

## Herod's tomb reported found

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A long search for Herod the Great's tomb has ended with the discovery of remains of his grave, sarcophagus and mausoleum, according to archaeologists. Palestine's Roman-appointed ruler at the time of Jesus' birth, Herod is said in the Bible to have ordered a slaughter of babies in order to be rid of the child. Although the tale is unconfirmed, his notorious sources portray him as having become blood-thirsty in these latter years of his reign, among other things killing three of his own children.

But Herod, who ruled from 37 to 4 B.C., was also renowned for monumental building projects. These included the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the palace at Masada and his greatest project—a complex at Herodium, south of Jerusalem, said archaeologist Ehud Netzer of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The podium, or base, of Herod's tomb. (Courtesy Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

The remains were unearthed there, at Mount Herod's north-eastern slope, Netzer added. Herodium is the only site that carries Herod's name and is where he chose to be buried and to memorialize himself, said Netzer, who conducted the search with colleagues and with the participation of local Bedouins. The team reached the burial site via a monumental stairway leading to the hillside and built, they said, for Herod's excavation—founder of the site. Excavations on the slope of the mountain, topped by a famed complex of a palace, a fortress and a monument, began last August. The location, the unique nature of the findings and the historical record leave no doubt that this was Herod's burial site, Netzer said. But the mausoleum itself was almost totally dismantled in ancient times, leaving only part of its sturdy podium, or base. Among the ruins were a group of decorated urns used to store ashes and chunks of a large, decorated sarcophagus of red-dish limestone and believed to be Herod's own, the searchers said. Notably, this was broken into hundreds of pieces, no doubt deliberately, according to Netzer and colleagues. Jewish rebels apparently destroyed the monument in the years 66-72 during the first Jewish revolt against the Romans, Netzer said. That is when rebels took over the site, according to the contemporary historian Josephus, who also led that uprising. The rebels were known for their hatred of Herod and all he stood for, as what they saw as a puppet ruler for the Romans, though Herod saw himself as a Jew. Josephus described Herod's funeral as magnificent, writing: "The bier was of solid gold, studded with precious stones, and had a covering of purple, embroidered with various colors; on this lay the body enveloped in purple robe, a diadem encircling the head and surmounted by a crown of gold, the scepter beside his right hand."

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