THE ANASTYLOSIS OF THE APSIDAL HERODIAN THRONE NICHE IN THE ROYAL COURT OF THE FORTIFIED MOUNTAINTOP PALACE OF MACHAERUS, OVERLOOKING THE DEAD SEA IN PEREA, JORDAN

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Introduction

The following study focuses on the 2019 anastylosis at Machaerus, in the area of the apsidal niche behind the north-western colonnade of the Doric peristyle courtyard. In the first two parts of this article, the presentation of the archaeological evidence and its research history, together with the relevant literary references, will be presented. In the third part, using the classic method of historical archaeology, we will contextualize the archaeological evidence with the historical sources, giving a clear historical interpretation of the dead monument. Finally, in addition to the literary references, we will contextualize the historical-archaeological legacy with four imaginative artworks as well, the presentation of which was ingeniously close to the historical reality of sacred archaeology at Machaerus. The project of the Hungarian Academy of Arts during April-May 2019 was under the direction of the author, supported by the following team members: Tamás Dobrosi (surveyor), Ueli Bellwald (restorer) and Basem Mahamid (representative of the Department of Antiquities).

Archaeology

The discovery of the royal court of Machaerus happened during the third excavation season of the late Virgilio Canio Corbo OFM (Corbo 1980: 365-376) (**Figs. 1-3**). After the 1980 field season, Corbo asked Eugenio Alliata OFM in Jerusalem to execute the first architectural reconstruction drawing of the newly revealed Doric peristyle courtyard. This was published the following year by Corbo and his co-director Stanislao Loffreda OFM, in the *Liber Annuus* of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (Corbo and Loffreda 1981: Fig. 5a) (**Fig. 4**). Meanwhile, as we can see on Corbo's plan and in the attached contemporary excavation photograph, the area of the Herodian throne seat remained unexcavated under *ca* 2 meters of ancient debris (**Figs. 2** and **5**).

The discovery of the apsidal throne niche behind the north-western colonnade of the Herodian royal court occurred 13 years later, during the second excavation season of the late Michele Piccirillo OFM, but remained unidentified (**Fig. 6**) [Piccirillo took full responsibility for the excavations, with the fieldwork of the 'Cooperativa Archeologia' of Firenze being under his and his architect's direct leadership: *Michele Piccirillo of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum and architect Luigi Marino of the University of Florence, responsible for the project and the realisation of the excavation work* (Bianchi and Faggella 1993: 407). They also thanked *for his precious contribution, Eugenio Alliata of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum as well*, who was at that time the assistant of Piccirillo (*ibid*.: footnote no 2; see also Piccirillo 2004)]. They had so much overlooked the importance of the only curved wall of the Machaerus citadel that their 1993 fake monument presentation completely ignored it. They even built a modern wall in front of it, to hide the apsidal niche (**Figs. 8 and 9**) [This could only have happened by misattributing the semi-circular Herodian wall to the Hasmonean period: *The range of rooms set along the northwestern side of the peristyle probably trace preexistent Asmonaean rooms, as the light stone clearing with respect to the position of the stylo-*

1. Helicopter photograph (2004) of Machaerus in the first rays of the rising sun, looking towards the Dead Sea and Jerusalem in the background (courtesy of ACOR, Jane Taylor Collection).

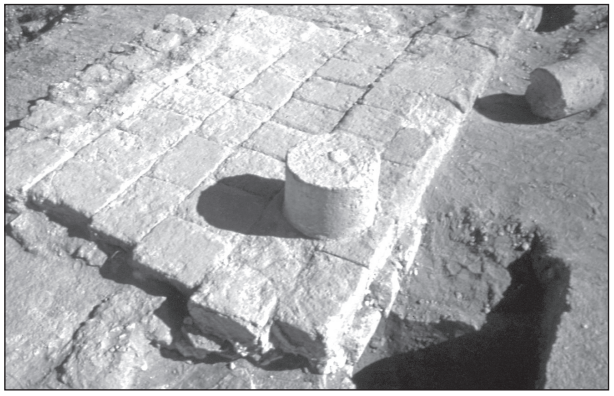
bate of the peristyle seems to testify, and above all, the lack of the connection between the external wall and the structure which defines the triclinium to the north-west (Bianchi and Faggella 1993: 411, footnote no 12). However, they arrived to the opposite conclusion on the same page: *[T]he rooms built to the north-west of the peristyle, must be dated to a phase later than the destruction* [57BC] *of the rooms themselves which, disregarding the period of their actual foundation* ["Asmonaean", as they wrote just above, which means *ca* 90-57BC]*, must have been in use up till the final destruction of the fortress* [which is 72AD]. Finally, they decided to crown their confusion with the erection of a modern wall in: *the lack of the connection between the external wall and the structure*].

It is baffling that they published the apse in their preliminary reports, but left it out of the posthumously published 2017 final report on the 1992-1993 archaeological mission of Piccirillo (Marino *et al.* 2017: 62, fig. 179 [the layout drawing is attributed in the caption to Alliata], 96, figs. 327-328, 97, fig. 330 [In this 2017 Italian academic publication, in a lost relation with reality, the authors celebrated their 1993 fake monument presentation at Machae-

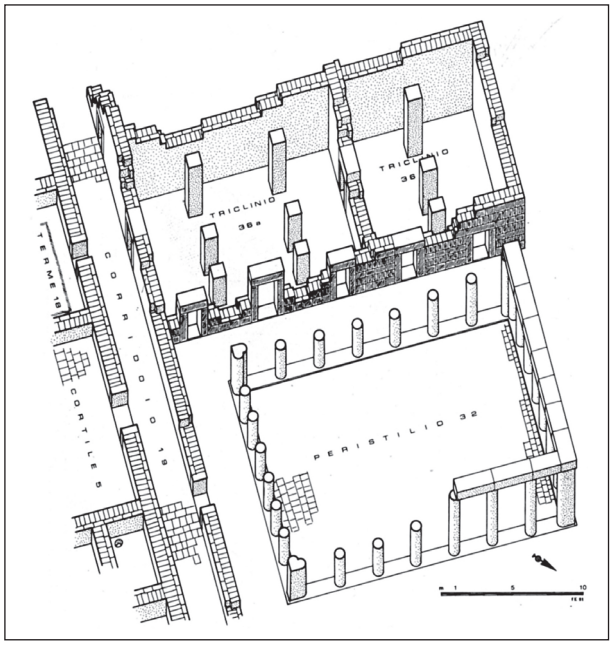
2. The discovery of the Machaerus royal courtyard in 1980. Eugenio Alliata OFM (left) with his two fellow archaeologist-priests and compatriots, Virgilio Corbo OFM (right, under the sunshade of the dig director) and Pietro Kaswalder OFM (above). In the foreground, an unidentified person. The area of the apsidal throne niche (behind Corbo) remained unexcavated under approximately two meters of accumulated ancient debris.

rus, which had by 2014 been 'purified' from the site by order of the Department of Antiquities].

Building (1) a modern covering wall in front of a semi-circular niche was only part of their intentional forgery. In addition to this, they (2) presented the Herodian Doric peristyle courtyard as an Ionic one, (3) faked four partial anastyloses with modern column drums - but on 'original' Ionic column bases and with an original Ionic capital, and finally (4) re-erected on the reconstructed south-western stylobate five attic bases (amongst them two originals)



3. The only in-situ Doric column base that was discovered by the Italian Franciscans in 1980. View from the south. They also discovered a second Doric column drum (or base) (see right side of photograph) that was no longer in situ.



4. The architectural reconstruction of the peristyle courtyard, with the triclinium and main corridor, made by Eugenio Alliata (Corbo and Loffreda 1981: Fig. 5a). The number of columns is correct; we concur that there had to have been several doors from the triclinium to the courtyard, although none could be located.

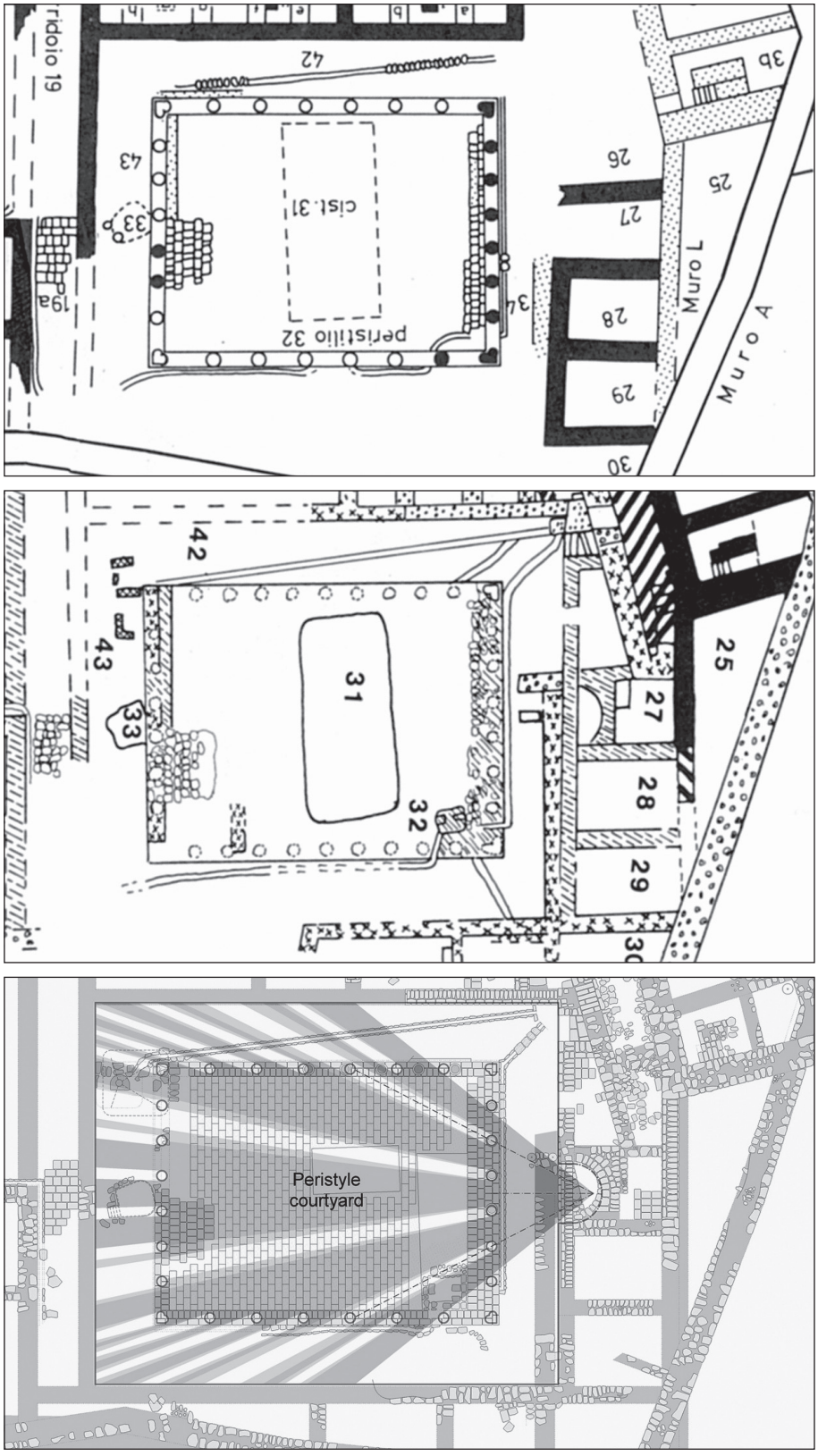
- where there were no columns standing in Antiquity [For the background to the forgery and its 'purification', see Vörös 2015: 24-79].

The archaeological excavations of the Hungarian Academy of Arts, which started in 2009, in 2014 removed all of the above-mentioned false Ionic columns (the architectural elements of which originally stood in the Herodian royal bathhouse), and finally in 2019 removed the fake modern covering wall in front of the now freshly restored apsidal throne niche as well. With this act, the mission of removing the 1993 fake monument presentations from the Machaerus citadel was accomplished.

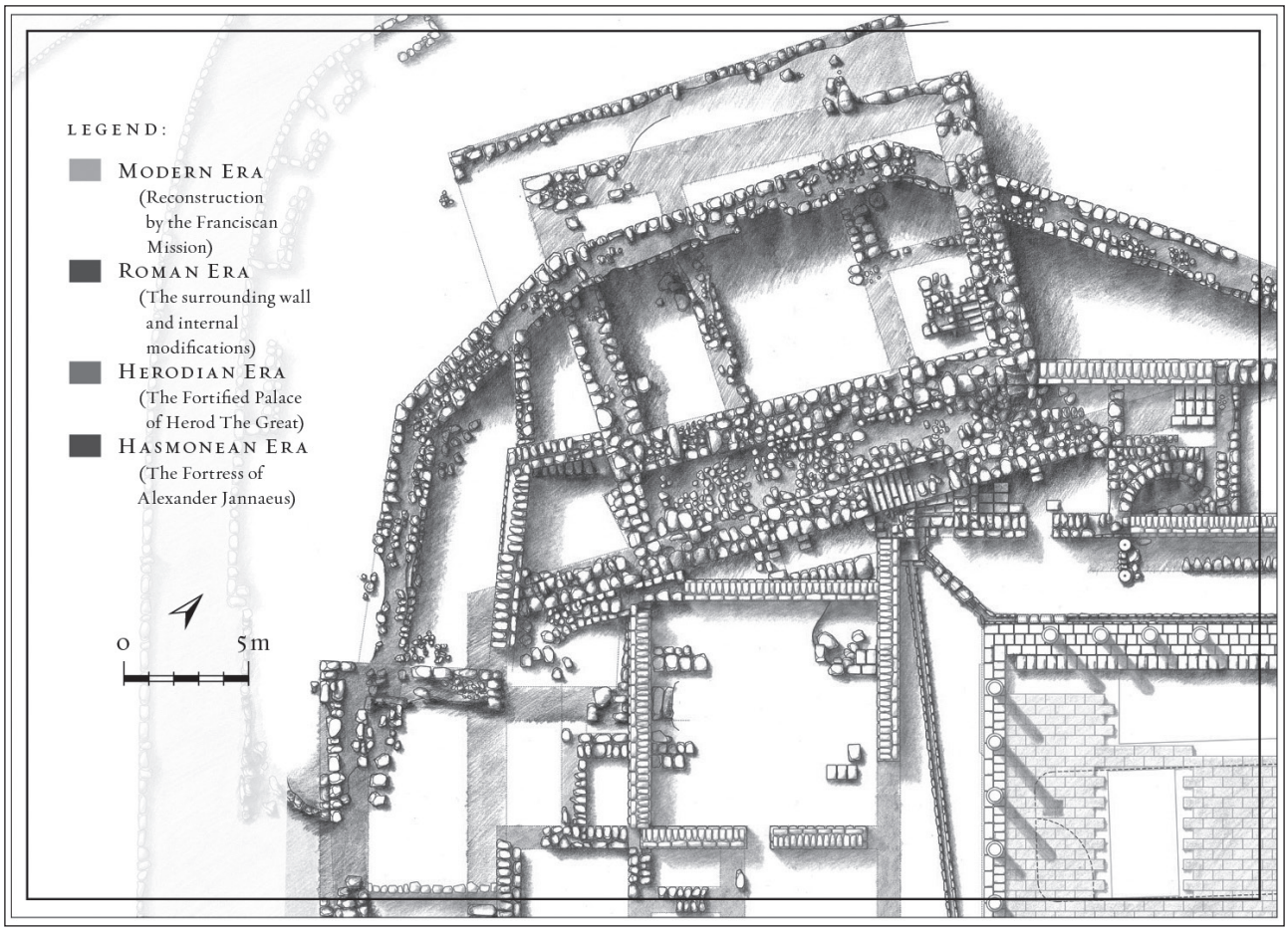
After detailed archaeological studies in the field, we were by 2012 able to reconstruct theoretically the original Doric architectural space, that was designed in the Late Hellenistic canon with the Greek module of 34.5cm (**Figs. 7** and **10-13**) The heart of the Herodian hilltop castle was the royal courtyard. Its alignment was completed on the mountaintop summit using the Pythagorean ratio of 3:4:5 for the right-angled alignment of the architectural space. With the same so-called *pygme*-unit, that is the Greek forearm module (34.5cm or 13.6in, called Pygmaioi [from *pygmê*, the length of the forearm; much smaller than a cubit, it is only the distance from the elbow to the wrist-joint of the knuckles]), they designed not only the courtyard but also the colonnade of the Doric tetrastyle porticus (1 column-base radius = 1 module). The intercolumniation on the short side was two (systyle) and on the long side three (diastyle) column diameters respectively. Vitruvius, chief architect of the Emperor Augustus warned that when columns are placed three column diameters or more apart, stone architraves break (Vitruvius, *De architectura* III 3.4). As no architrave stones survived at Machaerus, most probably the Herodian builders used Lebanese cedar instead of stone.

The surviving Doric column drums derived from similar columns, and not only from one column. In the Doric peristyle courtyard, there were originally 24 similar columns (plus four heart-shaped ones at the corners), of which nine column prints survived on the stylobate (plus two heart-shaped corner-column prints). However, the Herodian Early-Roman-type royal bathhouse was Ionic in style, while the

late-Hellenistic-style courtyard was Doric. This was confirmed not only by the *in-situ* column bases, but also by archaeological artefacts that came to light during the excavation of these two different architectural spaces in the Herodian royal castle. Inside the Apodyterium hall of the bathhouse there could originally have been 12 similar Ionic columns on the crepidoma (with



*5-7. Three subsequent architectural-layout documentations of the peristyle courtyard clearly demonstrate the 1993 error of Luigi Marino (***Fig. 6***), the Florentine architect of Michele Piccirillo OFM. In the first layout from 1980 (top), the number of columns was properly surveyed and documented (graphic; photographic) by the Corbo mission, with eight columns on each of the porticus sides. The black column bases on the stylobates were all based on archaeological evidence, viz. the column prints and only in-situ base. However, for the 1993 reconstruction of the Piccirillo mission (middle), the false notion of 11 columns was fabricated on the longer porticus sides (finally executed as ten), in order to create similar spacing between the columns on all sides of the porticus (with systyle as opposed to the archaeologically demonstrated diastyle intercolumniation on the long sides). They even forged the Doric architectural space as Ionic. The illustration of the Hungarian mission (bottom) shows why the Herodian builders wanted to have eight columns on each side of the 3:4-ratio courtyard. It gave the illusion (in a typical Hellenistic-Alexandrian architectural gesture) that the person in the throne-seat was sitting in his apsidal niche in front of a square architectural space.*



8. The north-western area of the Biblical citadel clearly shows the four different periods of the complex in the direct vicinity of the apsidal throne niche.

much smaller diameters than the Doric drums). In the meantime, from the surviving architectural elements we were able to piece together just one complete Ionic and one complete Doric column. We re-erected these Herodian columns in the very places where the first Franciscan Archaeological Mission found the only two *in-situ* column bases of the Herodian royal castle, in 1979 and 1980 respectively (**Fig. 14**).

Our complete column re-erections fulfil the requirements of monument anastylosis as defined in international conventions on monument presentation. Thus, we used: (1) exclusively original architectural elements, (2) re-erected in the original places and (3*)* as they originally appeared. Their heights fit the classic Late-Hellenistic architectural canons: the Doric column being 11 modules (380cm) and the Ionic 19 modules (475cm). We had serious difficulty with the individual drums, because of the two column entases. The Doric entasis is conical, while the Ionic is cigar-shaped (like a pregnant column). The Doric column even fits the classical 11-module standard of the Greek *pygme* unit of the courtyard perfectly. Both re-erected columns were originally decorated with plaster, giving them the appearance of white marble monoliths.

During the 2019 archaeological field season, after removal of the modern wall in front of the apsidal throne niche, we excavated the

9. This photograph depicts the same area as Fig. 8, with the Dead Sea in the background. View from the north-east.

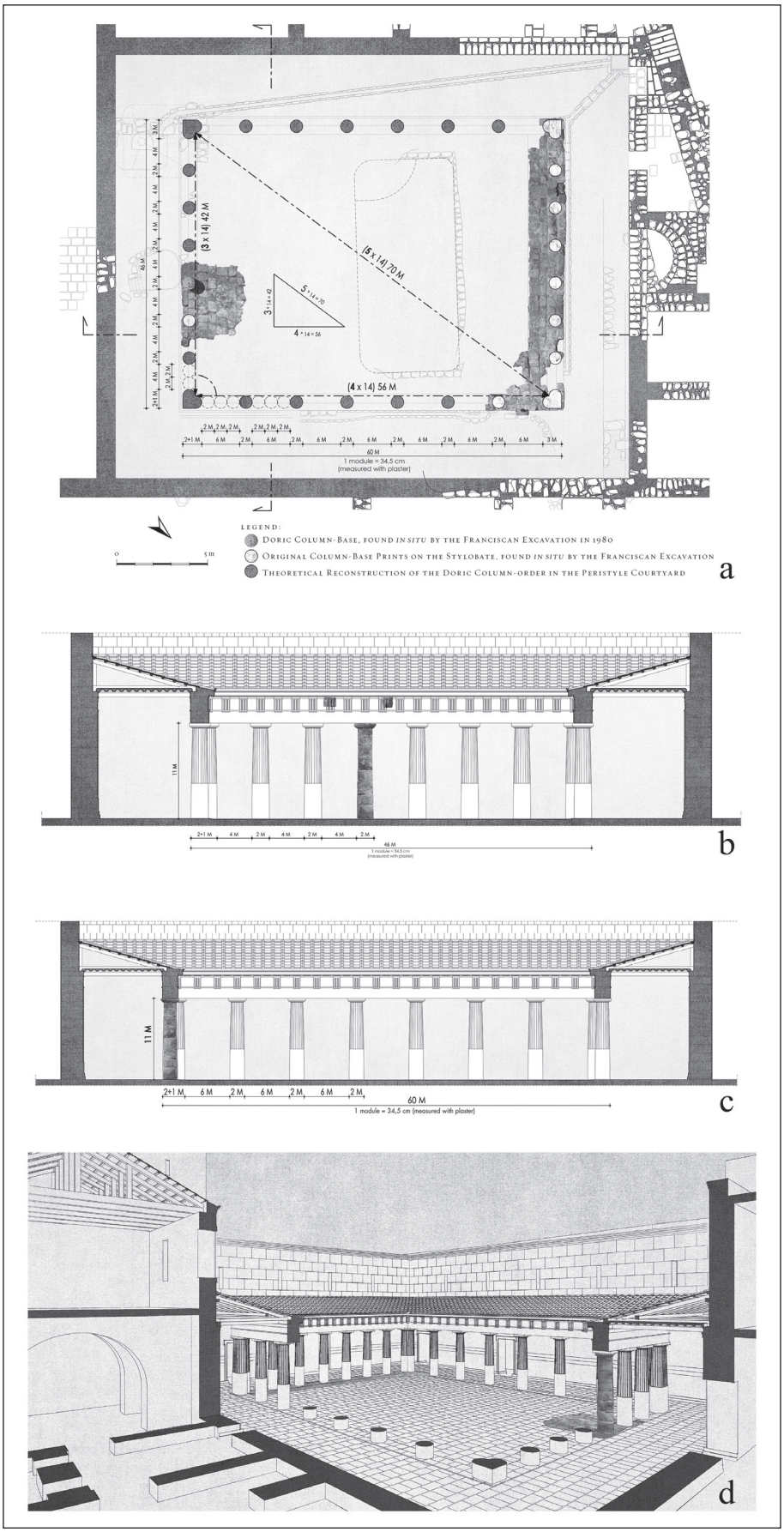
area down to bedrock. After exposing and documenting the foundations of the archaeological area, we re-erected by anastylosis the first row of stones of the apsidal throne niche, to give a 3D understanding of this important architectural space to pilgrims and visitors. As archaeology is a visual academic discipline, in the accompanying illustrations the reader can easily study the nature and scientific details of our fieldwork (**Figs. 15-20**).

History

The Transjordan (Perean) Judean fortress of Machaerus (Gk. Μαχαιροῦς, meaning 'sword') was built by the Hasmonean Alexander Jannaeus in *ca* 90BC (destroyed by Gabinius in 57BC). It was transformed into a royal palace and city by King Herod the Great in *ca* 30BC (destroyed by King Aretas IV in 36AD). From its hilltop location east of the Dead Sea, Machaerus could provide a view all the way to the Temple of Jerusalem, Masada, Jericho and even to Alexandreion. Pliny the Elder (*Hist. Nat.* V. 15, 16) acknowledged that "Machaerus, next to Jerusalem, was once the most strongly fortified place in Judea", in a unique strategic location overlooking the Dead Sea and the West Bank. Historical events at the fortress are narrated by

10. Ground-floor plan of the fortified Herodian royal palace (ca 30BC [destroyed 36AD]). The Herodian architectural legacy of Machaerus has very strong similarities with the well-dated analogies of the Judean palace-fortresses, today in Israel (Netzer 2009: 202-217). The royal palace structure was placed within the ruined surrounding wall of the Hasmonean fortress, the four fortification towers were rearranged, and the water-harvesting system received a second cistern (or maybe even a third one in the southern courtyard). The reconstruction of the Herodian ground plan was initiated by the Corbo mission; Alliata even prepared preliminary architectural reconstructions of the peristyle courtyard and triclinium.

11. The theoretically reconstructed royal settlement had an upper city (citadel) and a lower city (suburb) with a well-preserved surrounding wall. This housed the entourage of the royal court, the Herodian household, during the reigns of father and son, King and Tetrarch Herods. According to our understanding, the lower city would have been the historical place where Saint John the Baptist suffered political house arrest by Antipas, in the company of his disciples. The superimposed 3D architectural model sits on a helicopter photograph (APAAME_20171001_REB-0071). View to the south.



12. The reconstructed space in the Herodian royal courtyard at Machaerus: (a) layout plan; (b) architectural cross elevation; (c) architectural longitudinal elevation; (d) architectural reconstruction drawing. The latter is not an imaginary or suppositional illustration of the royal courtyard. The details are all based on archaeological evidence, as discerned through photomontage of the original architectural elements in the illustrations. During excavation of the lower city of Machaerus, several additional architectural fragments and column elements may come to light that will be incorporated into the next phase of our monument presentation.

Flavius Josephus (*e.g. War* 1.167–174, 2.485–486, 7.171–177; *Ant.* 13.416–418, 14.89–97) and Strabo (*Geographica* XVI, 2, 40). The account given by Josephus that Herod Antipas had John the Baptist imprisoned and executed at the fortress (*Ant.* 18.116–119) compliments the descriptions in the Gospels of Mark (6:14-29) and Matthew (14:1-12), which are in turn confirmed by Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.* I. 11, 4-6). Combining the information given by Josephus and the Gospels, Machaerus can be identified as the scene of the tragic birthday banquet of Tetrarch Herod Antipas, and the place where Princess Salome danced. It is important to emphasize that Machaerus was the only royal palace of King Herod that was inherited by Antipas, and was thus the best symbol of his Herodian legacy and a perfect place for his birthday party in *ca* 29AD (see Luke 3:1-3). After a period of occupation by Judean rebels, the post-Herodian garrison fortress was destroyed by the Romans during the winter of 71/72AD (*War* 7.190–209).

We may reconstruct the 'microhistory' of Machaerus - based exclusively on historical sources - via the following time lines, so as to come to a clear understanding of its one-and-a-half-century history during the Late Second Temple period.

Machaerus Timelines

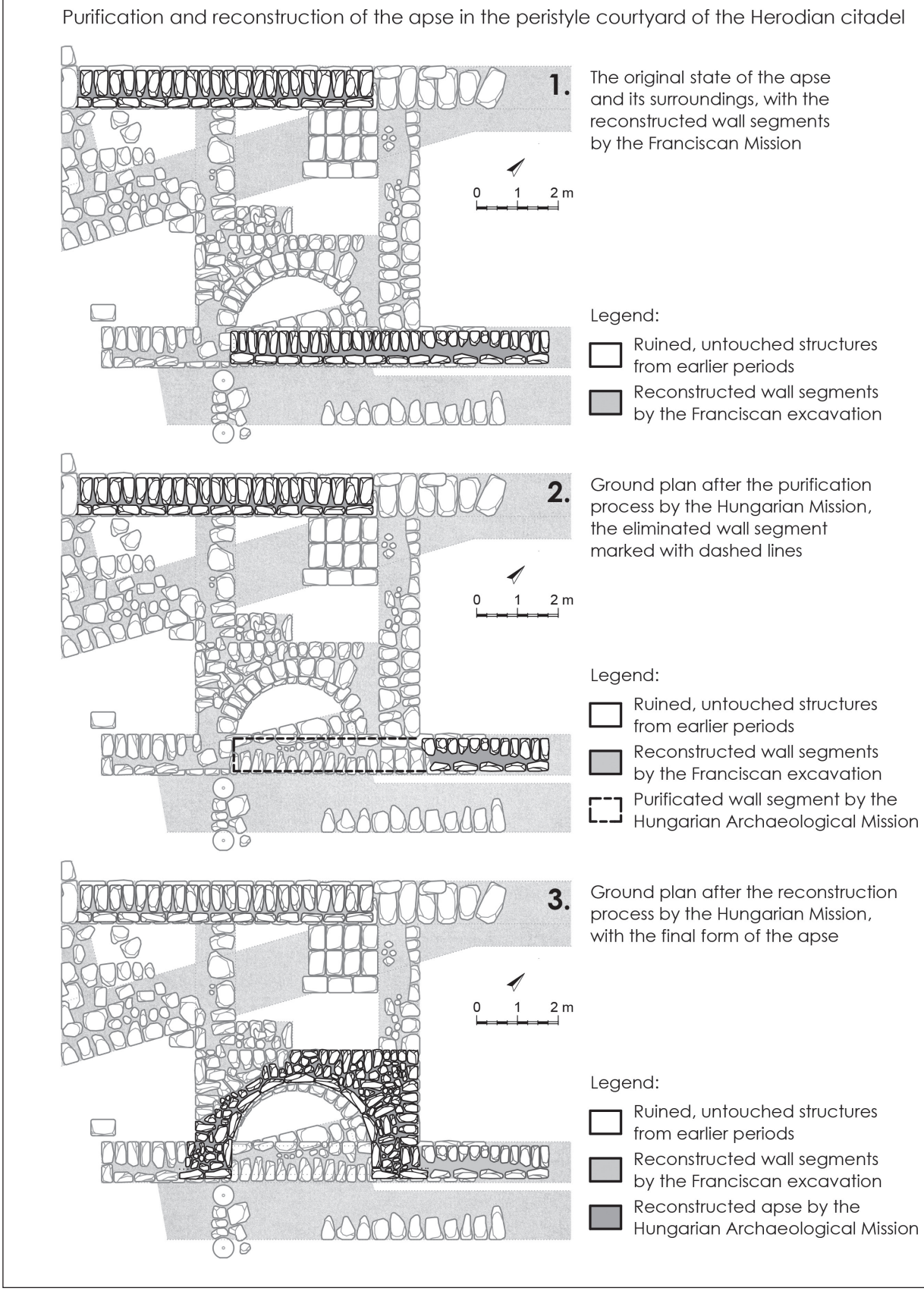
Late Hellenistic (Hasmonean) Period

ca **90BC:** Machaerus fortress was founded by King Alexander Jannaeus; during the reign of his widow Queen Salome Alexandra (76-67 BC) it became one of the royal treasure houses of the Hasmonean rulers until…

57BC: …when it was demolished by the Roman general and Syrian provincial governor Aulus Gabinius. King Aristobolus II tried to seek protection for his one thousand soldiers

13. The 3D architectural model doesn't simply incorporate the colours of the royal Herodian courtyard; the Lithostrotos stone pavement - like the colonnade - is an authentic, faithful reconstruction of the original.

14. The above photograph showing the two complete Herodian columns of the Machaerus royal palace that were re-erected in 2014 became the cover illustration of the 2016(4) issue of American Journal of Archaeology.

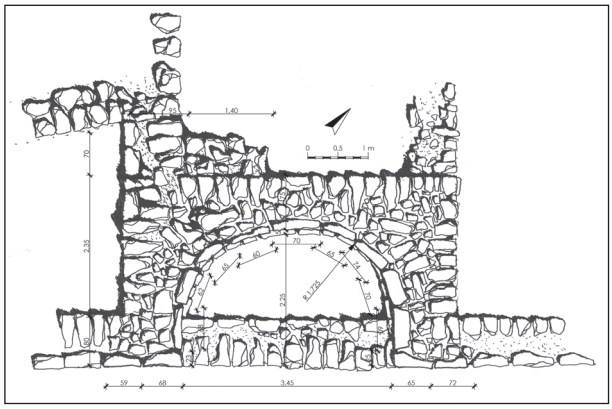


15. Restoration of the semi-circular apse in the peristyle courtyard of the Herodian citadel.

in Machaerus and consequently reinforced the ruined walls, but the Romans captured and destroyed the Hasmonean fortress two days later - for a second time.

Herodian Period

ca **30BC:** King Herod the Great erected a city on the Machaerus hill, surrounded it with walls and towers, and provided it with large cisterns. On the top of the hill, within its citadel, by replacing the ruins of the Hasmonean fortress he built a magnificent royal palace for himself that was reached via a road leading up through the city. Following the death of King Herod in…



16. Graphic documentation of the new monument presentation of the apsidal throne niche behind the porticus corridor of the north-western Doric colonnade of the Herodian royal courtyard. View from above.

17. The semi-circular apsidal niche of the royal Herodian throne seat from the courtyard. The original floor level is lost; probably a staircase led to the throne on an elevated platform.

18. The authentic new monument presentation of the Herodian apsidal throne niche in the royal courtyard of Machaerus, with the Dead Sea in the background. View from the north-east.

4BC: …his son Herod Antipas inherited the fortified city together with the territories of Perea and Galilee; Machaerus was the only royal palace the Tetrarch inherited from his father.

29AD: According to Josephus, Antipas imprisoned and executed John the Baptist within the fortified walls of Machaerus, with the Gospels of Mark and Matthew giving detailed descriptions of the circumstances of his imprisonment and execution. During the confinement of the Baptist, there was an exchange of messages through his disciples between himself and Jesus in Galilee. According to the Gospel of Luke, we can date the event of this imprisonment to *ca* 29AD.

36AD: The Nabataean King Aretas IV Philopatris, once father-in-law of Tetrarch Herod Antipas, defeated the troops of his former son-in-law and destroyed Herodian Machaerus.

Early Roman Period

44AD: After the death of King Herod Agrippa I in 44AD, when the ruins of Machaerus - together with Perea - came under the control of the Roman Prefectus Judaeae in Jerusalem, a military-garrison stronghold was established for the Roman army on the ruins of the original Machaerus citadel.

66AD: The citadel was taken over by the citizens of its lower city, and later reinforced by Zealot rebels. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the Romans - for a third time - conquered Machaerus in…

71/72AD: On the order of Emperor Vespasian, the fortress of Machaerus was destroyed by the Legion X Fretensis under the command of Lucilius Bassus, Roman Legatus of Judea province. Subsequently, the site vanished into the oblivion of human history.

Modern Period

1807 (17 January): Ulrich Jasper Seetzen identified the Machaerus citadel.

1909 (1 January): Fr. Félix-Marie Abel OP identified the lower city of Machaerus.

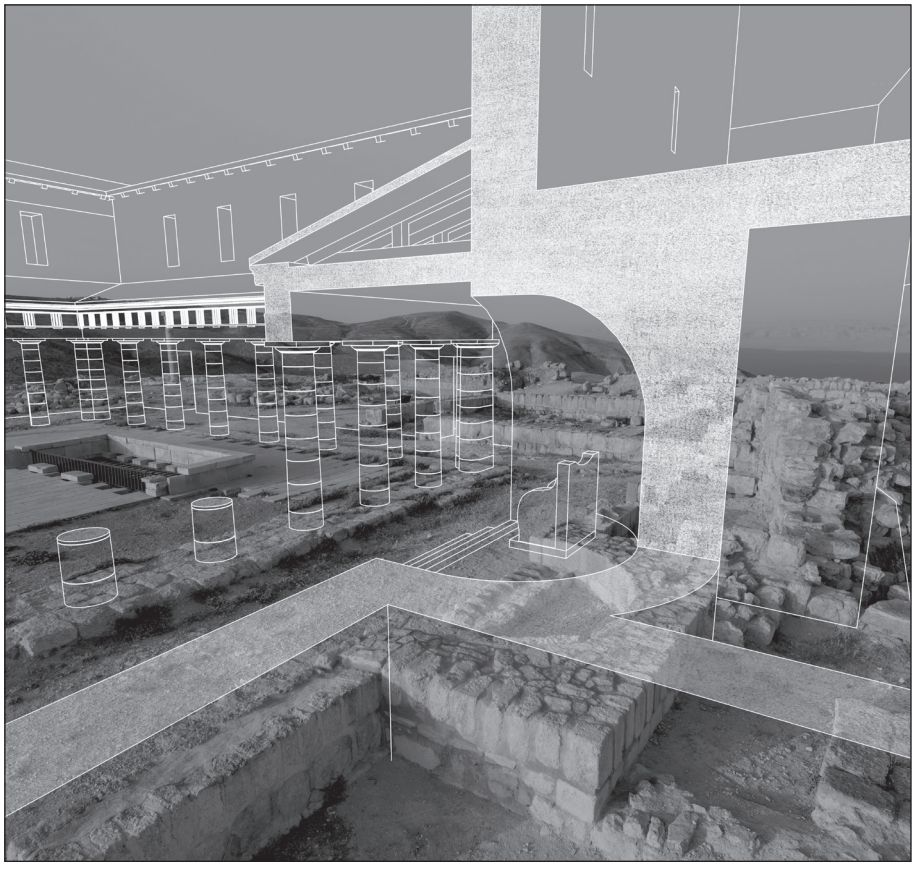
1965–1974: August Strobel surveyed and published the Machaerus circumvallation wall.

1968–2018: Complete excavation of the Machaerus citadel down to the Herodian layer.

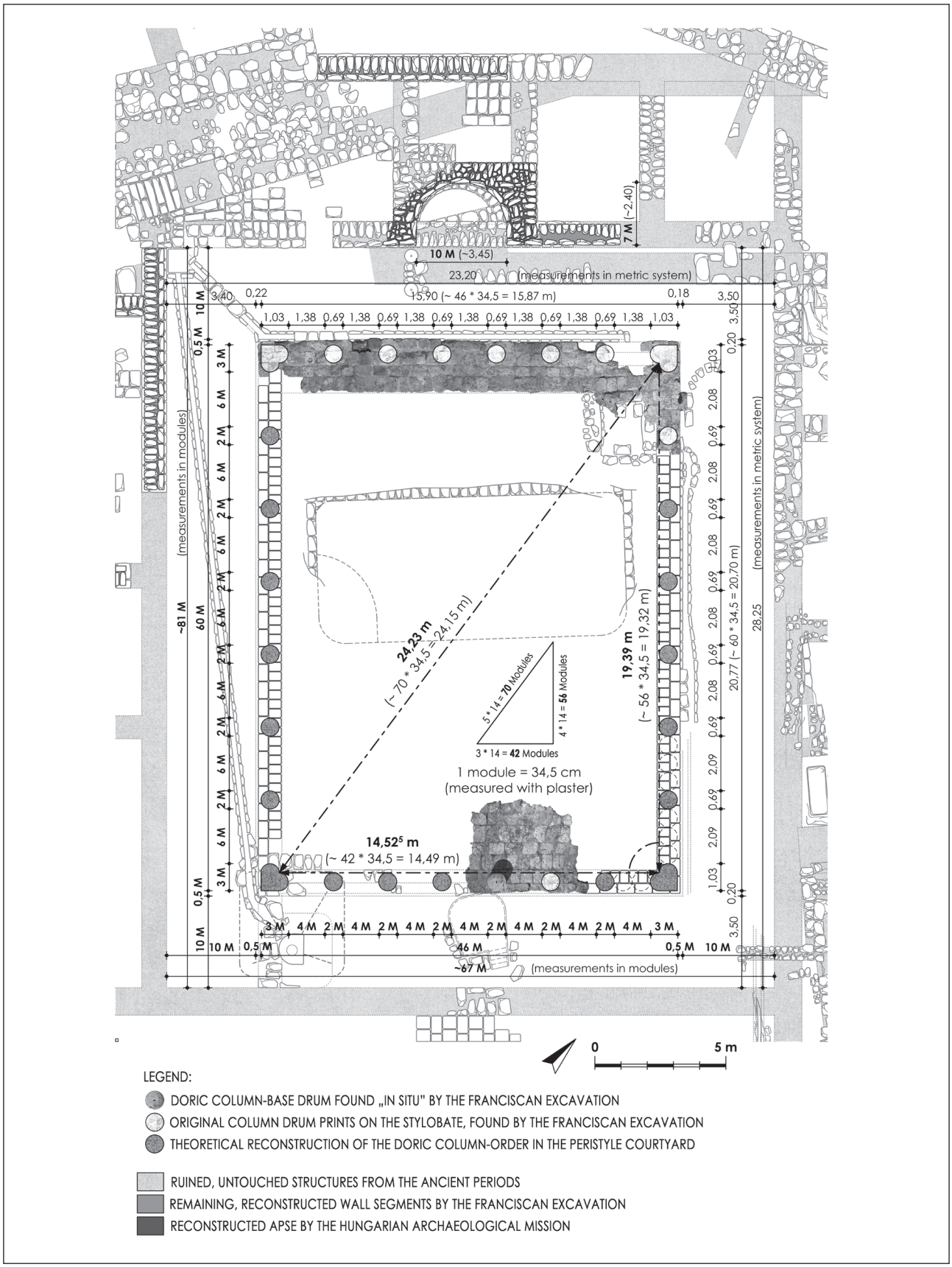
2019: Archaeological excavation of the Hasmonean foundations around the royal throne seat of the Herodian palace.

Historical Archaeology: Contextualizing Relevant Historical References with the Surviving Archaeological Evidence at Mount Machaerus

The above historical sources are in full harmony with the results of archaeological research at the Biblical site. The first fifty years of excavation (1968-2018) were conducted by three academic institutions, *viz*. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1968), Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (SBF) (1978-1981; 1992-1993); Hungarian Academy of Arts and the SBF (since 2009), all in collaboration with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. These excavations revealed the complete fortified Herodian royal palace (for an overview of the history of research at Machaerus 1968-2018 see Vörös 2019: 30-83). In addition to theoretical architectural reconstructions, it proved possible to re-erect with clean anastyloses: (1) a complete Ionic column in the Apodyterium hall of the Herodian bathhouse; (2) a complete Doric one in the central peristyle; (3) the first course of stones of the once magnificent throne seat in the same Machaerus royal court of the King and Tetrarch Herods. The Roman siege by the Legion X Fretensis resulted in a circumvallation wall with camps around the citadel, as at Masada, and an unfinished agger ramp. These latter archaeological remains were discovered by August Strobel in 1965 and published in 1968; he made a detailed survey in 1973 which was published the following year (Strobel 1968, 1974). The lower city of Machaerus was discovered by Felix-Marie Abel OP in 1908, and was partly excavated by Virgilio Corbo OFM in 1981 (Loth-Abel 1997*,* 59; Corbo and Loffreda 1981). The architectural legacy and archaeological material recovered (including epigraphic, ceramic and numismatic evidence) all confirm the detailed description of Josephus. There is no contradiction anywhere; the historical



19. Theoretical architectural reconstruction of the Herodian throne seat, superimposed on a photograph of the surviving ruins in a cut-away view. The Gabbatha-elevation of the bema judgement seat raised on an elevated platform is clearly depicted, with steps leading up to the podium with the throne. View from the north.



20. The complete layout of the Herodian Lithostrotos courtyard at Machaerus is fully described with the ancient architectural alignment system.

references all align with the archaeological evidence (epigraphy: Vörös 2013: 254-277, 2019: 264-271; ceramics: Loffreda 1996; numismatics: Piccirillo 1980).

The once magnificent 660-m^2 royal courtyard, with its still *in-situ* apsidal throne niche on the axis of symmetry, had to be the historical site of the birthday banquet of Antipas described by the Gospels. Many people were invited, even from Galilee in the northern part of his tetrarchy: "An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee" (Mark 6:21). It is not just the largest architectural place in the fortified palace of Machaerus, but the only space where the Tetrarch would have been able to receive such a large gathering of official guests. This Doric courtyard was presumably the very place where, according to Josephus, Antipas made his historical judgment of a death sentence on John the Baptist. Antipas most likely passed judgement from the bema-elevation throne seat of the stone-paved royal court in his Praetorium.

Machaerus was the Golgotha of the Baptist; Jesus himself compared his future death with that of John in the following statement: "'they did not recognise him but treated him as they pleased: and the Son of man will suffer similarly at their hands.' The disciples understood that he was speaking of John the Baptist" (Matthew 17:12-13).

The archaeological remains of the Jerusalem Praetorium (John 19:13), where Jesus was condemned to death by Pontius Pilate, are probably lost. However, we have here - on Mount Machaerus - one of the closest architectural and archaeological parallels of its courtyard, in the former palace of the King and Tetrarch Herods. On the *Gabbatha* ('elevation') of the Machaerus palace even the *in situ* Herodian *Lithostrotos* ('stone pavement') survived in the royal courtyard. Machaerus, the setting for a tremendously important scene in the Gospels, was always an imagined site for Bible, Gospel and religious- or history-book illustrators. As a result of the Franciscan-Hungarian archaeological excavations and architectural 'Lego-puzzle', the historical place and its architectural spaces have been elucidated. Within the walls of this Biblical royal castle lived four figures of the Gospels: King Herod the Great, his son Tetrarch Herod Antipas with his second wife Princess Herodias, and their daughter Princess Salome from the previous marriage of her mother. Today, it's not just possible to visit the archaeological site, but - virtually - we can also explore the spaces of the Passion and Calvary of Saint John the Baptist.

The architectural drawings and computer models of this study are not imaginary or suppositional illustrations of the Machaerus royal courtyard. Insofar as they are detectable through the photomontages and attached architectural illustrations, the details are all based on archaeological evidence. When we put together the information provided by Josephus and the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, it had to be the scene of the tragic birthday of Herod Antipas, where he (from the throne seat) and John the Baptist (facing him) had their conversations: "because Herod was in awe of John, knowing him to be a good and upright man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him" (Mark 6:20).

Without the ten *pygme*-module wide (345cm) porticus-gangway corridor and the same width of the apsidal throne niche, less than 10 percent of the column drums and pavement stones survived, with only one *in-situ* column base and a single capital. However, this fragmented information set up all the necessary details for a complete theoretical reconstruction of the architectural space, including a complete column anastylosis with the proper Doric entasis. During the excavations of the lower city of Machaerus, several additional architectural fragments and column elements will come to light that will be incorporated into the next phase of the presentation of the monument (re. the Golgotha and the Gabbatha of Machaerus, see [in depth] Vörös 2013: 342-363, 2015: 80-89).

History of Art: Contextualizing the Historical-Archaeological Evidence with Representations of the Royal Throne Seat in the Herodian Machaerus Palace

There are tens of thousands of images and representations related to the subject of Herodian Machaerus, such as 'the prison of John the Baptist', 'the banquet of Herod' and 'the dance

of Salome', but especially those connected to the life of the Baptist. These include 'John in prison', 'Herod Antipas listening to John from the throne seat', 'John is sending his followers to Jesus' and 'their return with the message of Jesus to the imprisoned prophet'. The commonest subjects of these representations are the martyrdom of John (also among the most popular illustrations of the Gospels), 'Salome bringing the head of the Baptist on a salver to Herodias' and of course the 'beheading of John the Baptist' itself.

Many of these portrayals of the architectural legacy and material heritage of Herodian Machaerus reflect then contemporary European royal castles and courts. In these fictive representations, the figures wear not ancient, but mediaeval, renaissance or baroque costume. The architectural heritage and spiritual legacy of Machaerus lived on in the world of imaginations, first as Bible illustrations and then as *Biblia pauperum* in the form of frescos, reliefs and icons in churches, and later in the backgrounds of paintings depicting the above-mentioned subjects. It was in 1807 when, after 1,735 'lost years', Ulrich J. Seetzen rediscovered the ruins of the ancient royal castle (Seetzen 1810), and only in 1968 when the ongoing archaeological excavations were started by American Baptist colleagues.

A century before the first archaeological excavations on the Machaerus hilltop, Edward Armitage made in 1868 a fascinating oil painting entitled *Herod's Birthday Feast*. Today it is amongst the treasures of the Guildhall Art Gallery in London (**Fig. 21**). The Victorian painter was an alumnus of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and most probably made this marvellous painting under the literary influence of the French *Machaerous* book of Auguste Parent that was published in Paris the same year (Parent 1868). Since Parent had not written about Doric fragments or the remains of a (half-) peristyle courtyard at Machaerus citadel, the Gospel-scene representation is based simply on the fantasy of Armitage. However, as a brilliant artist, he felt the *genius loci* of the Biblical citadel, and his 1868 painting is the closest to the architectural and archaeological reality of the Herodian royal court of Machaerus in the history of art.

We would like to offer three additional examples of art-historical masterpieces representing the throne seat of Herod Antipas. The first two illustrations are from Florence, but with six centuries' distance between them. The 13th-century dome mosaic of the famous Baptistery of Florence (by an unknown master) is titled in art history as *Saint John Reproaches Herod and Herodias*; it was definitely known by Giovanni Fattori, who painted in 1856 his *Saint John the Baptist Rebuking Herod* that can be found close by, in the Gallery of the Academy of Florence (**Figs. 22-23**). The artistic structure of the two compositions is the same. The throne of Herod Antipas is in an apsidal niche on the right, and he is in the company of Herodias and Salome. John the Baptist is facing the three royals on the left, with a rod in his hand. However, while the anonymous mosaicist imagined Corinthian columns, Fattori envisioned a colonnade with Egyptianized papyrus capitals.

In the meantime, we are convinced that the famous Fattori masterpiece was influenced by another painting as well, one executed a good two decades earlier, that is to say the artwork of

21. Edward Armitage, Herod's Birthday Feast. Oil on canvas (155×277cm), 1868. Guildhall Art Gallery, London.

22. Saint John reproaches Herod and Herodias. Baptistery (dome mosaic detail), ca 1240-1310. Florence.

23. Giovanni Fattori, Saint John the Baptist rebuking Herod ('San Giovanni Battista rimprovera Erode'). Oil on canvas (282×357cm), 1856. Gallery of the Academy, Florence.

24. Antoine Ansiaux, Saint John the Baptist blaming Herod ('Saint Jean-Baptiste faisant des reproches à Hérode'). Oil on canvas (277×326cm), 1822. Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille.

Antoine Ansiaux with the nearly same title and topic. Today it is in the Palais des Beaux-Arts of Lille (see **Fig. 24**). Once again, in the wonderful oeuvre of Ansiaux we can see the same artistic structure as in the two aforementioned compositions, but with closer similarities of detail to that of Fattori. Salome wears blue clothes in both paintings and the two representations of the right foot of Antipas are apparently identical. Furthermore, Ansiaux represents a lion-armed throne, Fattori a sphinx-armed throne. Also, the two paintings are virtually the same size - 282×357cm *vs* 277×326cm - which affords powerful life-sized depictions of the important figures at a dramatic moment in the Gospels.

In addition to the above similarities, in all the three representations:

- John the Baptist is standing barefoot on the left with a rod in his left hand, wearing clothes of camel hair;
- A crowned/diademed Antipas is sitting on his throne on the right;
- The Hasmonean royal princesses, Herodias and Salome, are present;
- The decorated royal thrones are on elevated platforms.

It seems credible that both Romantic painters, Ansiaux and Fattori, knew the mediaeval Florentine mosaic work, and that Fattori also knew the painting of Ansiaux. However, we have to take into consideration the possibility that Ansiaux and Fattori might both have followed a lost antitype tableau as well. Meanwhile, for us it is more important that the three masterpieces properly demonstrate the importance of the relevant Gospel scene in imaginative mediaeval and Romantic visual artworks, that is contextualizing the historical place of the bema in the Lithostrotos-Gabbatha on the Golgotha of Saint John the Baptist.

Summary

In the above study, by combining archaeology, history and art history we have been able to demonstrate that the literary references of the Gospels can be wonderfully contextualized in historical archaeology and with imaginative works of art, when the artists felt the *genius loci*. However, in our view there are only nine historical sites on the Gospel archaeology map of the Holy Land where such an attempt or quest can be executed (**Fig. 25**). Amongst these sacred places, Machaerus has a unique position, one where the archaeological legacy survived as a *ca* 90BC - 72AD 'time capsule' (see 'Machaerus Timelines' above). As Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi rightly confirmed, "In that palatine area that overlooks the Dead Sea, and where now archaeology has revealed in its entirety the relics of its past, even in the pulsation of its ancient daily existence, an act of abuse of power was committed, in all of its brutality. Machaerus, therefore, may today still be an emblem of the many crimes of history, but above all it is an epiphany of courageous witness to truth and justice, as the anthem that serves as a prologue to the fourth Gospel sings: 'A man sent by God came: his name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness to the light, so that all might believe through him' (John 1:6-7)" (Vörös 2019: 18-19).

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25. Historical sites of the Gospels that can be confirmed by archaeological evidence in the Holy Land.

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