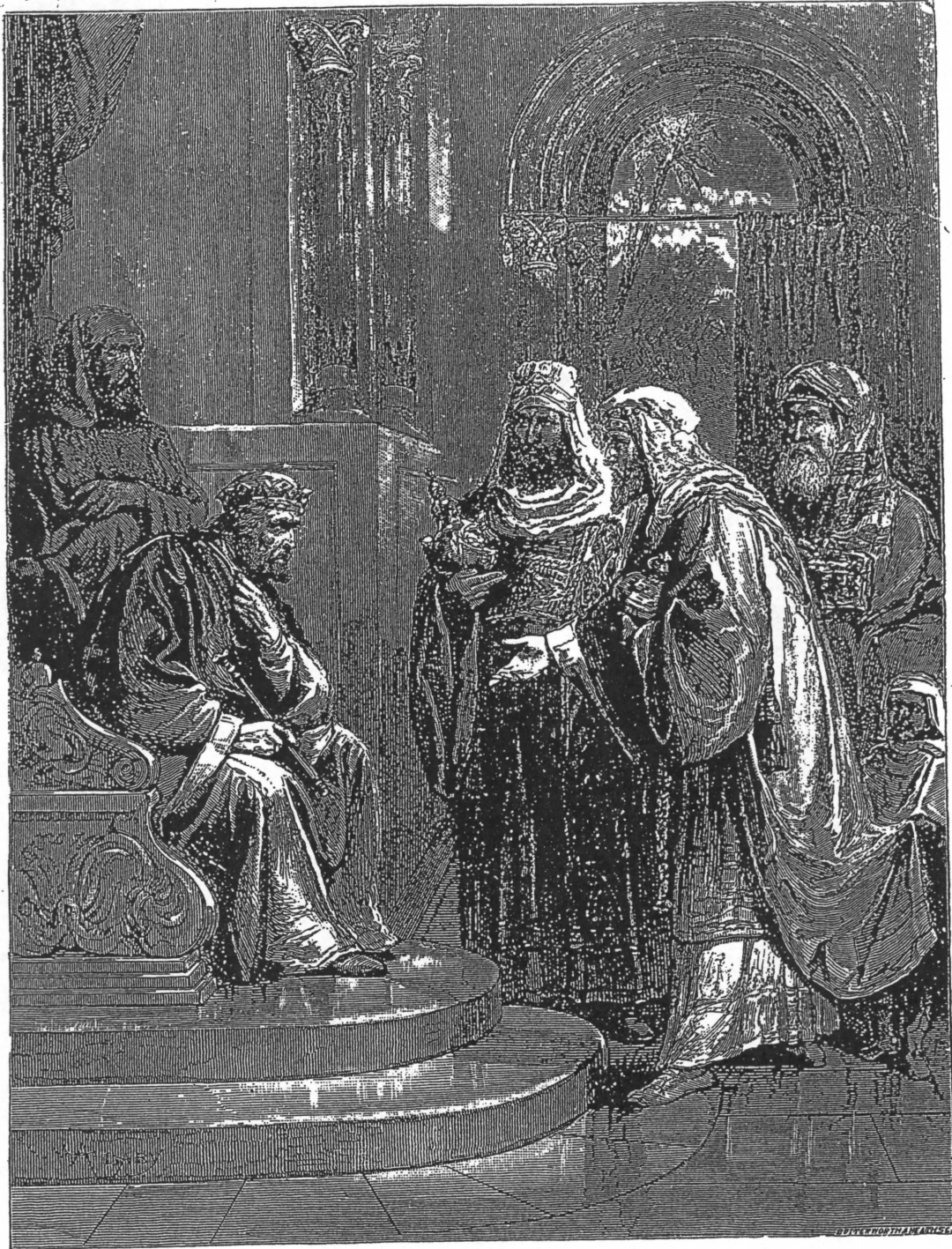


Herod: Monarch, Master Builder and Human Monster

Manfred E. Kober, Th.D.



THE WISE MEN BEFORE HEROD.

Herod: Monarch, Master Builder and Human Monster

1A. THE LIFE OF HEROD:

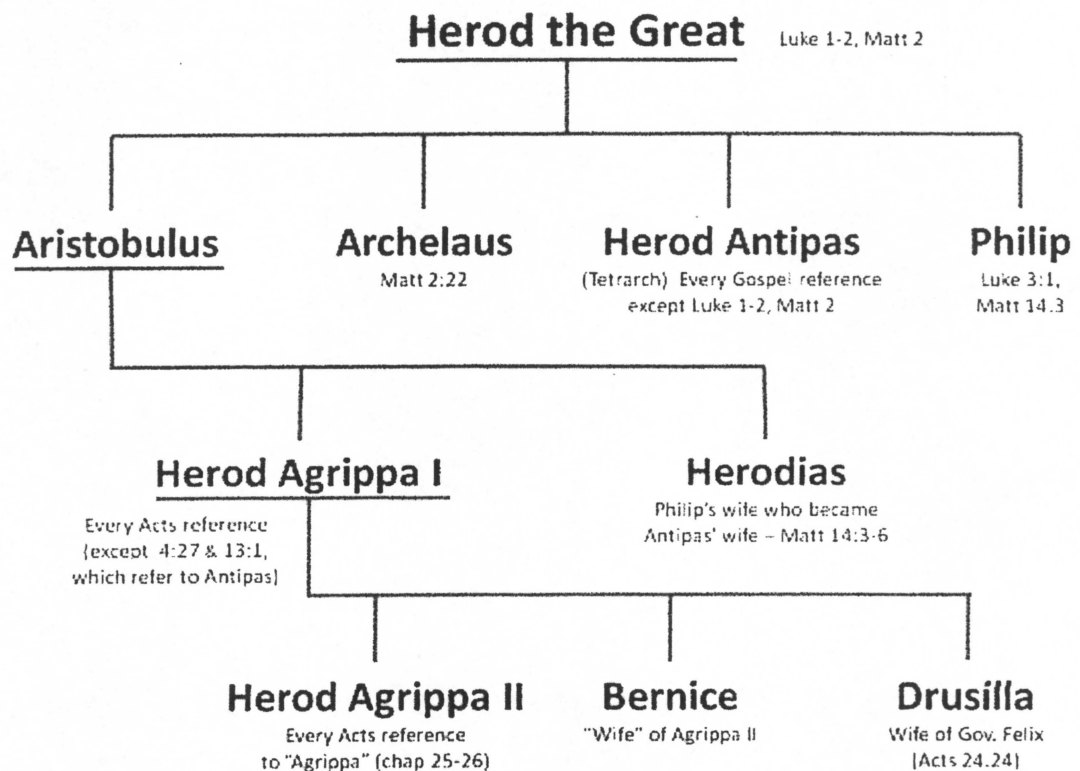
1b. His rise to power:

Herod the Great is the villain in the Christmas story. He was born around 74 B.C. in Idumea, south of Judea. He was the second son of Antipater, the Idumean, a high-ranking under Ethnarch Hyrcanus II, and Cypros, a Nabatean. Herod practiced Judaism, because many Edomites and Nabateans had been commingled with the Jews and adopted their customs. These "Judaized" Edomites were not considered Jewish by the dominant Pharisaic tradition, so even though Herod may have considered himself of the Jewish faith, he was not considered Jewish by the observant and nationalist Jews of Judea.



2b. His reputation:

Herod has been described as "a madman who murdered his own family and a great many rabbis," "the evil genius of the Judean nation," "prepared to commit any crime in order to gratify his unbounded ambition," and "the greatest builder in Jewish history." As will be seen below, he is known for his colossal building projects in the Eastern Mediterranean area, especially throughout Judea and Transjordan.



3b. His building activity:

It is well-nigh impossible to list all of Herod's building projects around the eastern end of the Mediterranean. A sample below must suffice:

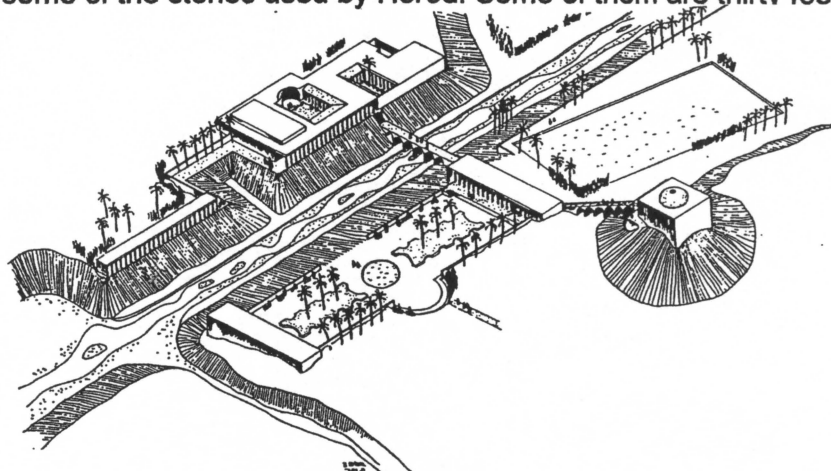
- Herod built a large palace for himself at Jerusalem on a podium 330 x 130 meters.
- He built the western and northern palaces on Masada.
- He built three palaces or large residential villas with audience halls, peristyle courts, gardens and baths with hypocausts in Wadi Qelt near Jericho.
- He built a palace fortress at Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea, where John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded.
- He built a palace mausoleum at the Herodium.
- He built the palace-fortress of Antonia in Jerusalem.
- He built three towers (Hippikos, Phasael and Mariamne) in Jerusalem.
- He built border fortresses in Arad, Aroer, Beersheba and Tel Ira.
- He built temples to Augustus at Sebaste, Caesarea and Paneion.
- He built an enclosure around the patriarchal tombs at Hebron.
- He built a similar enclosure at Mamre nearby.
- He built amphitheaters at Caesarea, Jericho and Jerusalem.

(Summarized from Rogerson, J. W. and Judith M. Lieu, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2006, 67.

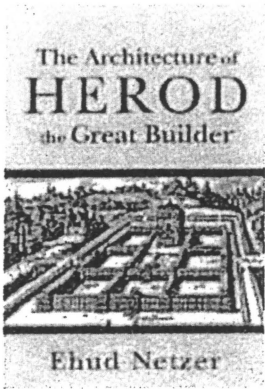
Herod's most famous and ambitious building project was the expansion of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of his reign (20-19 B.C.), Herod rebuilt the temple on "a more magnificent scale." Although work on buildings and courts continued another eighty years, the new temple was finished in a year and a half. To comply with religious law, Herod employed 1,000 priests as masons and carpenters in the rebuilding. The finished temple, which was destroyed in A.D. 70, is sometimes referred to as Herod's Temple. Today only the four retaining walls remain standing, including the Western Wall ("Wailing Wall"). These walls created a platform (the Temple Mount) upon which the temple was then constructed. As the disciples were impressed of old by the magnificence of the temple and the size of the stones (Mark 13:1), even today the visitor stands in awe at some of the stones used by Herod. Some of them are thirty feet in length.



Copper coin of Herod, bearing the legend "ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΗΡΩΔΟΥ" ("Basileōs Hērōdou") on the obverse



Jericho. Rekonstruktion des herodianischen Palastes.



Herod was particularly interested in marble decorations, mosaics and mural paintings on plaster. He introduced innovations in hydraulic engineering. In constructing the harbor at Caesarea, for example, he used underwater cement.



Coin depicting the Roman Temple at Caesarea.

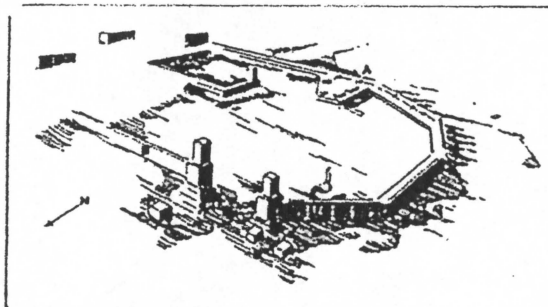


Figure 1

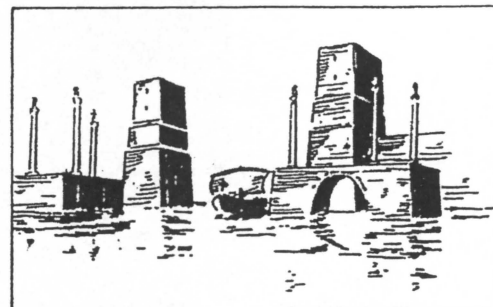


Figure 2

2A. THE PLACE OF HEROD IN THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOR:

1b. The person of Herod:

James Montgomery Boice has some interesting comments about Herod:

Herod was the king of Judea or, as we should more accurately say, an under-king of a border province of the far-flung Roman Empire. There was nothing likeable of Herod, he was a sly old fox, guilty of many murders, including at least one wife and three sons. He probably had no religion. He was a cynic. He knew the traditions of Israel, but he only half believed them if he believed them at all. (*The Christ of Christmas*, 1983, 71).

2b. The account of Matthew:

While the visit of the wise men, first to Herod then to Bethlehem, is a story Universally know and loved, it would be appropriate to give a condensed version Of the accout before attempting an analysis.

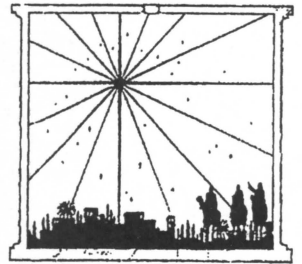
Herod the Great appears in Matthew 2:1-23, commencing with the arrival of the Magi and concluding with the murder of the infants. According to Matthew, after the birth of the Savior, "wise men fro the East" visited Herod to inquire the whereabouts of "the one having been born king of the Jews." They had seen His star in the east and wanted to pay homage to him. Herod the Great was alarmed at the prospect of a usurper. He assembled the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah ("the Anointed One") was to be born. They answered that Bethlehem was to be His birthplace according to Micah 5:2. Herod therefore sent the wise men to Bethlehem, instructing them to search for the child and, after they had found Him, to "report to me so I may go and worship him."

However, after the Magi had found Jesus, presenting Him with gifts and worshipping Him, they were warned in a dream not to report back to Herod. Similarly, Joseph was warned in a dream that Herod intended to kill Jesus, so he and his family fled to Egypt. When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he gave orders to kill all the boys of the age of two and under in



Bethlehem and its vicinity. Joseph and his family stayed in Egypt until Herod's death, then by angelic direction moved to Nazareth in Galilee in order to avoid living under Herod's son Archelaus.

the MAGI



3A. HEROD AND THE WISE MEN:

1b. The search of the wise men:

1c. Their identification:

Unger is probably correct in his identification of the Magi: The learned men were members of an educated class in ancient Persia and exercised priestly functions (Herodotus 1.101, 132). They observed the heavenly bodies and, it is not impossible that they knew of Balaam's prophecy that "a star" would come forth out of Jacob and "a sceptre" would "rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17) and shared a common expectation, prevalent in the East at the time and mentioned by the Roman historians Seutonius and Tacitus, that a world sovereign would arise out of Judea. (Merrill F. Unger, *Matthew*, 3751, unpublished commentary).

2c. Their inquiry: Mt. 2:1-2

Their desire was to know the place of the birth of the King of the Jews. Jerusalem seemed the obvious birthplace. The Magi had been guided by a star, in all probability the Shekinah glory of God, indicating the presence of deity. Centuries earlier the Shekinah glory departed eastward from Jerusalem. Now it returned and guided the wise men.



HEROD AND THE WISE MEN.

2b. The reaction of Herod and the city: Mt.2:3

1c. The alarm of Herod:

When Herod heard these things he was troubled or agitated. He viewed the babe as a threat to his throne, even though he had but a bare year or two to live. Unger's observation is very much to the point:

Such is the utter irrationality of jealousy and a grossly suspicious nature of which he was a notorious example. But he, monstrous as his wickedness was, was less excusable than his Jewish subjects, who had the promises of the Word and had enjoyed the privileges of the LORD's elect people (Unger, 3752).

2c. The anxiety of the people:

Instead of being filled with the joy of the Lord at the advent of their savior-deliverer, they were troubled, knowing full well the suspicious nature and angry outbursts of their potentate, especially when it came to someone whom Herod suspected of plotting against him. Who would suffer at Herod's hands? Who would be butchered by Herod's henchmen?

3b. The response of the religious leaders: Mt. 2:4-6

1c. The religious authorities:

Herod had called together all the chief priests (the incumbent high priest, as well as those who previously held this position) and the scribes (the interpreters of the law). In other words, the supreme council of the nation was called and Herod asked them where Christ—the Jewish Messiah—should be born according to Old Testament prophecy.

2c. The ready answer:

The prompt reply of the Jewish leaders to Herod's petition is not surprising, for Messiah's birthplace was clearly predicted in the Old Testament. The religious leaders replied by paraphrasing Micah 5:2: "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah for out of thee shall come a Governor and shall rule my people Israel" (Matt. 2:6).

This prompt and voluntary testimony from the highest Jewish tribunal (which some decades later condemned the Messiah to die) indicated that the prophecy was understood as being of an actual individual, born in a literal place, as prediction of the Messiah who as a king would rule over His people.

4b. The scheming of Herod: Mat. 2:7-8

Herod secretly called the wise men and inquired diligently of them what time the star appeared.

1c. The request of Herod of the wise men:

Unger outlines Herod's evil purpose:



This was crucial to the sinister plan to do away with the newborn babe. The now aged, physically failing tyrant, had tracked down the place where his victim was. But he had another fact to ascertain—the age of his victim, without which he might still see his murderous plan come to naught. The one clue he had secured from the Jews themselves. The other he will wilily get, he hopes, from the Magi—but he must conduct his nefarious plan with the utmost secrecy lest his object should be divulged and defeated. Herod concluded the best indication of the age of the royal child would be ascertaining what time the star (“His” star v. 2) appeared. The eager visitors, totally unsuspecting such wicked folly as the king was contemplating, told him when they first saw the star. From this information Herod calculated the child’s approximate age, concluding that He was under two years of age (v. 16), so that His parents would not likely have removed Him from the place of His birth.

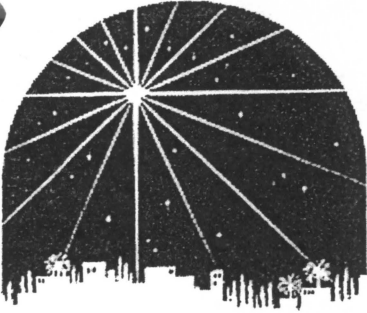
So the royal murderer, with the most dastardly display of cunning hypocrisy, sent the Magi to Bethlehem to make a careful search for the child, with the pious request: “Bring me word again. . . that I may come and worship him also” (Unger, 3754, emphasis in the original).

W. H. Griffith Thomas puts Herod’s deception very succinctly, “Herod in request of wise men used word ‘worship’ but he meant ‘destroy’; thus holy words were combined with wicked plans” [sic] (*Outline Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, 1961, emphasis in the original).



2c. The resumption of the journey: 9-11

As the wise men resumed their journey to Bethlehem, they were overjoyed to see the star. They saw the bright light that had started them



on their journey. They realized that God was obviously guiding them and they knew that shortly—undoubtedly within the hour—they would reach their destination. They knew that—within the hour—after their long journey, they would reach their destination and would pay homage to the Messiah.

As they arrived in Bethlehem the star pointed out the very house where the little child was. When they saw the child, they worshipped him, somehow realizing that it was God. Then they offered gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Hendricksen describes the qualities of the Magi, “they are pictured here as not only wealthy but also warm-hearted and worshipful. These men offered their treasures to *Him*: they are meant for the child to honor Him” (*Matthew*, 171, italics in the original).

5b. The rage of Herod:

Having been instructed in a dream not to return to Herod, the wise men returned to their own country by a different route. When the Magi did not return to Jerusalem, Herod realized his command to them was disobeyed. He flew into a rage. For many years he had not exercised self-control, so now he is no longer able to keep his passion in check. In a violent outburst he commands all the babies in Bethlehem and environs to be killed. Unger recognizes the Satanic scheme behind the dastardly deed:

This horrible and senseless atrocity of the aged wretch, on the brink of death, insanely insecure, accords perfectly with what is known of him from history and archaeology. He who even murdered close members of his own family appears in true light as the murderer of the innocent children of Bethlehem and as the would-be murderer of the Messiah. The latter role brings into clearest focus the demonic power by which he was driven and the onslaughts of Satan through him to do away with the incarnate Redeemer-King (cf. Gen. 3:15) (Unger, 3758).



“Herod sending killed all the men-children that were in Bethlehem” (Matt. ii. 16).



KILLING THE MALE CHILDREN UNDER TWO YEARS OLD.

right hand. About the bier were his sons and his numerous relatives; next to these was the soldiery, distinguished according to their several countries and denominations; and they were put into the following order: first of all went his guards, then the head of Thracians, and after them the Germans; and next the band of Galatians, everyone in their habiliments of war; and behind these marched the whole army in the same manner as they used to go out to war, as they used to be put in array by their muster-masters and centurions; these were followed by 500 of his domestics carrying spices. So they went eight furlongs, to Herodian; for there by his own command he was to be buried. And thus did Herod end his life (*Antiquities*, XVII.VIII.3).

The funeral procession marched from Jericho to the Herodian, Herod's favorite fortress, located eight miles south of Jerusalem and four miles south of Bethlehem. Not until May 2007 was Herod's actual tomb discovered. It took one of Israel's foremost archeologists, Ehud Netzer, 35 years to find the exact location. (Note the separate sheet in the appendix about this remarkable discovery. See also page 7 of the Behlehem outline.)

5A. THE LESSONS FROM HEROD:

Some have tried to soften the image of Herod, the cruel and bloodthirsty tyrant, pointing out that there were extenuating circumstances that might explain his behavior. Did he not have hardening of the arteries? Did not his equally wicked sister Salome constantly prod him? Was he not victim of the sins of others?

While allowance must be made for all this, his own accountability cannot be erased or excused. According to God's Word, self-control is one of the cardinal virtues and produced by the Holy Spirit in the heart (Prov. 25:28; Gal. 5:23). Eternally valid are Paul's word in Romans 6:12 "Let not sin therefore reign [hold sway or hold sway, be king] that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."

Herod, who stopped at nothing to be king, was actually a slave, and this by his own choice. His life is a sober reminder of the destructive nature of lust for power and a passion for luxury.

- Uncontrolled ambition can turn a person into a monster.
- Jealousy clouds the individual's judgment. Being satisfied with one's place in God's scheme of things is a great virtue.
- Great accomplishments are meaningless if done in a way that dishonors God. Herod's legacy can be summarized with the words "creativity and cruelty."





HEROD AND THE WISE MEN.

MATT. CH. II. V. 7.

THE BIRTH OF ISRAEL'S FOND DESIRE
SHOOK HEROD'S SOUL. HE GREATLY FEARED,
AND SOON DID EAGERLY ENQUIRE
THE TIME THE SAVIOUR'S STAR APPEARED.



THE WISE MEN WORSHIP JESUS.



Verlag von Georg Wigand in Leipzig.

Druck von Breitkopf und Härtel in Leipzig.

Der Kindermord zu Bethlehern.

Da Herodes nun sahe, daß er von den Weisen betrogen war, ward er sehr zornig, und schickte aus, und ließ alle Kinder zu Bethlehern tödten, und an ihren ganzen Gränzen, die da zweijährig und drunter waren, nach der Zeit, die er mit Fleiß von den Weisen erlernt hatte.

Ev. Matthäi. Cap. 2. v. 16.

(172.)

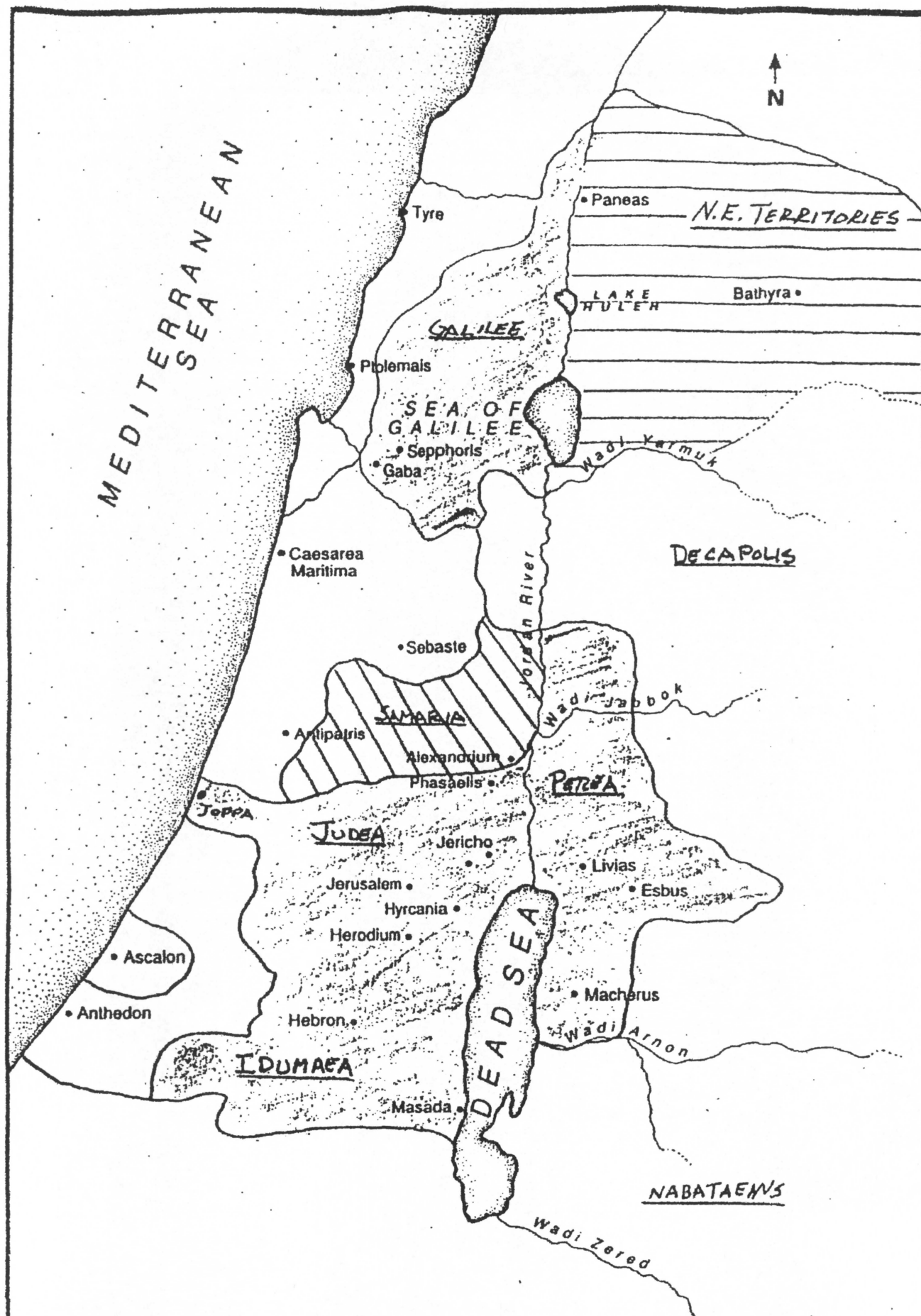


THE TRIUMPH OF THE INNOCENTS.

BY W. HOLMAN HUNT, O.M.

This unusual picture by Holman Hunt shows the souls of the infants martyred in Bethlehem as they accompany and protect Joseph and Mary on their flight to Egypt. The globe represents their eternal life. The infants strew branches and flowers on the ground in honor of their Savior-King.

A. G. Temple, ed., *Sacred Art*. London: Cassell and Company, Ltd, n.d., 117.



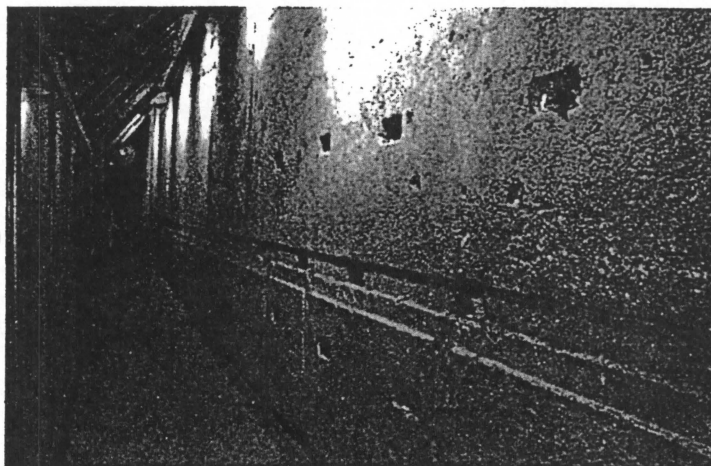
Herod's Building Program in the Levant



Above, aerial view, from the east, of Herodian Jerusalem dominated by the massive Temple Mount.

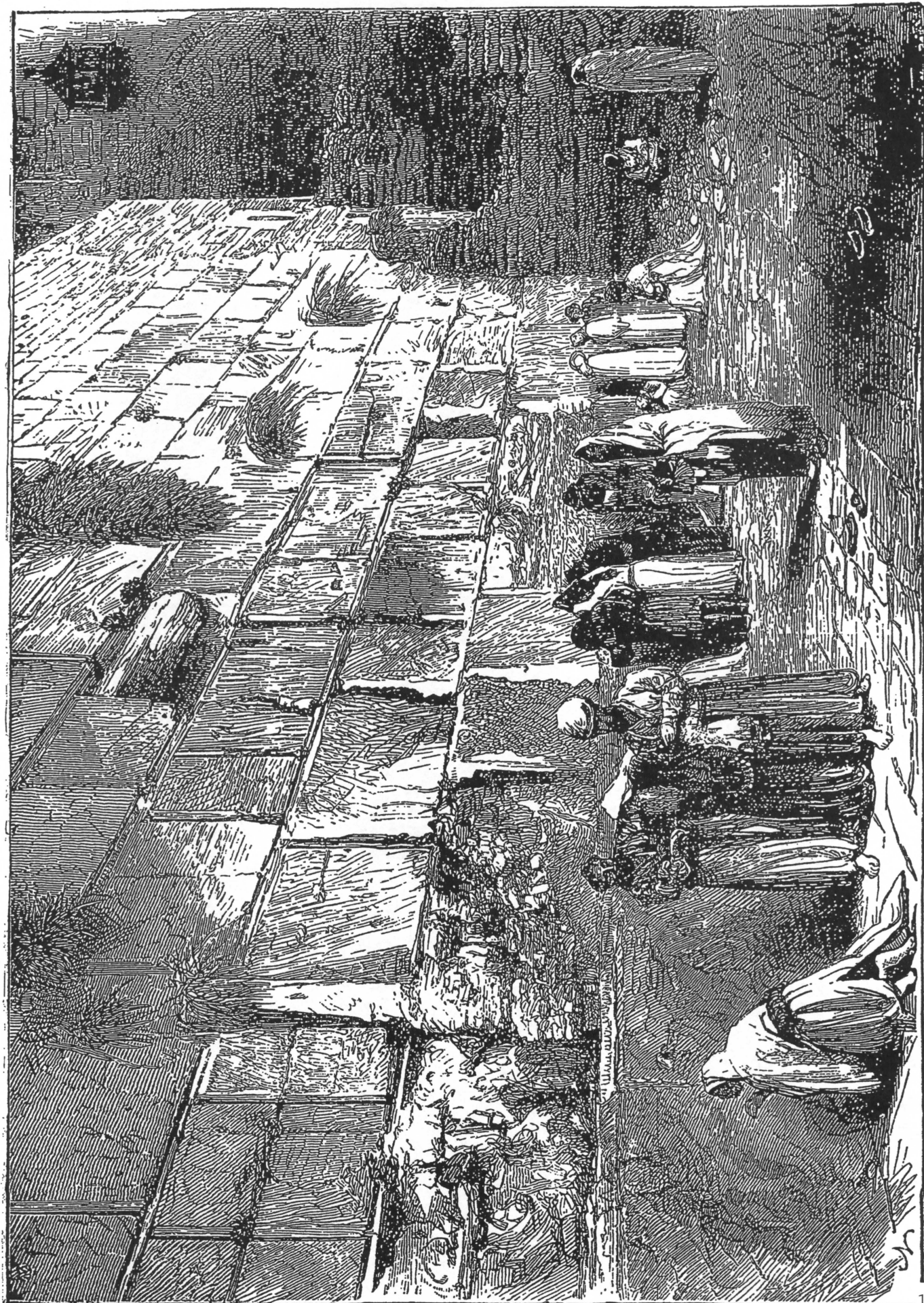
Herod initiated his vast project to expand the Temple enclosure by creating a huge platform, more than doubling the size of the previous Temple Mount by building supporting structures into the deep valleys surrounding it. The area of his platform, one of the largest sacred areas in all of antiquity, was about 35 acres, the size of 24 football fields. The famed Acropolis in Athens was one-third the size. This giant platform was bordered by four mammoth retaining walls, measuring 1,595 feet on the west, 1,020 feet on the north, 1,562 feet on the east and 921 feet on the south. The lower parts were built of large rectangular ashlar (blocks of shaped and worked stone) with recessed margins and a large, slightly raised central panel (boss). Each row of stones, on average, was four-feet-high, except for one row where the stones are 11.5 feet high. The largest stone in this so-called "master course" is 41 feet long, 11.5 to 15 feet wide and 11.5 feet high, and weighs an incredible 370 tons.

Right, intact Herodian stones of the west retaining wall of the Temple Mount. Upper right is the huge "master course" (camera lens not wide enough to show the entire stone). Note its size compared with the smaller stones below. (Photo taken in the Western Wall [or Rabbic] Tunnel).



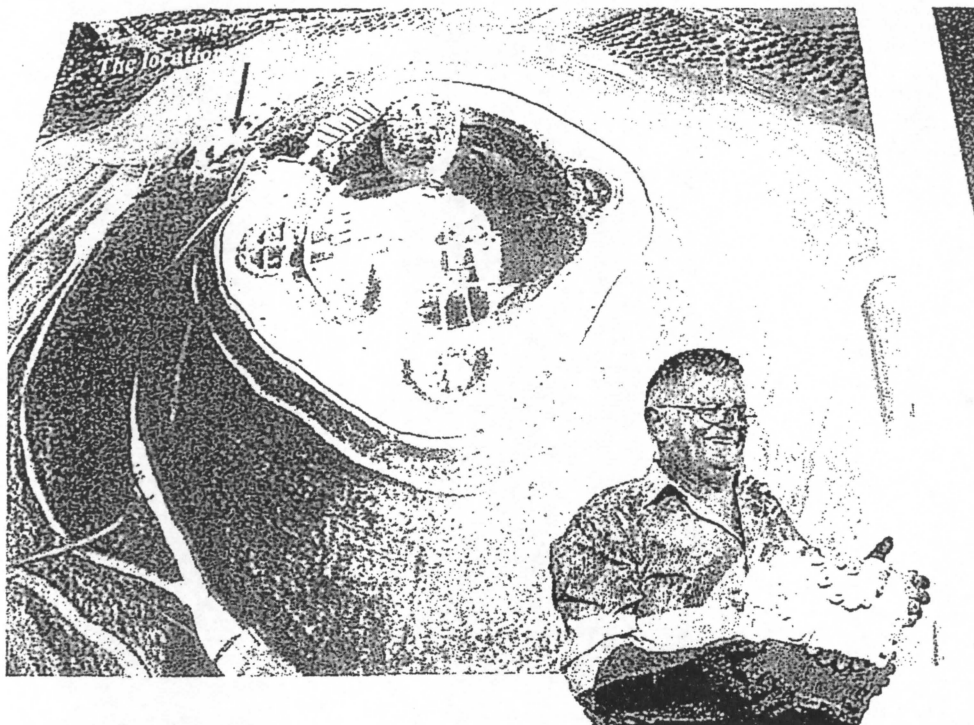
What is truly amazing is that today's best cranes can only lift 250 tons. This means, of course, that we will have to totally re-think our understanding of ancient technology. How were such huge stones lifted into position? According to one theory, the quarry was to the north of the Temple Mount at a higher elevation. If so, the builders could have pushed the stone into place using lever and pulley systems available at that time.

Great colonnades or porches ran around the entire perimeter of Herod's Temple Mount, supported on the outside by the upper part of the retaining walls, and on the inside by rows of Corinthian columns thirty seven and a half feet high. Those on the north and west had cedar roofs; as did the one on the east side, known as Solomon's Colonnade. The latter was the meeting place of the young church, and where the "apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people" (Acts 5:12). Extending along the whole length of the southern end of the platform was the high Royal Stoa, a basilica-style building with 160 columns arranged in four rows, forming a long nave flanked by two side aisles. It was the largest building on the giant Temple Mount, measuring 600 feet long and soaring to one hundred feet at its highest point. Apparently it served many purposes, including a business center, a place for exchanging money, and perhaps at a later date the meeting place for the Sanhedrin. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus praised the Royal Stoa as a "structure more

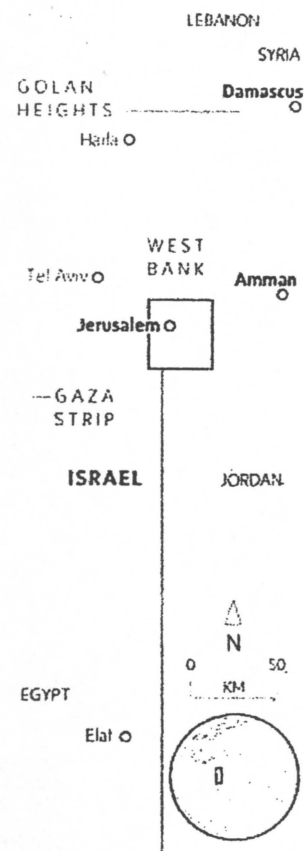


The Wailing Place of the Jews.

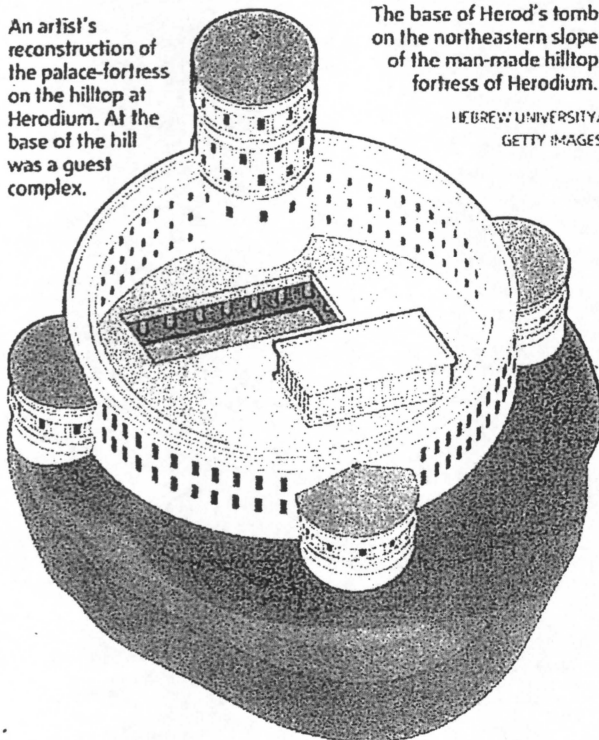
The Hebrew University team concentrated their dig on the northeast slope of the massive hill that allowed Herod such a commanding view of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and the Dead Sea. The complex included a guest spa at the base of the mound and a hilltop fortress so well fortified that Jewish resistance fighters used it as a base during the Bar Kokbah revolts against the Romans in 132-135 A.D.



Israeli Professor of Archeology Ehud Netzer holds a piece of a sarcophagus believed to contain King Herod's remains during a press conference at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. MENAHEM KAHANA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

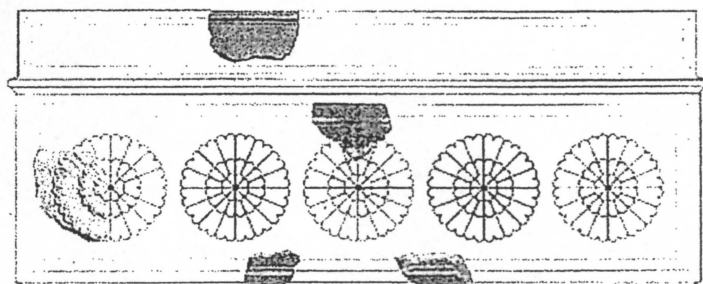
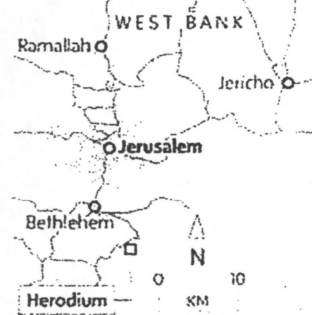


An artist's reconstruction of the palace-fortress on the hilltop at Herodium. At the base of the hill was a guest complex.



The base of Herod's tomb on the northeastern slope of the man-made hilltop fortress of Herodium.

HEBREW UNIVERSITY/GETTY IMAGES



A reconstruction of Herod's sarcophagus, including pieces of the stone coffin found in Herod's tomb. HEBREW UNIVERSITY/GETTY IMAGES

HEAVENLY CREATIONS, RICHARD PALMER, THE CLIO, AND MA