

The Herodium and Oil in Israel

Commentary of May 9, 2007 — Herod's Burial Site Discovered, Along with Oil?

Herod's Burial Site Discovered?

At a press conference by a Hebrew University archaeologist, Prof. Ehud Netzer announced the discovery of the sarcophagus of king Herod. See the news release by Hebrew University: "[Tomb of King Herod discovered at Herodium by Hebrew University archaeologist.](#)"

The location of the Tomb of King Herod had been discovered at the site called the Herodium, which Herod built as a fortress (in case of a rebellion against his rule) and as a site for his burial. Of course, the Tomb has been desecrated and looted, apparently soon after burial, or certainly during the Jewish rebellion against Rome beginning in 67 C.E. If this is indeed the Tomb of King Herod, then historical tradition is correct.

In fact, not much new has been discovered. The general location of Herod's Tomb has long been known. Josephus clearly stated that the Herodium was where Herod was buried. The "new" item discovered were broken portions of an ornate sarcophagus which Netzer concludes was the exact site of Herod's sepulcher. No body or bones have been discovered. Herod died in Jericho and a funeral procession led from Jericho to his place of burial.¹ The Jewish historian Josephus describes the final stage of the procession and internment of King Herod this way:

"... the body was carried twenty-five miles, to Herodium, where he had given orders to be buried. And this shall suffice for the conclusion of the life of Herod."

• **Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 1:673**

See Dr. Martin's reconstruction and explanation of Josephus' account of the funeral procession from Jericho to the Herodium in chapter 8, available online at: "[Astronomy and the Death of King Herod](#)," from his book *The Star That Astonished the World* (Portland, OR: ASK Publications, 1996).

Josephus wrote his account almost 100 years after Herod died. Many scholars have thought that Josephus was mistaken even though Josephus stated he had access to and often relied on historical written sources, including those of Herod's own court historian:

"And even Nicolaus his [Herod's] historiographer makes mention of this monument built by Herod [at the entrance to King David's Tomb], though he does not mention his going down into the sepulchre, as knowing that action to be of ill repute; and many other things he treats of in the same manner in his [Nicolaus'] book; for he wrote in Herod's lifetime, and under his reign, and so as to please him, and as a servant to him, touching upon nothing but what tended to his glory, and openly excusing many of his notorious crimes, and very diligently concealing them. ...

Indeed, a man, as I said, may have a great deal to say by way of excuse for Nicolaus, for he did not so properly write this as a history for others, as someone who might be subservient to the king himself."

• **Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 16:183–184, 186**

1. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 17:173, 191, 194, 196, 199.

The result of Ehud Netzer's announcement is that Josephus' history was correct after all. No inscriptions have yet been found. One hopes that something may be discovered to indicate the date of King Herod's death to confirm Dr. Martin's historical and astronomical calculations that Herod died in 1 B.C.E., and not in 4 B.C.E. as most historians incorrectly conclude.

Herod built the Herodium to commemorate his victory that gave him rule over the Jewish people:

"And in this very place, where he overcame the Jews it was that he some time afterward built a most excellent palace, and a city around it, and called it Herodium."

• **Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 14:360**

For recent background information regarding the Herodium (written before this most recent discovery), see "[Herodium - King Herod's Palace-Fortress](#)." Josephus describes the Herodium, which as a general structure was still extant in his own day:

"And as he [Herod] transmitted to eternity his family and friends [Herod had many of them killed], so did he not neglect a memorial for himself, but built a fortress upon a mountain toward Arabia [from the direction of Jerusalem and Bethlehem], and named it after himself Herodium; and he called that hill that was of the shape of a woman's breast, and was almost eight miles from Jerusalem, by the same name.

He also bestowed much elaborate art upon it, with great ambition, and built round towers all about the top of it, and filled up the remaining space with the most costly palaces all around, insomuch that not only the sight of the inner apartments was splendid, but great wealth was laid out on the outward walls and partitions and roofs also.

Besides this, he brought a mighty quantity of water from a great distance, and at vast expense, and raised an ascent to it of two hundred steps of the whitest marble, for the hill was itself moderately high, and entirely artificial. He also built other palaces about the base of the hill, sufficient to receive the furniture that was put into them, with his friends also, insomuch, that on account of its containing all necessities, the fortress might seem to be a city, but by the bounds it had, a palace only."

• **Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 1:419–421**

More About Oil in Israel

In an intriguing May 3, 2007 internet article "[American Company to Invest \\$50 Million in Israeli Oil Well](#)" it is claimed that a company called Shire International is investing a substantial amount of money in potential oil wells in Israel. However, this information has not appeared anywhere else on the Internet (although the article is widely cited), nor has it appeared as a press release on the Shire International website.

However, if this article is true, for a company to place \$50 million of private investment funds in oil exploration in Israel (which has been risky in the past), this indicates an expectation of substantial success, and a very favorable risk/reward ratio. Discovery of drillable oil in Israel this would confirm Dr. Martin's evidence that he originally published in 1981, which he himself put on the ASK website: "[Oil Soon to be Discovered in Israel](#)."

No one can know whether this and other initiatives to discover oil in Israel will be immediately successful. One thing is clear: as we get closer day by day to Christ's return the nations of the Middle East will see a time of great prosperity. Whether this prosperity comes from discovery of oil, water, or other resources, all nations in the Middle East will prosper, led by Israel.

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