

Archaeologists say they've found Herod's tomb: The dig at Herodium

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Israeli archaeologists believe they have discovered the tomb of king Herod, the Roman-appointed king over the Jews who reigned from 37 BC until his death in 4 BC and was known for his monumental building projects.

The excavation's chief archaeologist, Ehud Netzer from the Institute of Archaeology at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, announced May 8 that his team had discovered the tomb three weeks before during ongoing digging at Herodium, a once-magnificent palace located several miles south of Jerusalem in what is now the West Bank.

During his reign Herod undertook the reinforcement and expansion of the Second Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and the fortress atop the rock stronghold of Masada.

The New Testament nativity stories say Jesus was born during Herod's reign. The Gospel of Matthew says Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt because the king planned to have the infant Jesus killed. Herod Antipas, son of King Herod, played a role in Jesus' execution, according to the Gospels.

Archaeologists have long based their belief that King Herod was buried at Herodium on the account of the historian Josephus Flavius, who described the king's lavish funeral although not the tomb itself.

Pointing to intricately carved remains from the excavation, Netzer said his team had discovered a grave, fragments from a sarcophagus and a mausoleum on Mount Herodium's northeastern slope. "It was clear that someone had intentionally shattered the sarcophagus" soon after Herod's death, Netzer said, referring to the king's many enemies.

Netzer said his team is certain that the grave they discovered is Herod's despite the fact that neither human bones nor an inscription has yet been found at the site. "It was the quality of the things that were uncovered that led us to understand that this

was the grave of a king,” Netzer said of the finely detailed remains of the sarcophagus, which was decorated with rosettes; the beautifully decorated urns for storing ashes; and the well-built podium of the mausoleum.

“The location and the unique nature of the findings, as well as the historical record, leave no doubt that this was Herod’s burial site,” the archaeologist said.

Eric M. Meyers of Duke University, a prominent U.S. archaeologist, was quoted by the *Los Angeles Times* as saying “it sounds like a royal tomb” because of the context. “I’m one of the most suspicious guys there is, but finding a tomb halfway up the side of Herodium is a pretty good indication that this is it.”