

42 Herodium

Names (also known as)

Herodium or Herodion (from Ancient Greek: Ἡρώδειον; Hebrew: הרודיון, Arabic: هيروديون, Jabal al-Fraidees).

Etymology

Herodion is the only site that is named after King Herod the Great. It was known by the Crusaders as the "Mountain of Franks". Arab locals call it Jabal al-Fourdis ("Mountain of Paradise").

Location/Description



Herodium is a truncated cone-shaped hill, located 12 kilometres (7.5 miles) south of Jerusalem and 5 kilometres (3.1 miles) southeast of Bethlehem, in the Judean desert (currently the West Bank). Herod the Great built a fortress, a palace, and a small town in Herodium, between 23 and 15 BC, and is believed to have been buried there. Herodium is 758 meters (2,487 ft) above sea level, the highest peak in the Judean desert.

Scriptural references

None

Famous characters

Herod the Great

Brief history

In 40 BC, after the Parthian conquest of Syria, Herod fled to Masada. On the way, at the location of Herodion, Herod clashed with the Parthians and emerged victorious. According to the Roman Jewish historian Josephus, he "built a town on that spot in commemoration of his victory, and enhanced it with wonderful palaces... and he called it Herodion after himself" (The Wars of the Jews I, Chapter 13).



Josephus describes Herodium as follows:

"This fortress, which is some sixty stadia distant from Jerusalem, is naturally strong and very suitable for such a structure, for reasonably nearby is a hill, raised to a (greater) height by the hand of man and rounded off in the shape of a breast. At intervals it has round towers, and it has a steep ascent formed of two hundred steps of hewn stone. Within it are costly royal apartments made for security and for ornament at the same time. At the base of the hill there are pleasure grounds built in such a way as to be worth seeing, among other things because of the way in which water, which is lacking in that place, is brought in from a distance and at great expense. The surrounding plain was built up as a city second to none, with the hill serving as an acropolis for the other dwellings." (The Wars of the Jews I, 21, 10; Antiquities of the Jews XIV, chapter 13.9).



Constructed over a small pre-existing hill, Herodium was a fortress for Herod to quickly flee from Jerusalem to a luxurious palace designed for his enjoyment. He chose to be buried here and the mountain is the shape of a tumulus. Herod's tomb was discovered by archaeologist Ehud Netzer in 2007.

Construction

Archaeologists believe that the palace was built by slaves, paid workers (contractors), and architects. Herod was considered one of the greatest builders of his time and was not daunted by geography—his palace was built on the edge of the desert and was situated atop an artificial hill. The largest of the four towers was built on a stone base 18 meters in diameter. This was most likely where Herod lived; he decorated his rooms with mosaic floors and elaborate frescoes. The other three towers, which consisted of living spaces and storage, were 16 meters in diameter. Outside, several cisterns were built to collect water that was channeled into the palace.



Roman siege

Herodium was conquered and destroyed by the Romans in 71 AD. At the beginning of the Bar Kokhba revolt sixty years later, Simon bar Kokhba declared Herodium as his secondary headquarters. Archaeological evidence for the revolt was found all over the site, from the outside buildings to the water system under the mountain. Inside the water system, supporting walls built by the rebels were discovered, and another system of caves was found. Inside one of the caves, burned wood was found which was dated to the time of the revolt.



Sources:

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60 stadia is about 11.1 kilometres (6.9 mi). The actual distance is slightly more—12.5 kilometres (7.8 mi)

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