PALACES AND THE PLANNING OF COMPLEXES IN HEROD'S REALM

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Abstract

Analyzing the building projects of Herod the Great leads one to the conclusion that the design of complexes is one of their most distinctive features. This is manifested by the planning, to a high standard, of many of his palaces as complexes, as is the case with most of the temples and entertainment facilities. Herod’s palaces excelled in their great variety. The striking complexes among these palaces are: Masada’s Northern Palace; Jericho’s Third Palace; tentatively, the central palace at Jerusalem; and Greater Herodium—the most comprehensive complex. The temples, no doubt, called for initiative in the design of complexes. On one hand are the pagan temple precincts of Sebaste and Caesarea. On the other hand, there is the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, which featured a complex within a complex—the Inner Temple within the Temple Mount. Jericho’s Hippodrome is a most inspiring complex by itself. However, the inauguration festivities of Caesarea were sufficient reason to combine the enlarged palace, a hippodrome and a theatre in a kind of complex. Herod’s sources of inspiration ranged from his predecessors, the Hasmonaeans (e.g. their winter palace complex at Jericho); the Hellenistic architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean (such as at Alexandria and Antioch); the developing Roman architecture—in particular that of Augustus and his milieu (e.g. Forum Iulium and Forum Augustum in Rome); but above all his own ability, based on the combination of a deep understanding in the field of building, profound logic, and a most creative imagination.

An analysis of the building projects of Herod the Great leads one to the conclusion that the design of complexes is one of their most distinctive features. This is manifested by the planning, to a high standard, of many of his palaces as complexes, which also applies to many of the temples and entertainment facilities erected by him.

The wave of building in Rome during the days of Augustus certainly served as one of the sources of inspiration for Herod’s projects following his first visit to that city in 40 BCE. Buildings and complexes, such as the theatre of Pompey and the porticoes fronting it, the Forum Julium,¹ and the Saepta, some of which were still in the process of

¹ Although it still lacked certain elements at the time of its inauguration by Julius Caesar in 46 BCE, and was completed by Augustus some years later; see Roller 1998, 41.
construction, must have made a strong impression on him. However, both in his own country and its neighbours Herod saw and apparently was much impressed by various building projects, most of which were erected according to Hellenistic traditions. The most distinctive local example is the Hasmonaean winter palace complex at Jericho (Netzer 2001 1–174; 301–311) (Fig. 1). However, there might have been other Hasmonaean complexes in Jerusalem and elsewhere. An open question is the role of Iraq el-'Amir in Herod’s realm. It included Hyrcanus the Tobiad’s “floating palace,” which was possibly never completed, but was still standing nearly to its full height in the days of Herod. This was part of a most impressive complex that was inspired by Alexandrian architecture (Netzer 1998; 2000). In any event, Herod had visited both Alexandria and Antioch, the two most important Hellenistic centres.

We shall first survey Herod’s palaces, many of them built as complexes. (However, with the exception of Masada, we shall not discuss the palatial wings within the desert fortresses.) Most of the palaces built in the first phase of his reign (ca. 37–30 BCE) were in fact compact buildings. They included the Western Palace at Masada (and its three satellites, Buildings Nos. 11, 12, 13), which resemble the Hasmonaean Twin Palaces at Jericho (Netzer 1991, 599–604). All of them have oriental elements in their plan.

Included in the category of compact buildings is Herod’s First Palace at Jericho (Netzer 2006 45–49; 262–263), which features both Hellenistic and Roman elements (Fig. 2). However, a personal touch can be sensed in its general organization.

On the other hand the Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem, whose plan can only be conjectured, was according to Josephus a kind of a complex comprised of a royal wing, a military wing and four towers, one at each corner (Fig. 3). In view of the great similarity between the remains of the Mountain Palace Fortress at Herodium and the literary description of the Antonia, it seems that the latter was basically square in plan. Unlike most scholars who place this edifice beyond the “traditional” Temple Mount, a location that rules out a square plan, we believe

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3 There are various viewpoints with regard to the division of Herod’s reign into phases; however, we shall not discuss this subject in this article.
4 E.g., in the organization of the service areas along the building’s northern side, which were approached by separate corridors.