

# The promontory palace at Caesarea Maritima: preliminary evidence for Herod's *Praetorium*

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## 1. Introduction

According to Josephus, Herod the Great built a splendid palace as a showpiece of his new city, Caesarea Maritima, and its great artificial harbor, Sebastos. A palace built around a large rock-cut pool is visible on a rocky promontory adjacent to the great harbor (fig. 1). Identified by E. Netzer in 1976 as Herod's palace, the promontory ruins have undergone further excavation (1990-96) by the University of Pennsylvania Museum under the direction of K. Gleason and B. Burrell, resulting in the discovery of a second, attached palace which doubles the known area of the complex.<sup>1</sup> This article, which is the prelude to the final report, describes the new discoveries and develops the following theories:

1. The entire complex was built by Herod in two phases in the years between 22 and 10 B.C.
2. The Lower Palace was the original palace, built at the time the great harbor was constructed, while the newly-discovered Upper Palace was built later in Herod's reign, in conjunction with the theater and hippodrome for the inaugural festivities of the city in 11 B.C.
3. The complex may be identified as "Herod's *praetorium*" used by later Roman procurators and governors.
4. It continued to serve its official/residential function through the Byzantine period.

No single discovery proves that this is Herod's palace; rather, the identification is based upon evidence deriving from historical texts, the extant architecture (viewed in relationship to Herod's other works), and the stratigraphy of the site itself. Ceramic evidence for this period contains very few types that are dated exclusively to the lifetime of Herod. Further, there are few places where one can reach original construction deposits: extensive alterations, looting, and poor preservation have left few sealed deposits. Rock-cut foundations rarely contain pottery, and the adjacent sea was readily available for the disposal of contemporary rubbish. Lit-

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\* The abbreviations used in this article are as follows:

*Caesarea retrospective* = A. Raban and K. G. Holum (edd.), *Caesarea Maritima: a retrospective after two millennia* (Brill 1996);

*Harbours* = A. Raban, *The site and excavations*, vol. 1 of *The harbours of Caesarea Maritima: results of the Caesarea Ancient Harbour Excavation Project 1980-85* (BAR S491, Oxford 1989);

*Excavations 1975-79* = L. Levine and E. Netzer, *Excavations at Caesarea Maritima 1975, 1976, 1979 — final report* (Qedem 21, Jerusalem 1986);

LRBC = P. V. Hill, J. P. C. Kent, R. A. G. Carson, *Late Roman bronze coinage* (London 1960);

DG = C. Balmelle *et al.*, *Le décor géométrique de la mosaïque romaine* (Paris 1985).

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