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Herod the Great's Contribution to Nikopolis in the Light of his Building Activity in Judea

King Herod, known also as Herod the Great, left a massive impression on the history of building in the Holy Land, more than any other ruler in the past. His days symbolise the transition between the Hellenistic and the Roman periods, in this part of the world¹.

Herod, being a Jew, but coming from a non-Jewish Edomite origin, replaced the dynasty of the Hasmoneans - a Jewish family of priests who gained independence from the deteriorating Seleucid regime in the middle of the second century B.C.E. Culturally, the Hasmoneans were under a strong Hellenistic influence.

Herod was the son of Antipatros who served as a political advisor to the Hasmonean Hyrcanus II in an intermediate period when the country was already occupied by the Romans but still controlled by the Hasmoneans. Herod served first as a governor of the Galilee (the Northern part of the country) but, in the year 40 B.C.E. when some of the Hasmoneans collaborated with the Parthians against the Romans, he escaped to Rome and was soon nominated as King of Judea by Marcus Antonius and the Roman Senate.

Herod not only "gambled on the right horse" but was also, no doubt, influenced by Roman culture. He visited Rome at least four times and kept personal and friendly relationships, first with Marcus Antonius and later, after Actium, with Augustus and Marcus Agrippa. From the architecture as well as from the cultural material of his days, we know that the transition to Roman culture started only in Herod's days, although the country was occupied by the Romans a quarter of a century earlier.

Herod's days were, generally speaking, peaceful. He ruled for 33 years and developed the economy of the country to a high point, by promoting agriculture, commerce, and natural resources as well as maintaining a welfare policy - a good background for a major building effort.

In the many and varied building projects Herod left all over his country, we find a distinctive expression of his personality, his ambition, his intuition, his

1. For the most up-to-date comprehensive research, concerning Herod's life, personality and activities see *Schalit, A., König Herodes: der Mann und sein Werk, Berlin 1969.*

ingenuity, and realism. No doubt, Herod showed a special interest in building and a deep understanding of this field. We have no doubt that he was personally involved in the preliminary planning of his building projects, the choice of the site, its functions, and the main features of the general layout².

We have two main sources in the study of this unique phenomenon: the archaeological remains and the books of Josephus Flavius, the Jewish historian who lived close to 100 years after Herod but who described his life and period in great detail. In many sites these two sources compliment one another. In many other cases we depend only on Josephus who, as a rule, has been proved to have been correct, at least in his descriptions of Herod's building activities.

Herod's building projects are spread all over his kingdom. (plan 1). Many of them, naturally, were built in the capital, Jerusalem. The largest and most important of all was the central and only Jewish Temple, rebuilt completely by Herod (plan 3). The Temple itself is totally destroyed, but it has been well-documented by Josephus and the Mishna's Midot tractate. The Temple was surrounded by a huge temenos (which partially existed before and was enlarged by Herod), which was surrounded on three sides by double colonnades, and on the fourth side (South) by a triple colonnade built in the shape of a basilica - the Royal Stoa. Concerning these stoas, too, we depend on Josephus's account that the Royal Stoa was a most magnificent building³. A special effort was invested in building its foundations, which were about 40 meters deep at its corners⁴. In the opinion of the lecturer, this special effort was the result of Herod's delicate situation of not being able to even enter the temple he rebuilt, whilst his predecessors, the Hasmoneans, served in it as priests and high priests. The elaborate Royal Stoa - being outside the holy zone - enabled him to receive his tenants and guests on the occasions of national gatherings, on the Temple Mount⁵. Some scholars do see in the general layout of the Temple Mount an imitation of the *Caesaria* built in honor of Julius Caesar in Smyrna, Cyreniaca, etc⁶. The only archaeological remains of the Temple Mount are, however, the huge temenos walls of which the most famous is the Western one, better known as the Wailing Wall⁷.

2. The ideas expressed here were first presented by us in *Netzer E.*, Herod's Building Projects: State Necessity or Personal need? (Symposium), The Jerusalem Cathedra I (Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute-Wayne State University Press), Jerusalem 1981, 48 - 61; 73 - 80.

3. See Josephus B.J. V 5,2 (190 - 192); and Ant. XV, 11, 5 (411 - 416).

4. See *Simons J.*, Jerusalem in the Old Testament, Leiden 1952 and see *Mazar, B.*: The excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem: Preliminary Report of the First season, 1968: *Eretz-Israel* 9, 1969, 161 - 174 (in Hebrew); *idem*, The Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem Near the Temple Mount: Preliminary Report of the Second and Third Seasons, 1969 - 70: *Eretz - Israel* 10 (1971) 1 - 31 (in Hebrew).

5. See F.N. 2 above.

6. See *Foerster, G.*, Art and Architecture in Palestine, The Jewish People in the First Century (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum) 2 (1976), 980.

7. See F.N. 4 above.

North of, and beside the Temple Mount, Herod built one of his first buildings, named after Marcus Antonius - the Antonia⁸. It was probably a rectangular building which served as a fortress as well as a palace. According to Josephus the building, which is practically destroyed, had four towers, one on each corner, the one closest to the Temple being higher than the rest. 10-15 years later Herod built his central palace at Jerusalem. Josephus describes this palace as having two huge triclinia, one named after Augustus and the second one after Marcus Agrippa⁹. North of, and beside the palace, Herod built three unique towers, named after his wife, his brother, and his friend, the highest of which was about 45 meters in height. According to Josephus's detailed description¹⁰, each of the towers had a solid base, with palacial rooms on top. Even a water cistern and bathhouse are mentioned. Only one solid base (about 22 X 20 X 20 meters in size) has remained of this unique group, probably the Phasael tower, named after Herod's brother¹¹. It seems that these towers (inspired, according to Josephus, by the Pharos Lighthouse in Alexandria) combined together the functions of a watch tower, a signalling tower, a palacial wing, and a monument (for prestige).

Herod also built in Jerusalem a theatre, a hippodrome, and probably other public buildings¹². The fragmented archaeological data so far, indicates that Herod integrated his structures into the existing town, though major changes were made around the Temple Mount, including the building of streets, large open paved spaces, bridges, and stairs.

Herod followed the Hasmoneans in maintaining a unique system of "desert fortresses" - a combination of fortresses and palaces,¹³ built along the Jordan Valley and both sides of the Dead Sea. Some of these fortresses were totally rebuilt, but some were only enlarged like the most famous of them - Masada (plan 3). Masada (nearly totally excavated by Yadin, the lecturer being one of the expedition architects)¹⁴ (photo 1) included the elaborate Northern Palace described by Josephus, which is well-preserved and built upon three natural rock terraces. The Northern Palace was well-protected, but due to its exposed position on the cliffs, was also totally exposed to the landscape, with many colonnades, according to the manner of the Roman countryside villas. Similar, but smaller, fortresses were

8. See *Simons*, (see F.N. 4 above).

9. See B.J. I, 21, 1 (402) and Ant. XV, 9, 3 (318).

10. See B.J. V, 4, 3-4 (161-175)

11. Some scholars tend to attribute this solid base to the tower named after his friend Hippicus and see *Geva, H.*, "The Tower of David" - Phasael or Hippicus? *Israel Exploration Journal* 31 (1981) 57-65.

12. See Josephus Ant. XV 8. 1 (268).

13. See *Tzafrir, Y.*, The Desert Fortresses of Judea in the Second Temple Period: The Jerusalem Cathedra 2 (1982) 106-119.

14. See *Yadin, Y.*, Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand, London 1969. Netzer is mentioned here (pp 6:8) by his previous name: Menczel.

exposed recently in Machaerus (by Corbo)¹⁵, Cypros (by Netzer and Damati)¹⁶, and Alexandrium (by Tzafrir and Magen¹⁷).

Jericho's plain, just 20 kilometer East of Jerusalem, has always been an oasis, having little rain but an abundance of spring water. Because of its mild winter (contrary to the cold winter at the capital), it became, in the Hasmonean time, a winter resort beside the royal estates which were developed at the same time. Herod built here three winter palaces which ultimately functioned as one great campus. The first palace excavated by Pritchard and misinterpreted as a gymnasium, was a rectangular building, built as a large villa¹⁸. The second, revealed by the lecturer, was built as a complex upon the ruins of the Hasmonean palace which was probably destroyed by an earthquake in 31 B.C.E. It included a villa (?) elevated on an artificial mound, a large swimming pool (32 X 18 m. combined of two Hasmonean pools), and an entertainment wing, containing a large peristyle garden, rooms, a swimming pool, and a Roman-style bathhouse¹⁹. The third and most elaborate palace was built on both sides of Wadi Qelt, probably after Marcus Agrippa's visit in 15 B.C.E. This was partially excavated by Kelso and Baramki²⁰, and partially by Netzer²¹. In the building (plan 4) of this complex (about 8 acres large) a Roman team took part, using Roman cement, Opus reticulatum and Opus quadratum techniques. The palace included two peristyled courtyards, a Roman bathhouse, various rooms and a huge triclinium (29 X 19 m. in size) (photo 3,4). This later was paved with a neat Opus - sectile floor. To the South of Wadi Qelt the palace included three units. The first is a large formal garden with elevated colonades on two sides, and a "grand facade" with 48 niches and a reflection pool built on its third side. The second unit was a large pool, about 90 X 40 m. in size. The third unit, built inbetween the above two was an elevated artificial mound which originally housed a round hall, 16 meters in diameter. This round hall and the large triclinium mentioned above were probably named after Augustus and Marcus Agrippa in a

15. See Corbo, V., *La Fortezza di Macheronte*: Liber Annus XXVIII (1978) 217–231; *idem*, *Macheronte La Reggia – Fortezza Erodiana*: L.A. XXIX (1979) 316–326; *idem*, *La Fortezza di Macheronte (Al Mishnaqa)*: L.A. XXX (1980) 365–376; *idem*, *Nuove Scoperte alla Fortezza di Macheronte*: L.A. XXXI (1981) 257–286.

16. See Netzer, E., *Cypros*: Qadmoniot 8 (1975) 54–61 (in Hebrew).

17. See Tzafrir, Y. and Magen, Y., *Two Seasons of Excavations at the Sartaba/Alexandrium Fortress*: Qadmoniot 17 (1984) 26–32 (in Hebrew).

18. See Pritchard, J.B., *The Excavation at Herodian Jericho*, *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 32–33 (1951).

19. See Netzer, E., *Jericho: Le Monde de La Bible* 17 (1981) 28–34; *idem*, *Recent Discoveries in the Winter Palaces of the Second Temple Times at Jericho*: Qadmoniot 15 (1982) 22–29 (in Hebrew).

20. See Kelso, J.L. and Barmki, D.C., *Excavations at New Testament Jericho and Khirbet En-Nitla*, *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 29–30 (1955).

21. See Netzer, E., *The Winter Palaces of the Judean Kings at Jericho at the End of the Second Temple Period*: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 228 (1977) 1–13; *idem*, in *La Monde de La Bible*. (F.N. 19 above).

manner similar to that of the halls in the palace at Jerusalem²². According to Josephus, the palace, in general, was named after two persons²³) (plan 5).

At another side of Jericho, Herod built a unique structure, a combination of a rectangular racing course (320 X 83 m. in size), a theater, or at least an auditorium of a theater, and a large building (70 X 70 m.) elevated on an artificial tell (excavated by us²⁴) (photo 4). This unique combination was probably intended to house "under one roof" a variety of activities such as horse racing, chariot races, gymnastics, wrestling, and music. This variety of activities is mentioned by Josephus in the context of the games that Herod had installed in honor of Augustus both at Jerusalem and at Caesarea Maritime every 5 years²⁵. The elevated building could have been used as a reception wing or as a gymnasium.

Herod's "Nikopolis" was built at Herodium - Herod's largest palace, a monument and his burial place (plan 6). Here, 15 km south of Jerusalem, Herod experienced a crucial battle (40 B.C.E.) in which he nearly lost his life. Herodium was comprised of a round building-mountain (excavated in 1962-1967 by Corbo²⁶) and to its north, about 100 m. lower, a huge complex of palace wings (excavated by us since 1972²⁷). The "Mountain-Palace-Fortress" had in its midst a round building, 63 m. in diameter and about 30 m. high, built as a fortress but including a neat palace wing, like a villa, inside (photo 5). Four towers projected from this building, (photo 6) of which the eastern one (built on a solid base) was the highest, following the same idea of Jerusalem's three towers (see above) (plan 7). Right after the completion of this round building it was covered, to half of its height, by a massive fill in a conic shape²⁸ (plan 8).

The lower palace included many palace wings which were built on three sides of a huge garden (about 120 X 110 m.) (plan 6). A large pool (70 X 46 m.) was built in the middle of this formal garden. The huge garden was surrounded by colonnades and long monumental halls. Lower Herodium also included, probably, Herod's burial estate. It seems that a course (350 X 30 m.) artificially leveled, was built especially for his funeral, whereas an elaborate building (the "Monumental Building") in the shape of a triclinium, situated at the edge of this course, could have been part of the burial complex. The tomb itself has not yet been found.

22. See F.N. 9 above.

23. See Josephus B.J. I, 21, 4 (407).

24. See Netzer, E., The Hippodrome that Herod built at Jericho: Qadmoniot 13 (1980), 104–107 (in Hebrew); *idem.* in La Monde de la Bible, (see F.N. 19 above).

25. See Josephus B.J. I, 21, 8 (415) and Ant. XV, 8, 1 (268–271); XVI, 5, 1 (136–141).

26. See Corbo, V., L' Herodion Di Gebal Fureidis: Liber Annuus 13 (1963) 219–277; *idem.* L' Herodion di Giabal Fureidis: Liber Annuus 17 (1967) 65–121.

27. See Netzer, E., Greater Herodium: Qodem 13 (1981).

28. See the architectural–structural analysis of this unique building in Netzer, E.: Qodem, (F.N. 27 above) 79–101.

Herod rebuilt two large towns which he named after Augustus: *Caesarea - Maritime* and *Sebaste-Samaria*. The largest of the two was *Caesarea* on the Mediterranean coast which was focused around a large harbour - one of Herod's main building efforts. The town itself (which replaced a small delapidated town called: Straton's Tower) was basically based on a grid system having parallel streets with sewage tunnels below. The town also included a temple dedicated to Augustus placed on a platform; hostels for sailors; storehouses; a palace for the king; a theatre and a hippodrome - all mentioned by Josephus. Various excavations were carried on in *Caesarea*²⁹, a site which consists of many strata, as a result of being intensively populated from Herod's days until the Crusader times. One of the few excavated remains from Herod's days is the theater (excavated by Frova³⁰). It consists of various stages the earliest of which is dated back to Herod. Herod's theater was a transitory type between the Hellenistic and the Roman prototypes -partially cut into bedrock and partially built on top of a fill surrounded by circling vaulted corridors built one on top of the other. *Caesarea* has a system of three long range aqueducts to which the earliest (built on arches) probably can be attributed to Herod³¹.

Sebaste-Samaria existed for many centuries as the capital of Samaria (plan 3), the central region of Palestine. It was rebuilt by Herod as a settlement for soldiers. The site was partially excavated, first by Reisner and Fisher and later by the United Expedition³². It was surrounded by a wall (about 3600 m. long) and was crowned by Herod with a temple dedicated to Augustus. The temple, which was built on top of the town's acropolis, was erected next to, but outside a large forecourt situated to its north - probably so as to enable its elevation in order to be seen from all the surroundings and at the same time not to disturb the forecourt's space. Another structure built in Herod's days at Sebaste was a rectangular studim (196 X 46 m.) surrounded by colonnades.

Another, though smaller town built by Herod was named after his father, Antipatris. A main street was revealed here during the excavations (1971 - 1984 by Kochavi³³), paved with stones with evidence of colonnades which once existed on the two sides of this main street. We believe that this evidence gives weight to the assumption that the earliest colonnaded paved road exposed in Antioch on the

29. For reference see Levine, L.I., Roman Caesarea: Qedem 2 (1975) and see *idem* and Netzer, E., New Light on *Caesarea*, Qadmoniot (1978) 70-75 (in Hebrew) and Raban, A., The Ancient Harbours of Caesarea: Qadmoniot 14 (1981) 80-88 (in Hebrew).

30. See Frova, A., ed., Scavi di Caesarea Maritima, Roma 1966.

31. See Levine: Qedem 2 (see F.N. 29 above) 30-36.

32. See Reisner, G.A., Fisher, C.S., and Lyon, D.G., Harvard Excavations at Samaria (1908-1910) 1-2, Cambridge, Mass. 1924; and Crowfoot, J.W., Kenyon, K.M., and Sukenik, E.L., The Buildings at Samaria, London 1942.

33. Not yet published.

Orontes³⁴ and mentioned by Josephus - was really built by Herod.

Antioch was not the only place where Herod left building projects beyond his kingdom's boundaries. Josephus provides us with a list of building projects built in Syria, Asia Minor and Greece³⁵ (plan 2). In these various sites (altogether about thirteen) he built theaters, gymnasia, stoa, and water projects and also rebuilt/ruined temples. Nikopolis according to Josephus, was the furthest site from his kingdom. Until some of these many building projects will be exposed, an open question remains whether these buildings (outside Herod's kingdom) were either built by his own teams, or perhaps Herod only initiated their erection and contributed the needed financial sources.

We have followed briefly Herod's main building projects in his own country and have mentioned his activities beyond his kingdom. The buildings in his own country, were no doubt, first of all, the result of personal needs and desires as well as a fulfillment of the needs of his various subjects - Jews and Non - Jews³⁶. No doubt, the building of the big harbour at *Caesarea* was a major effort to strengthen the connections with the Roman centers. Naming many of his projects after the Roman leaders was another common way of expressing his loyalty as was establishing the games in honour of Augustus once ever five years at Jerusalem and Caesarea³⁷. The buildings beyond his borders, especially in the remote countries, were a means to express his loyalty to the Roman regime as well as improve the ties with other sections of this large empire, which could be of a great help to him not only while traveling through these countries, but also for commercial ties.

Only one sentence, in Josephus, ties up with the huge and inspiring town of Nikopolis:

"for the people of Nikopolis he helped construct the greater part of their public buildings" (Ant. XVI 5, 3 (147)).

The fact that Nikopolis was a newly founded town no doubt held a special meaning for Herod - a great builder in his own right. Constructing a new town from the very beginning could easily have fired the imagination of this builder. However, only future excavations will provide information as to whether Herod sent teams of builders to Nikopolis or provided only money beside some good advice. It would perhaps be correct to end this paper with a quotation from Josephus concerning Herod's visit to Chios. It can give us some hints about the spirit of this unique man:

"But a north wind caught him there and prevented his ships from putting out to sea. He therefore waited over in Chios several days, and there gave a friendly reception to the many who visited him and he won them over with royal gifts. And

34. See *Lassus, J.*, Antioch on the Orontes V, Princeton 1972, 140-151.

35. See Josephus B.J. I, 21, 11 (422-428) and Ant. XVI, 1,2, (16-26): XVI, 5, 3, (146-149).

36. See *Netzer*, F.N. 2 above.

37. See F.N. 25 above.

when he saw that the portico of the city itself had fallen—it had been overthrown in the Mithridatic war and, unlike other structures, was not easy to set up again because of its great size and beauty—, he gave a sum of money which was not only sufficient but was more than enough to cover the cost of completing the structure, and gave instructions not to neglect this but to erect it quickly and so to restore to the city its proper appearance".

Ant. XVI 1, 2 (18-19)



1. Masada. Herod's fortress and palace.



2. The northern wing of Herod's third winter palace at Jericho.



3. *The vast triclinium in Herod's third winter palace at Jericho.*



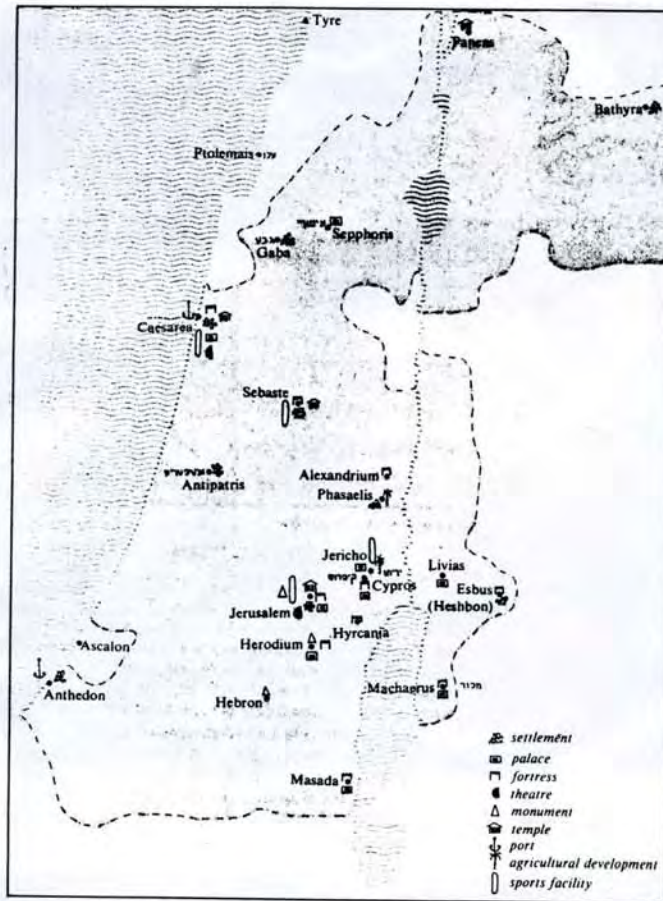
4. *Herod's hippodrome at Jericho.*



5. *The mountain - palace - fortress at Herodium.*



6. *A view into the mountain - palace - fortress at Herodium.*

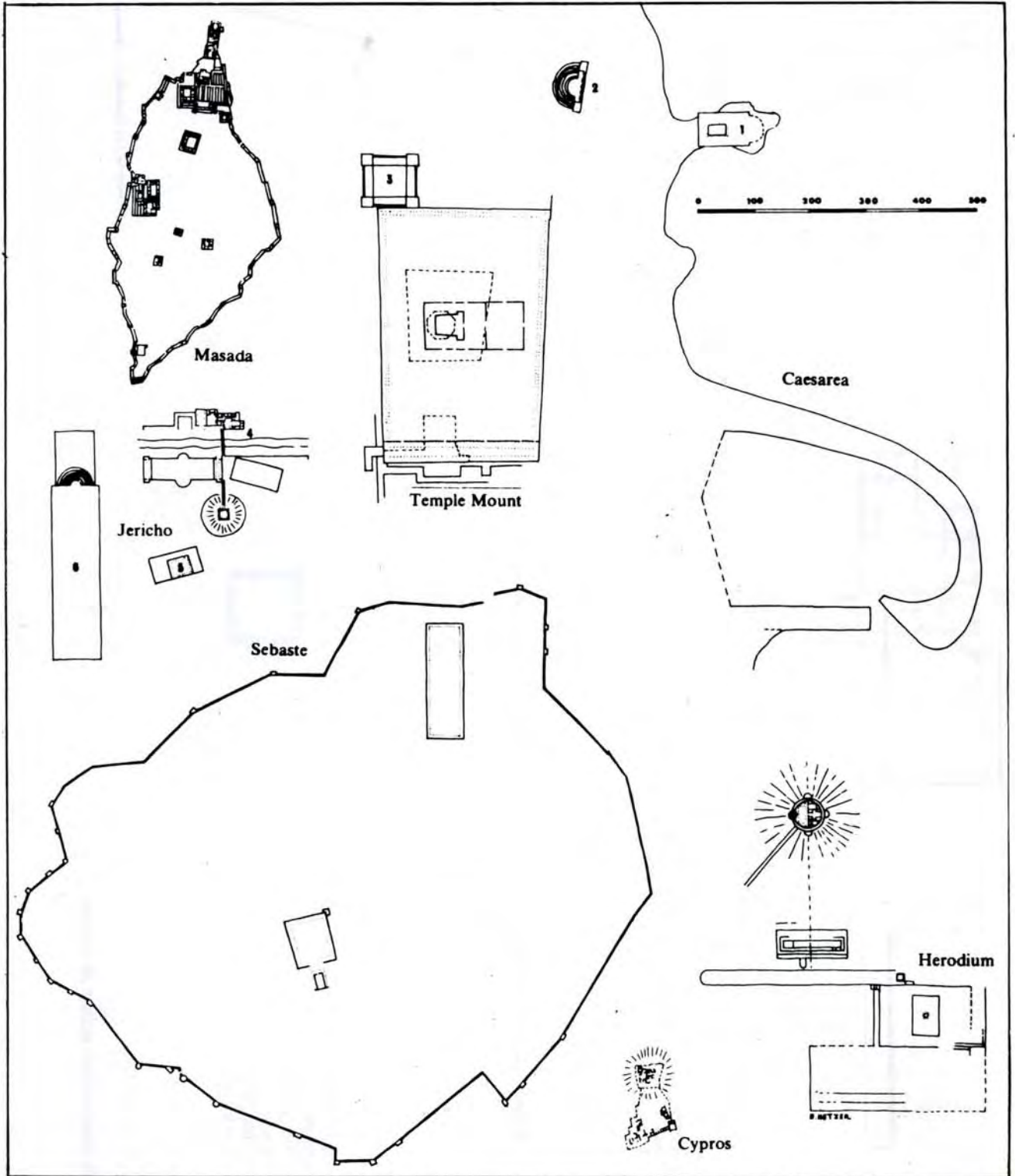


Building projects within the borders of Herod's kingdom.



Building projects beyond the borders of Herod's kingdom.

1. Ascalon 2. Ptolemais 3. Tyre 4. Sidon 5. Damascus 6. Berytus
 7. Byblos 8. Tripolis 9. Laodicea 10. Antioch 11. Rhodes
 12. Chios 13. Nicopolis



Herod's building projects at Masada, Jericho, Sebaste, Cyprus, Herodium, Caesarea and Jerusalem (The Temple - Mount).

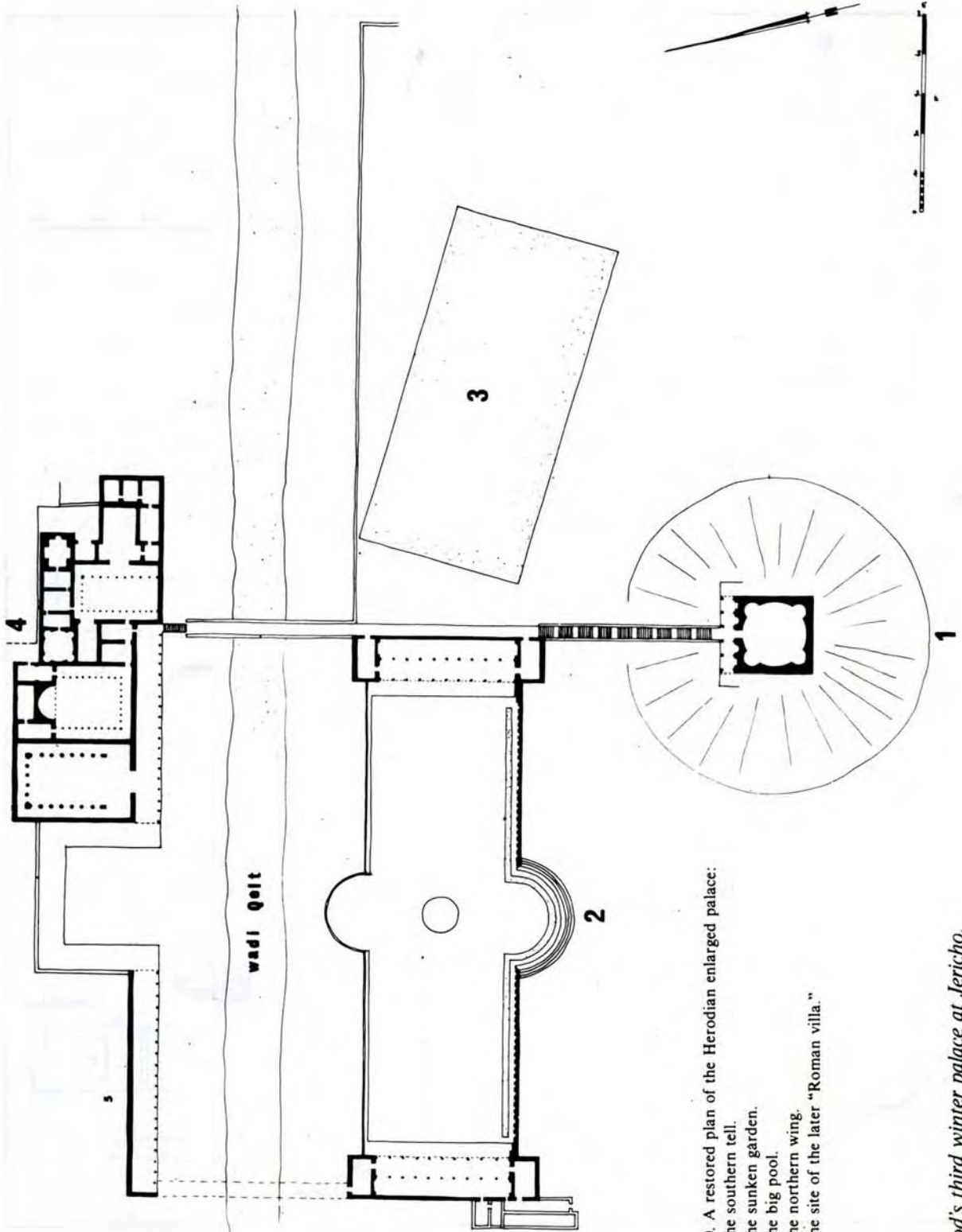
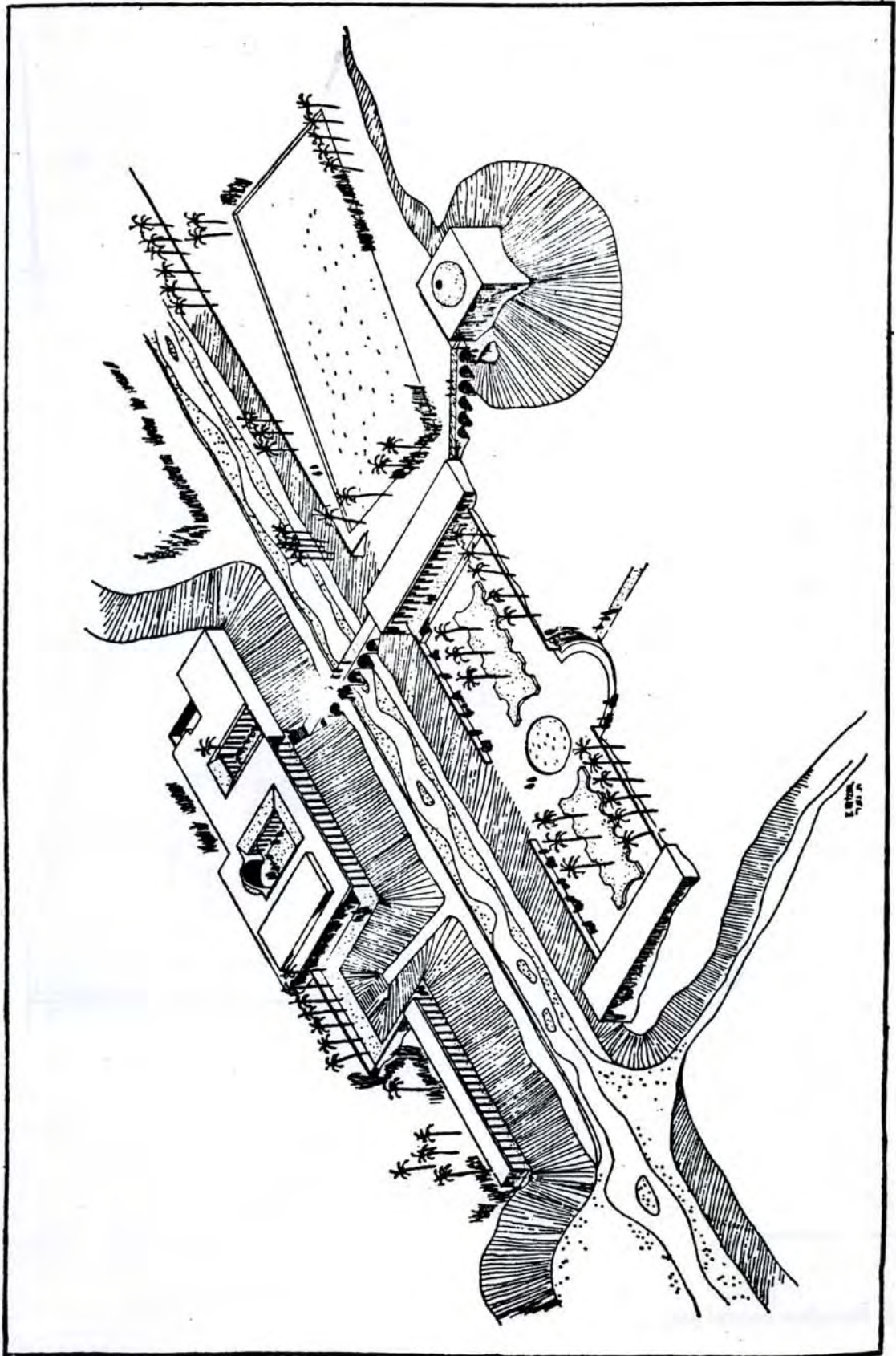
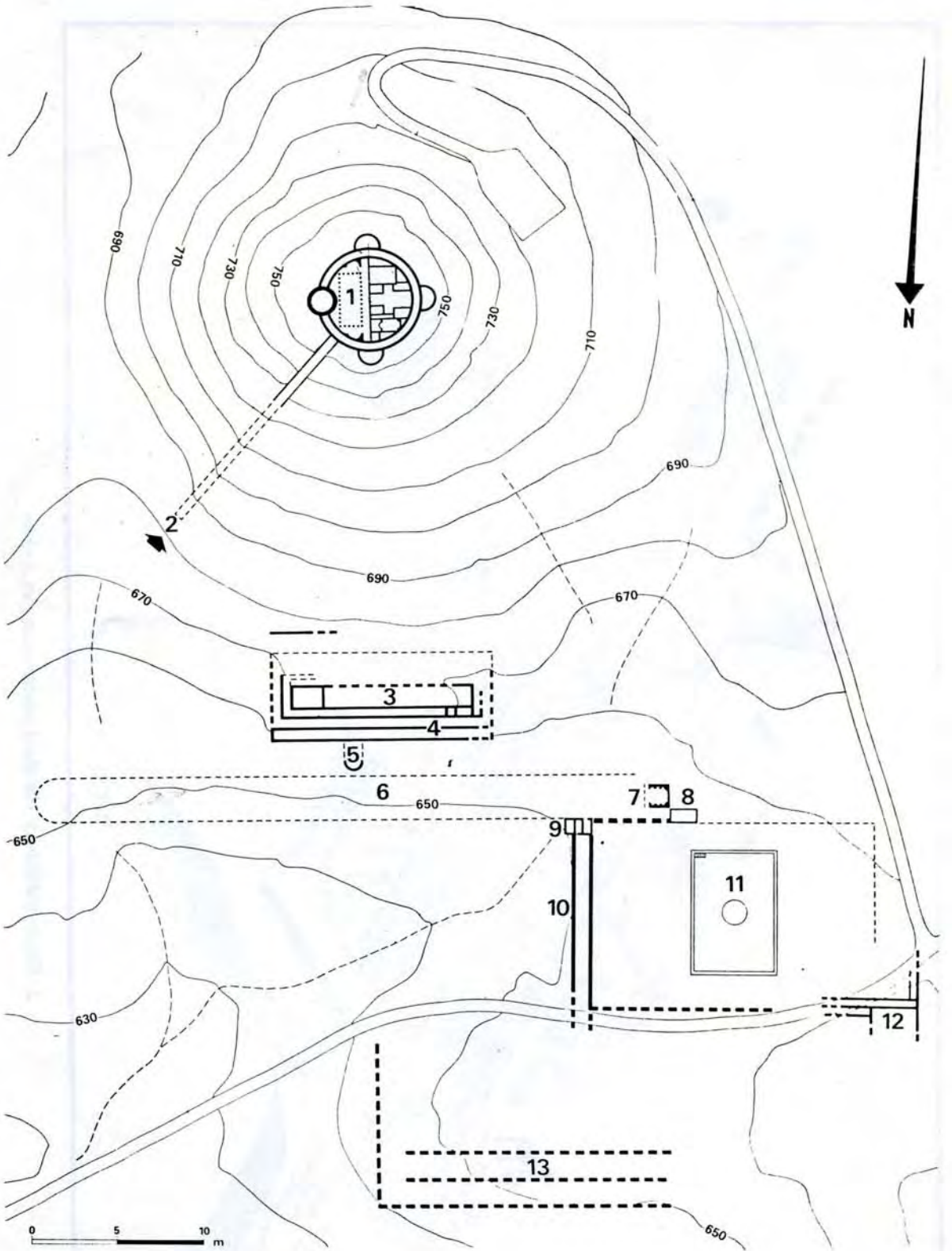


Fig. 10. A restored plan of the Herodian enlarged palace:
1. The southern tell.
2. The sunken garden.
3. The big pool.
4. The northern wing.
5. The site of the later "Roman villa."

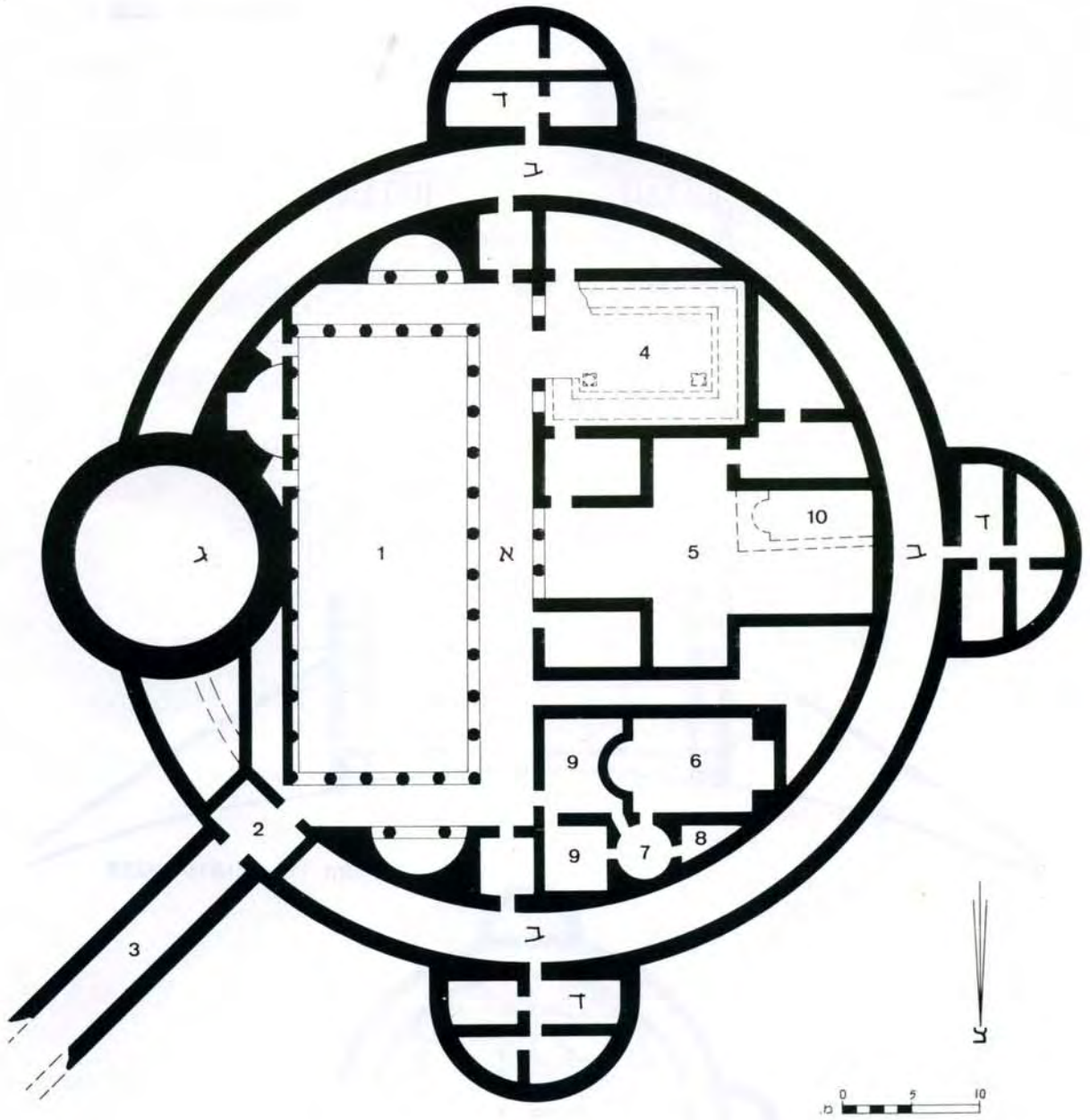
4. Herod's third winter palace at Jericho.



5. Reconstruction of the third winter palace at Jericho.

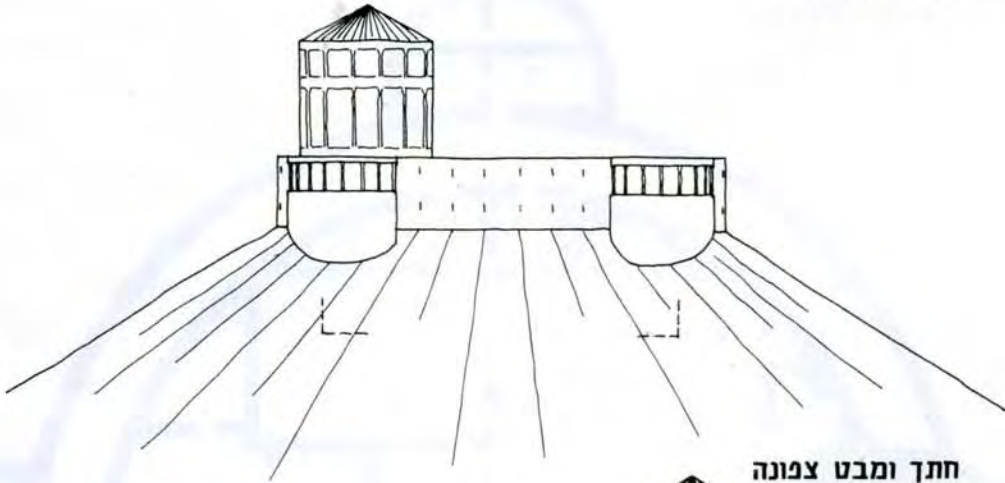


6. Herodium-general plan.

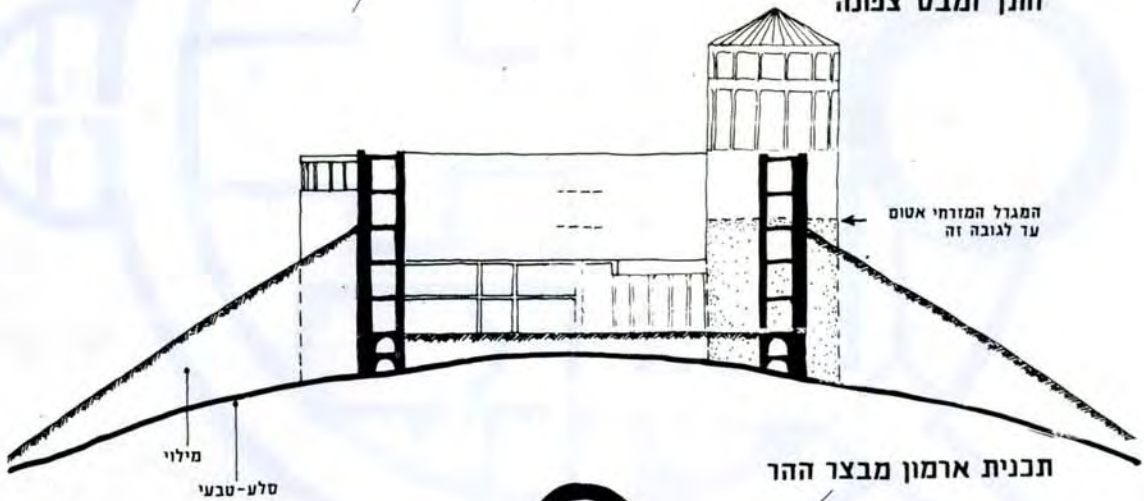


7. Herodium's mountain-palace-fortress.

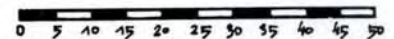
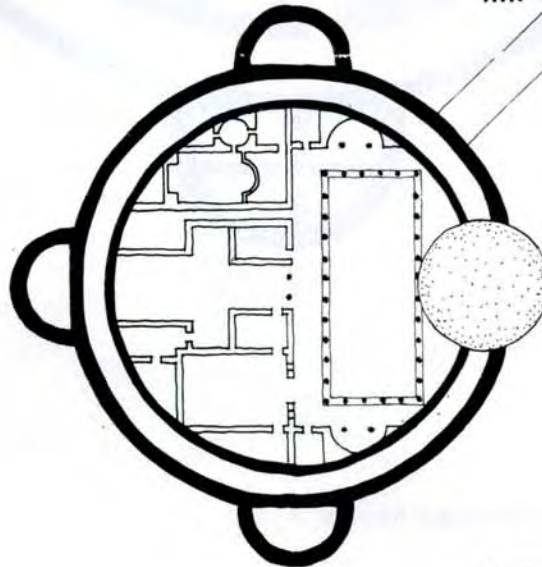
מבט לדרום-מזרח



חתך ומבט צפונה



מילוי
 סלע-טבעי



שרטוט: אהוד נצר

8. The reconstruction of Herodium's mountain palace - fortress.