Temple Mount. According to this information, Avi-Yonah located the palace along the western wall of the city, and the two other towers he located in a triangular cluster with the towers at the points of the triangle, in the northwestern corner of the city. It should be noted that in that case, the distance between the Antonia and the palace as the crow flies is about 750 m, and the distance from the Temple Mount to the palace along the northern wall is about 550–600 m. If a fire had spread that way, through the northern part of the Upper City, it would have easily destroyed northern part of the city. One may of course argue that Josephus was mistaken and confused the fortresses; that is, the fire broke out in the fortress of the three towers near the palace, as Avi-Yonah proposed, rather than in the Antonia Fortress.

I would propose that the king's palace was indeed in the western part of the city, but did not extend along the western city wall. Rather, it extended along the northern city wall at the highest part of the Upper City. We do not know the dimensions of the palace compound, but if this was its location, its eastern boundary would be much closer to the Temple Mount

compound and the Antonia Fortress, and the distance from the palace to the Temple Mount would have only been c. 300 m. Such a location easily explains the lack of built remains and small artifacts in the abovementioned excavations in the Armenian Garden and the Kishle. The quantity of remains in the citadel is somewhat higher. It is true that the area under discussion, which is entirely under the densely built Armenian Quarter has never been excavated. The monumental staircase found in the moat of the citadel, which obviously belonged to a large pool, may perhaps indicate the possible direction of the main part of the palace, east of the citadel (Sivan and Solar 1985: 112 – Plan 117 5/v). The fact that the entrance to this installation was from the east, may attest that the center of gravity of the structure was to the east.



Fig. 1a, 1b. A stepped, rock-hewn pool in the citadel compound near Jaffa Gate (photograph by the author).

Additionally, a long, large drainage channel was surveyed by Gibson and Lewis (2019). This channel passed in an east-west direction under the Kishle, about 30 m north of the abovementioned rock-cut steps. It is hoped that someday this area can be excavated, even on a limited scale.

■ The Western Fortress with the Three Towers

Near the northern city wall and the western palace, Herod built a fortress with three tall towers, Phasaël, Hippicus and Mariamne (War 5, 161–171). Immediately after the conquest of the city by the Romans, Josephus reports that Titus ordered the towers and the western city wall left standing and not demolished with the rest of the city (War 7, 1). Two of these three towers are depicted in the Madaba Map from the mid-sixth century CE (Avi-Yonah 1953: 146, illus. 111: v, w). The lower part of one tower survives to this day (Schick 1878) and it is incorporated into the late citadel near Jaffa Gate. We cannot know the appearance of the two towers that did not survive, but it is very possible that this one survived because of the magnitude of its construction, built as it was of large Herodian stones and solid, without interior spaces. It thus appears that between 70 CE and the sixth century CE one of the towers was dismantled and destroyed, or, alternatively, there was no space on the Madaba Map to depict three towers.

Maps from the Middle Ages (Levy 1991) already depict, near the western gate of Jerusalem, “David’s Gate,” only one tower, the “Tower of David” (Turris David). It appears on the Marino Sanudo map of 1320 (Levy 1991: 489), which by that time already possessed realistic outlines of the city (rather than a schematic circle). This is doubtless the tower whose base can still be seen today in the courtyard of the citadel. It is not known why one or even two towers were dismantled sometime between the sixth century CE and the early fourteenth century. We recall that in the early thirteenth century, Al Malik al-Muathim Issa dismantled Jerusalem’s wall (Broshi 1987) due to military considerations. It is possible that in the framework of this unusual action, one tower was completely dismantled and the second was dismantled down to its massive base.

In keeping with the above theory, of an alternative location of Herod’s palace, it is very possible that the arrangement of the three towers was not as Avi-Yonah proposed, a kind of triangle with a tower in each corner, but a row of three towers along the northern wall. It is possible that the tower whose base survived was built next to the northwestern corner of the palace, which is also the northwestern corner of the city. A second tower could have been situated opposite the halfway point of the palace, approximately opposite the southwestern corner of “Hezekiah’s Pool,” and the third tower could have

stood opposite the northeastern corner of the palace, which is the southeastern corner of "Hezekiah's Pool." As we know, the name of this large pool located in the Christian Quarter is anachronistic. It is commonly believed to be the Amygdalon Pool mentioned by Josephus (War 5, 468), and scholars have already posited that the Greek form of the name stemmed from its proximity to the three towers adjacent to Herod's palace (migdal means tower in Hebrew).

■ Conclusion

Of the list of buildings in Jerusalem presented above whose construction is attributed to King Herod, it seems that major remains survived only from the large western, southern and eastern retaining walls of the Temple Mount. While these walls too were partially dismantled, they were apparently so massive that the Romans could not execute their plan to utterly destroy them. It may be presumed that the heaps of debris left by the dismantling of the upper portions of the walls piled up at the foot those walls, concealing them to the point where it seemed that they had indeed been completely dismantled.



Fig. 2. Aerial photograph showing the location of Herod's palace according to the accepted theory (in blue) and according to the author's proposal (in red). The yellow star marks the place of the pool (Tatzpit Aerial Photography, processing: City of David Studio).

Obviously, from that time onward the ruins of the Temple Mount and its accompanying structures (the Antonia Fortress, the Royal Portico and the Temple) became a conveniently available source of building stones. Some of the stones were used as they were (for example, in the construction of “Solomon’s Stables” in the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount). But presumably, most of the dismantled and fallen stones from the Temple Mount walls were too large and heavy to be repurposed for private construction, and they were cut into smaller stones. A close examination of the Old City walls reveals small building stones here and there that bear remnants of Herodian marginal dressing, typical of the Temple Mount walls and the foundation of the tower in the citadel.

Nothing remains of Herod’s palace, and all attempts to identify part of the foundation in one wall or another are insubstantial. The question is whether it may have been identified in the wrong place in the city. In contrast to the accepted idea of identifying the palace as extending from the northwest corner of the city southward, along the western wall, I suggest that it may have extended from the northwestern corner of the city eastward, along the northern wall of the city. Only archaeological excavation and suitable finds – architecture as well as artifacts – can confirm or refute this theory.

We are grateful to Josephus Flavius for his descriptions and references, without which we could not imagine the existence of most of the abovementioned structures, not to mention their locations.

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