

Excavation of the approach to the mountain palace-fortress at Herodium

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In 2014, the Ehud Netzer Expedition for the Study of Herodium from the Hebrew University commenced excavations in the area of the approach to the mountain palace-fortress at Herodium (hereafter “the mountain palace”). The excavations produced surprising new data with respect to the stages of construction and the layout of the entrance to the hilltop structure, shedding light on Herod’s last building project at the site at the time when he transformed the entire hill into his burial and memorial complex (fig. 1 in colour).¹

The presence of a monumental stairway ascending the NE slope of the mount and leading to the structure at its top has long been known, as was that of a sloping passageway that led to the door entering the mountain palace. This arched passageway was intended to make entry possible through the fill of the conical artificial mount. Also prior to the new excavations the entrance room of the hilltop structure was known. The door leading into the courtyard of the palace had been exposed during the Franciscan excavations directed by V. Corbo in the early 1960s,² while in 1968-69 G. Foerster exposed the S part of the entrance room, as well as some of the upper arches of the passageway (fig. 2).³

In our own excavations (2006-10) on the NE slope it became evident that at various stages during Herod’s reign two straight and broad monumental stairways were built rising to the top of the mount. The earlier of the two belongs to the early building phase, at which time next to it on the slope the royal theatre and mausoleum were erected. The late stairway, which was partly built on top of the early one but on a slightly different orientation, was con-



Fig. 2. Uppermost arches of the passageway as revealed during Foerster’s excavations (view from northeast) (© G. Foerster).

- 1 The data assembled in the new excavations complement and amplify those from the previous excavations on the slope, some of which have been published in the final report of the excavations at Herod’s tomb precinct: R. Porat, R. Chachy and Y. Kalman, *Herodium I. Herod’s tomb precinct* (Final Reports of the 1972-2010 Excavations directed by Ehud Netzer; Jerusalem 2015).
- 2 This doorway was found to be blocked by two massive walls that were dated by the excavators to the time of the Bar-Kokhba Revolt: V. C. Corbo, *Herodion I. Gli edifici della fortezza* (Jerusalem 1989) figs. 104-5, map 2.
- 3 G. Foerster (“Herodium, notes and news,” *IEJ* 19 [1969] 123-24; id., “Herodium,” *RBibl* 77 [1970] 400-1, pls. XX-XXIII) concluded that the fill excavated by him between the walls of the upper part of the passageway was part of the deliberate blockage carried out by Herod towards the end of his life, a conclusion supported by the results of our recent excavations. We thank him for sharing with us his conclusions and materials from his excavations.