



# Masada – The Rock Fortress

## A comparative study of the Northern Palace in relation to the Western Palace

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### Introduction

*“After following this perilous track for thirty furlongs, one reaches the summit, which, instead of tapering to a sharp peak, expands into plain. On this plateau the high priest Jonathan first erected a fortress and called it Masada; the subsequent planning of the place engaged the serious attention of King Herod”* (Joseph. BJ VII.284-286).

The etymological origin of Masada placed in Judaea, Israel is: *Metzad* or *Metzuda* (Netzer 2006, 17) and stems from Hebrew meaning rock. The extensive building program undertaken on Masada was without question one of Herod the Great’s greatest achievements. Herod came to Masada twice before being elected king. Firstly in 42 B.C.E. and again in 40 B.C.E., but he did not begin any construction work at that time. (Netzer 2006, 19; Joseph. BJ I.237, 293; AJ XIV.296, 397). One of the first large projects on Masada is the Core of the Western Palace, begun about 35 B.C.E. (Netzer 2006, 19-24). The construction of the second palace On Masada, the Northern Palace was begun approximately 10 years later (Netzer 2006, 27-32, also see p. 18, 20 for an overview of the Herodian building activity of Masada in all three main phases).

The methodically approach will be two short introductory sections on the research and general history of Masada followed by a thorough analysis and discussion, which will include different aspects such as a topographical, an architecturally and as well as a chronologically one.

In dealing with the architecture of Masada a multitude of questions arise. Among these questions several concerns the relation between the Western- and the Northern Palace.

Why did Herod decide to build yet another palace, the Northern one? What are the dominant architectural features and differences between the two? What influences can be detected in the layout, design and decorative features?

It could as well have been interesting to concentrate on the layout of the whole of Masada. What types of structures do we find there, how do they differ in construction, function and purpose? This study would be meaningful in the context of seeking a broader understanding of Masada as a fortress as well as a home for Herod and his family in general. Due to the limitations of this paper such an undertaking is unfortunately not possible.

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## An outline of the research history of Masada

E. Robinson recognized the precise location of Masada in 1838 based on the accounts of Flavius Josephus (Netzer 2006, 17). Josephus' works have shown to be invaluable since he is the only historical source describing the mount and the geography surrounding it, and as well the events during the Great Revolt against the Romans in the years 66-73 C.E. (Joseph. *BJ* VII. 275-406).

Various scholars have surveyed Masada, but the first one to undertake excavations on a large scale was Yigael Yadin in the years 1963-65. (Netzer 2006, 17 - see as well Netzer's note 2; Yarden 1997, 7-40). The task was a tremendous undertaking considering the organization of the first excavation on the site. The mount is, as learned from Josephus as well, more or less impenetrable from the outside, and there were many practical obstacles Yadin and his team needed to consider before the work could even begin (Joseph. *BJ* VII. 280-286; Yadin 1997, 19-36). The archaeologist next to Yadin, who has carried out the most extensive work on Masada, is Ehud Netzer in close cooperation with a multitude of other scholars. Netzer has primarily been working with the different building phases/rebuilding's, the architecture and layout in general and the design of the structures (Netzer 1991).

The dedicative work carried out by Netzer on Masada among other sites, has provided the archaeological research in Judaea with plenty of new evidence concerning chronology, topography and layout, design and foreign influences.

It was until recently assumed that the site was Hasmonaean in origin due to the above written quote by Josephus (Josephus. *BJ* VII. 285). However, In contrast to the literary tradition, to this date no material finds clearly indicate the existence of Masada during the Hasmonaean Period. It is possible though that a few water cisterns were built during that period. Furthermore, did Netzer undertake soundings in 1989 and again in 1996-97, which proved that the Core of the Western Palace and the three adjacent "Small Palaces" did not stem, as previous believed also by Netzer himself, from earlier than about 35 B.C.E. The time, when Herod began his building projects on the site (Netzer 2006, 19. For further reading on the Hasmonaean structures in Judaea see Netzer 1999). As written in the introduction did Herod visit Masada at least twice before being elected King of Judaea in 40 B.C.E. (Netzer 2006, 19; Joseph. *BJ* I. 237, 293; *AJ* XIV. 296, 397). This may indicate that some sort of structure, probably not built from strong and lasting materials did exist prior to the construction work undertaken by Herod. However, since nothing supporting this hypothesis has been excavated yet, one can only speculate how Herod and his family were accommodated at that time.

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## A historical outline of Masada

The history of Masada is long and troubling. The site has proved to be of vast interest to both Historians and Archaeologist. The two most interesting and important periods in the history of Masada are, the time of Herod and the Zealothian occupation followed by the Roman siege (For further reading concerning the general history of Herod see Günther 2005 and Shalit 2001).

Herod and his family stayed for unknown periods of time on Masada probably from the beginning of the construction work in ca. 35 B.C.E. till the death of Herod in 4 B.C.E. (Joseph. *AJ* XVII. 191). The exact reasons for his staying's are of uncertainty. Did Masada primarily serve as a place for refuge? Did it have a greater political significance or was it equally a place for relaxation and vacations (Forester 1996, 55-56; Netzer 2006, 40; Joseph. *BJ* VII. 300-303)? However, It seems reasonable to believe that the Herodian Family at first found accommodation in the early Western Palace, and about 10 years later in the Northern Palace as well.

After Herod's death, Roman legionaries who maintained positioned there till 66 C.E., when the Zealots, an extremist Jewish group drew them out and captured Masada, garrisoned Masada (Joseph. *BJ* IV. 398-410; Yadin 1997, 16). The structures on Masada stayed more or less intact till the arrival of the Zealot's, who did not construct any major buildings themselves, however, they did make additions and a multitude of rebuilding's (Netzer 1991, with special empathy on pp. 573-655; 2006, 17; Joseph. *BJ* VII. 275-406).

Expounded in the writings of Josephus is the most dramatic event of Masada, which took place in the years 66-73 C.E. During the Great Revolt of the Jews against the Romans the site was besieged in 66 C.E., and eventually finally fell into the hands of Rome as the last standing fortress in 73 C.E. (Campell 1988; Cotton 1989; Richmond 1962).

The Roman general Lucius Flavius Silva was the engineer and mastermind behind the siege, which must have been a very difficult task taking the surrounding geography and harsh countryside into consideration. One only needs to turn to Josephus again to learn just how impenetrable the rock was (Joseph. *BJ* VII. 280-284). However, Silva and his armies succeeded and left a garrison on Masada (Joseph. *BJ* VII. 407).

The fate of Masada from then on is of minor both historical and archaeological interest, and there is as well no evidence of great settlement for example. However, we do know due to survey and excavation that a group of Byzantines lived there in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. (Netzer 1991, 137-147; Yadin 1997, 16).

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## The Western Palace; description

This paper's aim is partly to distinguish the differentiating features of the Western Palace in comparison to the Northern one. The description and following discussion will hopefully shed some light on why a second palace was needed.

The following description will not be a general and overall view of every single unit and room. Instead it will include a short introduction to the structure as a whole and a more thorough description of a few of the rooms, however, only in the Core-section.

### *The Core*

The Core of the Western Palace can, according to stratigraphy and style of building, be dated to ca. 35 B.C.E. This makes the Core one of the earliest structures to have been built on the site (Netzer 2006, 19. *BJ* I. 237, 293., *AJ* XIV. 296, 397.)<sup>1</sup>. Yadin thought that the whole structure of the palace should be dated contemporarily, whereas Netzer detected two main phases of construction. The above-mentioned phase, which includes the Eastern Service Wing, the Western Service Wing and the first stage of the Side Entrance Wing. The later phase should according to Netzer be dated to ca. 15 B.C.E., contemporarily with the grand Casemate Wall. This phase comprises all of the remaining parts of the palace.

Netzer then increased the two phases to a total of four, where the Core is the earliest and the only structure in phase I (Netzer 2006, 21-24).

The Core is almost perfectly rectangular, measures ca. 28 x 23.5-24.5 m and consists of a variety of rooms (Netzer 2006, 21-24). The rooms are surrounding a large open courtyard, Room 441 (Netzer 1991, 245-247; 2006, 22). The courtyard was by far the largest space in the Core (12 x 10.5 m) and was the center of the complex. It was entered through the Open Reception Room 521 (7 x 6.7 m) to the south of it (Ibid.). The reception room opened onto the courtyard via a portico in the form of a *distyle in antis*. The two pilasters and columns were of the Ionic order and painted black and red (Ibid.).

This room was not the sole reception room in the Core. The second one, the Closed Reception Room 458 (8.7 x 6.0 m) to the southeast of the courtyard, was originally termed the "Throne Room" by

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the construction work at Masada see Lichtenberger 1999 as well. For a general overview of Herodian constructions see as well Japp 2000 and Roller 2007. It should already here be noted that there are discrepancies between Netzer's work from 1991 and 2006. The soundings in 1996-97 provided new evidence and the scholar has as well changed his mind regarding several different elements according to his continuously research.

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Yadin. This was due to four hollows in the floor indicating that a canopy for a throne once stood there (Netzer 1991, 247-248; Yadin 1997, 118). Netzer, however, do not believe this to be the case and prefers the designation reception/dining room (Netzer 2006, 252). The room was entered via three doorways in the eastern part of Room 521. It could as well be entered via a short corridor, Corridor 534, in the eastern part of the Core (Netzer 1991, 248; 2006, 23). A possible small dressing room, Room 457, was built west of the corridor (Ibid.).

The so-called “Mosaic Room”, or Room 456 east of the courtyard (8 x 5 m), provided the access to the small corridor south of it (Netzer 1991, 249-250; 2006, 23. For colour photos of the mosaic see Yadin 1997, 124-125). This room had several entrances the main one being in the north. The room itself was divided into two due to another distyle *in antis*. The northern part was paved with plaster, while a large geometrical and floral designed mosaic covered the floor in the southern part (Ibid.). The second interesting feature in this room is the flight of stairs in the northern part that led to the upper story. The second story mainly consisted of bedrooms, which mean that Herod had some of the most necessary facilities taken care of instantly, which again indicate that he himself and his family did stay in Masada from early on for periods of time (Netzer 2006, 23-24).

The Core consist of several other rooms, among them a bathhouse, a *mikve* and some guardrooms etc. (Netzer 1991, 251-263; 2006, 21-24).

### **Later structures**

The structures surrounding the Core display a variety of rooms for many different purposes. The more important ones are built in phase II, the Eastern Service Wing and the Western Service Wing, and in Phase III the Storeroom Wing. The palace preserved all possible necessities in its final stage (Foerster 1996, 57; Netzer 1991, 264-286, 301-307). The decision to expand that quickly after the construction of the Core, and then the additional storerooms soon thereafter as well indicates that there was an immediate demand for service and storage for food and liquids. Here it would be appropriate to mention the three Small Palaces as well, which according to their typological resemblances with the Core, should be dated contemporarily with this (Netzer 1991, 319-359; 2006, 24-27). This would mean that there was also a need for more private dormitories. This can be understood so that Masada now had to comply for the needs of several people. Not only the royal family, but also for all the people who helped run the place on a daily basis.

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## **The Northern Palace; description**

The description of the Northern Palace will also not be a general and overall view of all the different units and rooms we find there. Taken the palace's size into consideration it seems more reasonable to give an introduction to the structure as a whole, which will as well include some geographical and topographical comments. The description will, however, comprise a more thorough analysis of a few selected rooms. Even though one ought to designate the Northern Palace as a complex including at least the Large Bathhouse, this will not be a part of the description and following discussion (Netzer 2006, 265).

## ***The geographical and topographical situation***

Masada is located 400 m. above the Dead Sea. The rock in itself measures approximately 580 m from north to south and 200 m from east to west. It is semi-rhomboid in shape and stands on its own being separated from the cliffs, which partly flanks the rock (Netzer 2006, 17; Yadin 1997, 27). As written previously was the rock according to Josephus close to being completely impenetrable. Whether fortified by man or nature, it was the strongest fortified fortress (Joseph. BJ VII. 280-284; Foerster 1996, 55). There were only two ways of getting to the summit of Masada. Winding its way up the eastern slope was the "Snake Path" mentioned by Josephus. The second path on the western slope was a ramp connected to a smaller track (Netzer 2006, 17; Yadin 1997, 7-40. See as well Netzer's note 3).

The rocks location was without question in every way perfect. It is not difficult to imagine why Herod thought it a great idea to build a fortress here. However, the location also offered complete isolation, and if the fortress was meant as a place of refuge one could not have chosen a safer site.

*"The Northern Palace is the piece de resistance of Herodian construction on Masada and one of the most exceptional edifices erected anywhere by the builder-king."*(Netzer 1991, 134).

This quote by Netzer clearly illustrates just how great an undertaking the construction of the Northern Palace had been. Not only was the palace placed on the mounts northern and dangerously sloping extremity, which must have been an immense task for the engineers and construction workers, it also comprised architectural and design-wise high standard features.

Another mentionable point is that the masonry of most walls in the Northern Palace consisted of light Limestone Ashlars laid in strait courses. Most of the other buildings on Masada consisted of extremely heavy Dolomite stones. This again cements the fact that a new way of thinking, constructing and

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building was necessary to carry out the tremendous task it was to engineer and construct this palace. Fact is that it was the only building besides the fortifications that Josephus mentions. It was famous (Joseph. *BJ* VII. 289-291; Netzer 1991, 134-135; 2006, 27-29).

The placing of the palace can by no mean have been a coincidence. It offered commanding view in three directions, maximum shade and it was completely isolated offering the best safety possible for the king. A point, which is also emphasized by Netzer (Netzer 2006, 29).

The building operations were according to Netzer preceded by a thorough study of the topographical situation. The extremity's resemblance with a ship prow and the extreme drop from the summit cannot have been easy conditions for any architect or engineer (*Ibid.*).

The three rock terraces existed prior to the construction, however; first they had to be levelled by the architects. Hereafter the first step was to build and set up the scaffolding, which have left visible traces in the bedrock (*Ibid.*).

### ***Upper Terrace***

One entered the palace through the Northern Square and Courtyard 90. From the courtyard one had to pass through yet another corridor, Room 93, before accessing the palace proper, on the Upper Terrace that is (Netzer 1991, 102-134).

The Upper Terrace served primarily as sleeping quarters and for reception purposes (Netzer 1991, 137-147; 2006, 30). The terrace consisted of two main parts; the southern one comprised two bedroom suites and a hall termed 80. In the northern part Hall 80 opened onto to a large semi-circular balcony via a portico, another distyle *in antis* (Netzer 1991, 138; 2006, 30).

The bedroom suites each contained two bedrooms and a small corridor. The rooms, corridors and the hall were all lavishly decorated with frescoes and mosaics. Corridor 87 and Room 88 illustrates some of the decorative features well (Netzer 1991, 138-146; 2006, 30).

The balcony is not that well preserved. A pergola of sorts perhaps surrounded it. The foundation of this colonnade is the only surviving part, but many of the column drums have been found scattered around the mount. A small garden could have been placed on the balcony as well. At the western end the flight of stairs leading down to the two lower terraces began (Netzer 1991, 146-147; 2006, 30).

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Rooms 83-85 were of Byzantine origin and were together with Hall 80 and Corridor 80-81 used sometime during that period.

Each terrace was supported and surrounded by high terrace walls. The walls supported the platforms on which the structures were constructed, and as well linked each terrace together as so did the staircases between each level (Netzer 2006, 29).

## ***Middle Terrace***

The Middle Terrace is located 18 m below the Upper Terrace. It is also not well preserved, and only the foundations of the round structure in the centre, laying on a square platform, have been preserved.

The foundations indicate very clearly though that two concentric walls once stood here (Netzer 1991, 148-153; 2006, 30-31). A circular reception hall, which was surrounded by a colonnade once stood on top of the walls. According to Netzer a tholos of sorts. Possibly a belvedere or a smaller banqueting-hall. The colonnade was erected on top of the outer circular foundation walls (Foerster 1996, 58; Netzer 1991, 148-153; 2006, 30-31).

The outer wall had a diameter of ca. 15 m. The distance between the two walls was ca. 3 m, making it a quite massive construction (Netzer 1991, 149-152; 2006, 30-31).

Rooms along the cliff had been constructed in the south part of the terrace. They had different purposes such as an exhibition room for example. The terrace also contained two water installations including a stepped pool, perhaps a mikve (Netzer 1991, 158; 2006, 31. See as well Netzer's note 47 here).

The staircase, Staircase 65, leading to the Lower Terrace was placed in the western part in connection with an Exedra, "Exedra" 57 (Netzer 1991, 155-157).

## ***Lower Terrace***

The Lower Terrace is located another 12 m below the Middle one, a total of 30 m below the Upper Terrace (Netzer 2006, 29).

This is the best-preserved terrace of the three, which is fortunate due to the lavishly decorated central hall, Hall 1 (Netzer 1991, 158-170; 2006, 31-32).

The main feature is the nearly square hall, most likely a banqueting-hall, which was surrounded on all four sides by colonnades. The colonnades had freestanding columns on the outside and engaged ones on the inside, which were attached to the walls that surrounded the hall.



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The southern colonnade, however, featured engaged columns of both sides due to its edge being cut into the rock, which was just beneath the Middle Terrace.

All the columns were of sandstone, of the Corinthian order with Attic bases (Netzer 1991, 159-162; 2006, 31-32. For colour photos see Yadin 1997, 44, 46, 48-49). The engaged columns inside the hall as well as those outside in the colonnades, were of the same dimensions and had the same details, the stuccoed fluting and the Attic bases, but only the ones inside the hall stood on pedestals as well. According to Netzer did the height of the hall defiantly exceed that of the colonnades and clerestory windows were then introduced (Ibid.).

The fresco decorations in the hall were plenty. It seems likely that the whole hall bore these decorations, and that the ceiling due to stucco fragments found in the debris, was also decorated (Netzer 2006, 32).

The terrace did not consist of that many other rooms due to the size of the large hall. Besides the hall, there were two smaller units adjacent to it. The western one, Rooms 12 and 13 (Netzer 1991, 163; 2006, 32), served merely as entrance to the Lower Terrace, and the eastern one showed a unit in two stories; one in level with the hall and the other below it. The lower level served as a Roman Bathhouse, Cellar 16, Room 15, Tepidarium 9, Frigidarium 8, Caldarium 10, Room 11 and Corridor 7 (Netzer 1991, 163-170; 2006, 32), while the upper level according to Netzer probably served as bedrooms for guest (Ibid.).

### Architectural differences and influences

The two descriptive sections concerning the two palaces on Masada make it quite evident that there were great differences both in the layout and design. These differences were partly due to architectural influences.

The first notable difference is the location. The Western Palace is located very geographical and topographical sensible one could say, whereas the Northern Palace is placed on a dangerously sloping mountainside: "The Hanging Palace" (Foerster 1996, 58). The location of the palace does indeed correlate well with its relation to Roman Villa architecture, where one of the defining features is the use and shaping of the landscape (Förtsch 1996, 74-78).

The second notable difference and feature is the fact that the Western Palace has a strong introverted character, whereas the Northern Palace is planned outward taking advantage of the surroundings and the

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landscape.

The Western Palace's centre is the south-eastern part. The Core consisted of, as discussed previously, reception, banqueting, baths and bedrooms.

All the immediate necessities were present so to speak. The other units, constructed in the second and third phase, were never fully integrated into the general plan of the palace. The Core was the nerve and the centre (Foerster 1996, 56).

The Northern Palace consisted on the contrary of a multitude of units built on three terraces all planned and integrated within the same general layout.

Gideon Foerster believes that The Core shows clear Hellenistic influence on one side; however, on the other side the un-unifying tendencies show rather an Oriental influence (Ibid). Foerster recognizes the difficulties of finding comparisons for the palace. He mentions several, one of them being the so-called *Strategeion* at Dura Europos. The resemblance is notable. The *Strategeion* consists of several of the same elements, as well a *distylein antis*. This structure recalls, as is the case with the Western Palace, also Oriental architectural features (Foerster 1995, 56-57).

It has through the paper been underlined that the Northern Palace in every aspect is a highly elaborated and developed piece of architecture.

Foerster has tried, in the same manner as with the Western Palace, to shed light on the significant features and details.

It is according to his research possible to detect both a clear Hellenistic and Roman influence (Foerster 1996, 58-61). Foerster writes: *"The existence of two different traditions side by side, the eastern Hellenistic and the western Italian, should not surprise us; at this point of time took place the first massive encounter with the western art and architecture in Palestine and there had not yet been time for a real synthesis of these two not-so-different cultures. One should add that traditional local Judaeian designs and concepts were also involved in this encounter."*(Foerster 1996, 61).

The quote points to one of the central elements discovered in the layout of the Northern Palace; it does not consist of a predictable uniformity.

Let us have a closer look at some of the components. Most elements in the palace are detected in Roman Villa architecture: the banqueting-halls or *triclinia*, the bedrooms or *cubicula*, baths etc. What is generally not seen is the so-called tholos on the Middle Terrace (Netzer 1991, 148-15; 2006, 30-31).

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The tholos seems to have clear Hellenistic predecessors. Foerster suggests that the tholoi was an essential Hellenistic palatial feature based on several examples, among them palaces in Vergina and Pella (Foerster 1996, 60. See as well Hoepfner et al. 1992 for an overview of Hellenistic Palatial architecture). Besides these direct structural comparisons, depictions of the tholoi have been discovered on tomb facades in Petra. This style apparently reflects an Alexandrian-Hellenistic tendency (Foerster 1996, 60-61; McKenzie 1990).

Foerster sees this as highly likely due to the feature of decorating engaged columns as seen in the banquet-hall, Hall 1, on the Lower Terrace. This form of decoration is in keeping with the popular Hellenistic tendencies detected in some Alexandrian *hypogaea* (Netzer 1991, 158-170; 2006, 31-32; Foerster 1996, 60-61). Foerster's final suggestion is then that the tholos and banquet-hall are Hellenistic in origin, whereas the cubicula with the semi-circular portico in front it on the Upper Terrace (Netzer 1991, 146-147; 2006, 30) and the bath on the Lower Terrace (Netzer 1991, 163-170., 2006, 32) most probably are Italian in design and presentation (Foerster 1996, 61).

Foerster's argumentation finds validation both in the ancient sources and in the architectural remnants. He has proven his points by using the available evidence. Some of his criticism has been directed towards several scholars. It has been suggested by Harald Mielsch that the design of the Northern Palace was completely Roman and is a direct demonstration of Herod's loyalty towards Rome. Foerster of course disagrees, which only seems sensible (Foerster 1996, 59-60). However, Foerster as well recognizes the fact that a traceable larger Roman influence is present in the layout and design of the palace and on Masada in general. This is according to him due to some of the close friendships between Herod and important Roman figures like Agrippa (Foerster 1996, 58).

Netzer agrees with Foerster in his criticism of Mielsch and writes: *"Although a Roman influence can clearly be detected in many of Herod's projects, the claim that this "Romanizing" was primarily a political means of gaining Rome's favour does not appear to me to be correct. Herod was a client king who had been appointed by the Roman Senate, but he was above all a ruler in his own right, and this was recognized by Rome"* (Netzer 2006, 95). However, it does also seem reasonable to believe that his friendship with rich foreigners did bring some new ideas and knowledge to the table. Herod travelled a lot in periods. On these travels he would have been presented to new styles, fashions and impressions. He had his financials covered and could build whatever he wished to (Netzer 2006, 243-245). Based on this fact, it makes perfect sense that Herod perhaps wished to show some international trends off and as well invite foreign craftsmen who already knew the trade to work for him.

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It will probably never be completely comprehended, why Herod decided to spend a massive amount of money and time, in planning and building this Palace. It seems reasonable to suggest that the construction of the Western Palace was due to more sensible needs, whereas the Northern Palace demonstrates elaborateness, boldness and innovation. At the same time, one has to remember that Masada was most likely a place of refuge as well. It has through the analysis been proven that the palace offered it all: complete protection and isolation – comfort, luxury and lavishness.

## Decorative differences and influences

Several interesting decorative features are displayed in the Western- as well as in the Northern Palace (It will not be possible to discuss all decoration types and styles in this paper). Israel was in the Hellenistic Period placed between two influential kingdoms: The Ptolemaic and the Seleucid. This resulted in a constant flow of impressions both from a more Oriental orientated world and the Hellenistic one (Rozenberg 2006, 350). The region of Judaea did at the same time honour their indigenous religious Jewish traditions to some degree, and no excavation has so far revealed depictions of human beings (Fittschen 1996, 150; Rozenberg 2006, 373).

The Western Palace displays several extraordinary mosaics and white plastered walls decorated in the Masonry Style. The Northern Palace shows a wide variety of Wall Paintings and several tendencies and influences are present (Rozenberg 2006, 355).

Firstly, it would be appropriate to comment on the so-called Masonry Style. This style could have derived from Greece, where it was known already in the Classical Period. The style indicated that the whole of the wall was plastered, which was originally more out of practical necessity than decorative means. The style evolved and differed in character and appeared frequently after the fifth Century B.C.E. The most common type of decoration seen in the Masonry Style was the dividing of walls into four horizontal zones, thereafter applying the use of the five-stone scheme (Rozenberg 2006, 350). It seems evident that two tendencies arose in Israel in the period of the Late Masonry Style: a rich polychrome decoration of the upper part of the walls, prevalent throughout the Mediterranean, and an Alexandrian variant of the style, which had immense influence on the Hasmonaean and Herodian architecture. The variant was as well polychrome and often displayed imitations of alabaster and marble veins as seen in the Northern Palace, Hall 1, on the inner walls of the pedestals (Netzer 1991, 159-162; 2006, 31-32; Rozenberg 2006, 351-352. For color photos see Yadin 1997, 44, 46, 48-49).

This clear Hellenistic influence is not the only one exerted in the Northern Palace, which also displays Wall Paintings and Frescoes of the Second Pompeian Style (Rozenberg 2006, 355-356; Beyen 1938).

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However, the so-called Alexandrian variant of the Late Masonry Style seems evident to Silvia Rozenberg in Hall 1, whereas Klaus Fittschen sees a stronger western tendency and refers to parallels in Italy (Fittschen 1996, 146-147; Rozenberg 2006, 352).

The mosaics in the Western Palace show quite the variety as well. The more simple ones, the white mosaic floors, illustrates the simplest composition and is found in most of Herod's palaces. A fine example was exposed in Bathroom 447 in the Western Palace. The type was popular and used in Italy (Peleg and Talgam 2006, 378; Netzer 1991, 256-257). The more extravagant mosaics found in the Palace include the large polychrome mosaic from Room 456 (Netzer 1991, 249-250; 2006, 23. For color photos of the mosaic see Yadin 1997, 124-125). It reveals a complex mix of bands, floral designs, spandrels and geometric patterns. Orit Peleg and Rina Talgam believe that this style derives from Hellenistic mosaic floors, and comparable examples have been excavated in Greece, Asia Minor and Egypt (Peleg and Talam 2006, 379).

## Conclusion

The initial approach to the paper, was that a clear demarcation from the beginning was essential, in order to prevent it from becoming solely a description of the structures on Masada. So many different buildings have been detected and excavated on the site that a fully analysis and appreciation of them all could not have been reached within 15 pages.

The construction of two so obviously different palaces seemed like an interesting study to investigate further. Some of the questions, which immediately came to mind were: why did Herod decide to built yet another palace about 25 B.C.E.? What are the dominant architectural features and differences between the two? What influences can be detected in the layout, design and decorative features?

This task seemed reasonable, but it became clear that the first step would be to establish both an archaeological and historical framework for the paper, which resulted in two short introductory sections.

The fact is that both palaces show significant architectural features. Therefore it was necessary to describe and analyze the layout of the palaces and to elaborate further on some of the features.

Through the descriptive analysis it was possible to detect and shed light on some of the architectural and decorative differences. It quickly became clear that both palaces possessed a great variety of structural elements and influences.

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One of the more surprising discoveries was the fact that it was not a strictly Hellenistic either Roman influence, which could be detected.

The Western Palace revealed a more traditional Jewish tendency, the lack of animals and humans in the mosaics for example, and the discovery of a mikve. At the same time did the layout of The Core and some of the Wall Paintings correspond better to Hellenistic predecessors; for example the more “closed” layout of the palace in general contrast to the Northern one.

The Northern Palace revealed a mixture of influences as well.

The so-called tholos is most likely a Hellenistic feature, whereas several of the other architectural elements show a clear tendency towards Roman Villa architecture: for example the inclusion of the nature in the layout. One of the more complex matters is the question on the predecessors of the Wall Paintings in the Northern Palace, and the exact reasons concerning the construction of the palace.

# Masada – The Rock Fortress

Af DITTE MARIA DAMSGAARD HIORT

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