# Royal Converts from Adiabene and the Archaeology of Jerusalem[*]

von Michał Marciak, Kraków

## Keywords

Adiabene, Jerusalem, Queen Helena, Judea

## Abstract

This paper reviews the identifications of the physical remains of the Adiabenean royalty in first-century CE Jerusalem in the light of the latest archaeological research and scholarly discussion. Several conclusions are drawn. First, it is concluded that despite admirably succeeding in changing the past perception of the archaeological landscape of the Lower City of David, the excavations in the Givati Parking Lot still lack any tangible data that could allow for a convincing identification of the recently unearthed structure as the palace of Queen Helena. Second, it is argued that *Le Tombeau des Rois* matches the general geographical, topographical, and architectural requirements for *Helena's Monuments* gleaned from ancient sources, but the most tangible argument is the finding of the unusual two-line inscription on sarcophagus no. 5029, which, if any geographical attribution of the epigraphical evidence could be allowed, is suggestive of both Northern Mesopotamia (Seleucid Aramaic script) and Jewish Palestine (Aramaic "square"/Jewish [formal] script). This, in turn, perfectly matches the historical-geographical heritage of the royal converts from Adiabene. At the same time, there is strong negative evidence for the identification of sarcophagus no. 5029 as that of Queen Helena. The sarcophagus likely belonged to a young female member of the Adiabenean royalty settled in Jerusalem before 66 CE, and most probably to one of the wives of Izates II or Monobazos II.

## Introduction

Recent excavations and surveys in Jerusalem (see Figure 6) have led to a great revival of interest both among the wider public and the academic community in the history of royal converts from Adiabene (a small Parthian *regnum minus* in Northern Mesopotamia),[1] who converted to Judaism in the first century CE.[2]

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[1] For Adiabene in the context of Northern Mesopotamia, see Marciak 2017, 257-418.

We have learned from ancient sources that after their conversion, some members of the royal dynasty emigrated from Adiabene to Jerusalem (Ant. 20:71; Bell. 4: 566-569; Bell. 5: 252-253; Bell. 6: 355) and built several structures there that accounted for some of the most eye-catching landmarks in the city's landscape in the first century CE: a magnificent mausoleum intended as a family sepulcher (see Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 20.95 and *De Bello Judaico* 5.55, 5.119, 5.147; see also Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio* 8.16.4-5; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.12.3; and Jerome, *Epistulae* 108) and three palaces in the City of David (see Jos. Bell. 4.567, 5.252, 6:355). This unusual degree of architectural activity of royal converts in Jerusalem certainly shows two things: their conversion was not an act of political opportunism, but a genuine act of conviction (see Ant. 20:71: Izates II sends his children to Jerusalem to learn the language [γλῶσσα] and culture [παιδεία] of the Jewish nation, which is to be contrasted with the conversions of other royal individuals like Azizus, King of Emesa [Ant. 20:139.142-143], and Polemo, King of Cilicia [Ant. 20:145-146], only for the sake of mixed marriage), and second, the royal converts indeed functioned in Jerusalem on a daily basis, which required creating a convenient space for the daily conduct of royal figures.

The search for the mausoleum of the Adiabenean royalty actually began as early as in the nineteenth century. In 1863, French explorer F. de Saulcy inspected a structure located some 700 m north of the Damascus Gate (on the present Nablus Road, see Figure 6) known as "Qobour es-Salàṭîn" or "Qobour Molouk" in the local Arabic tradition in the nineteenth century CE.[3] De Saulcy's identification of this structure as the sepulcher of the Judahite royalty from the First Temple Period (accordingly named *Le Tombeau des Rois*, which is the name still used today) was very quickly rejected[4] and replaced with another identification – the sepulcher of the Adiabenean royalty. Although this identification has always had a few critics,[5] one may state that it was rather widely held. Recent events have led to a great revival of interest in this sepulcher. Three particularly important events should be mentioned in this

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[2]    Two PhD dissertations were devoted to the royal converts from Adiabene in recent decades – Barish 1983 and Marciak 2012; however, only the latter was published – as Marciak 2014. See its reviews by Atkinson 2015; Jacobsen 2015; Kettenhofen 2015; Lipiński 2015; Nodet 2015; Downing 2017; Caillou 2017. For a short introduction to the history and culture of the royal converts from Adiabene, see also Marciak 2015.

[3]    De Saulcy 1865a, 345-410; de Saulcy 1865b, 309-322.

[4]    Even when presenting the results of his excavations in the *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, de Saulcy encountered fierce critiques related to his identification. See Rochette 1852, 22-37; Quatremère 1852a, 92-113; Quatremère 1852b, 157-169; and Brunet de Presle 1866, 105-138.

[5]    Quatremère 1852a, 92-113; Quatremère 1852b, 157-169; Tobler 1853, 297-322; Gell 1901, 413-419; Slousch 1921, 49-51.

context: first, the new excavations in *Le Tombeau des Rois* by a team of French archaeologists from the *École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem* (EBAF) and the *Institut français du Proche-Orient* (IFPO) in 2008-2009 and 2012;[6] second, the 2010 loan from the *Louvre Museum* to the *Israel Museum in Jerusalem* of the famous sarcophagus discovered by F. de Saulcy in *Le Tombeau des Rois* and often identified as that of Queen Helena of Adiabene; third, the announcement of the *Israel Antiquities Authority* in 2016 that the remains of Jerusalem's third-most northern wall (against which Josephus may have measured the distance between Jerusalem and the Adiabenean mausoleum) have been found.[7]

Likewise, archaeologists have twice suggested during the history of the exploration of the City of David that one of the newly unearthed structures may be identified as a palace built by the Adiabenean royalty in Jerusalem: a famous Israeli archaeologist, Benjamin Mazar, in 1978,[8] and Doron Ben-Ami with Yana Tchekhanovets in 2007.[9] It was especially the latter announcement that made archaeological news headlines in Israel and apparently instigated intense public interest, cumulating in a large number of visitors streaming to see the Louvre sarcophagus on display in Jerusalem.

Two particular reasons have led the present author to review the latest archaeological data from Jerusalem that may be relevant to the history of the Adiabenean royalty in Jerusalem. First, excavations in Jerusalem bring new and important information almost every year (including those led by Doron Ben-Ami and Yana Tchekhanovets, new excavations in *Le Tombeau des Rois* by J.-S. Caillou and M. Le Bohec in 2012, as well as the Russian Compound excavations in 2016, which revealed significant remains of Jerusalem's northernmost wall), and it is important to keep abreast of their most recent findings.[10] Second, several publications about the physical remains of the Adiabenean royalty in

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[6] Murphy-O'Connor 2010, 18-19; Caillou/Le Bohec 2014.

[7] Ngo 2016.

[8] Mazar 1978.

[9] Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2007; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011a; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b.

[10] Marciak 2014 is a slightly revised version of a doctoral dissertation defended at the University of Leiden in 2012. As for the state of the research on archaeological sites in Jerusalem, it essentially stopped in early 2012. The publication of Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2013 is especially relevant as, while this publication deals with the Late Roman layers, it indirectly sheds more light on an Early Roman layer. New excavations in *Le Tombeau des Rois* were also conducted in 2012. See Caillou/Le Bohec 2014. Furthermore, two important publications dealing with royal converts from Adiabene are Lipiński 2015 (linguistic data and interpretation of archaeological data) and Notley/Garcia 2014 (interpretation of archaeological data).

Jerusalem coincided in 2014-2015.[11] In this light, a fresh look at the current state of the research is warranted.

## Adiabenean Palaces and the City of David

Our sole source of information about the palaces of the Adiabenean royalty built in Jerusalem is Josephus' work *De Bello Judaico*. Josephus mentions the palaces in three distinctive accounts: Bell. 4: 566-569, Bell. 5: 252-253, and Bell. 6: 355.[12] It is important to note that Josephus does not describe any of these structures in detail, but only mentions them in passing while reporting on military activities during the later course of the Jewish uprising against Rome in the years 69-70 CE.[13]

It is important to take a look at the topography of Roman Jerusalem in 66-70 CE before we turn to Josephus' references. The walled settlement of Roman Jerusalem in 66-70 CE included several distinctive districts (see Figures 1-2): the Temple Mount, (Lower) City of David, Upper City on the western hill (overlooking the Temple Mount), a walled area within the Second Hasmonean Wall northwest of the Temple Mount, and northern parts enclosed by the Third Wall.[14]

In both Bell. 4:566-569 and Bell. 5:252-253, Josephus presents the outbreak of sectarian struggles among Jewish insurgents in Jerusalem. Namely, in Bell. 4:566-569 we hear that the Idumeans broke away from their former allies, the Zealots under the leadership of John of Gischala (as they were dismayed by the Zealots' brutal conduct, including the kangaroo courts), and allied themselves with the high priests.[15] This episode can be dated to before March/April 69 CE.[16] The Idumeans' actions give us insight into the topography of the besieged city – the Idumeans are said to have pushed the Zealots away first into the palace of Grapte, a relative of Izates, King of Adiabene, and next into the Temple com-

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[11]   Marciak 2014; Notley/Garcia 2014 (interpretation of archaeological data); Lipiński 2015 (linguistic data and interpretation of archaeological data); Caillou/Le Bohec 2014 (new archaeological data from *Le Tombeau des Rois*). See also Ngo 2016 (new information about the Russian Compound excavations).

[12]   Both Grapte's and Monobazos' structures are called αὐλή (Bell. 4:567 and Bell. 5:252, respectively), while Helena's palace is termed βασίλειον (both Bell. 5:253 and Bell. 6:355). In this light, it is tempting to suggest that Helena's palace was the most elaborate. However, it should be noted that Josephus uses the two terms αὐλή and βασίλειον interchangeably in his writings. See Marciak 2014, 164-165.

[13]   See Marciak 2014, 163-166.

[14]   See Magness 2012, 140-162.

[15]   On the military role of the Idumeans in Jerusalem in 69-70 CE, see Marciak 2017. See also Applebaum 2009 and Mason 2016, 409-416.

[16]   Price 1992, 220-221; Vermes/Millar/Goodman 1986, 489.

pound (Bell. 4:567-568).[17] It follows that this particular palace of the Adiabenean royalty was located in the nearest vicinity of the Temple Mount. Given the topography of Jerusalem, it has been further suggested that it was located directly south of the Temple Mount and perhaps close to the eastern slope of the Ophel (part of the City of David immediately south of the Temple Mount).[18] It is exactly in this area that B. Mazar pointed to the remains of a two-story structure as a possible candidate for Grapte's palace.[19] However, in light of the lack of any further clues (e.g., inscriptions), this identification must remain very tentative (as it was actually formulated by Mazar himself: "hypothetical").

In turn, another reference to the palaces of the Adiabenean royalty is made by Josephus in the context of the further increase of sectarian struggles in Jerusalem. Namely, another radical group under the leadership of Simon bar Giora was admitted to the city in March/April 69 CE by the Idumeans and the high priests, who were seeking an additional ally against the group of John Gischala (Bell. 4:550).[20] In Bell. 5:252-253, Josephus describes the territorial extent of control of both radical groups in Jerusalem. In particular, the possessions of the group of Simon bar Giora are said to have included "the upper city, and the great wall as far as Kidron, and as much of the old wall as bent from Siloam to the east, and which went down to the palace of Monobazos, who was king of Adiabene beyond Euphrates." It appears that Monobazos II's palace was, then, located in the area marked by two hallmarks: the old wall (also known as the first wall), which was the southernmost wall of Jerusalem, and the Siloam pool. In this light, Monobazos II's palace must have been located towards the southern extremity of the Lower City of David, north of the Siloam pool and close to the eastern slope of the City of David overlooking the Kidron Valley.

Furthermore, in Bell. 5:253 we also learn that Simon was additionally in control of "the Acra which was none other than the Lower City; he also held all that reached to the palace of Queen Helena, the mother of Monobazos." The palace owned by Queen Helena is also mentioned by Josephus in another ac-

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[17]  The person of Grapte is not attested otherwise, but Izates can be identified as Izates II, King of Adiabene, a famous convert to Judaism (unlike his grandfather, Izates I, King of Adiabene). The relation between the two is described with the term συγγενής, which may theoretically mean a relative (based on blood ties), a countryman (in a wider sense), or even an office court title meaning *the king's friend*. Given the fact that Grapte could own a palace in her own right and alongside both Queen Helena and King Monobazos II (who had their own palaces, see below), it seems that Grapte was a close family member of the Adiabene dynasty. See Marciak 2014, 259-260.

[18]  Vincent/Steve 1954, 236; Bieberstein/Bloedhorn 1994, 397.

[19]  Mazar 1978, 236-237.

[20]  Price 1992, 220-221; Vermes/Millar/Goodman 1986, 489.

count, which, this time, reports the Roman legions' final conquest of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Namely (Bell. 6: 355), after the capture of the Temple Mount, the Romans decided to put fire to the Acra, and the fire reached "as far as the palace of Queen Helena, which was in the middle of Acra" (μέχρι τῶν Ἑλένης βασιλείων ἃ δὴ κατὰ μέσην τὴν ἄκραν ἦν). This description points again to the Lower City of David. In this light, looking from north to south, Helena's palace was located in the midst of the Lower City of David between the palace of Grapte (in the north) and the palace of Monobazos II (in the south).

The recent claim of the discovery of a palace of the Adiabenean royalty has its origin in the excavations led by D. Ben-Ami and Y. Tchekhanovets (under the auspices of the Israel Antiquity Authorities) in the Givati Parking Lot in Jerusalem. The excavation area is situated south of the Dung Gate of the Old City and on the other side of the modern road where the entrance to the Archaeological Park of the City of David can be found.

The project began in 2007 and, as it was planned to be multiannual, is still ongoing (as of 2017).[21] In 2007, the excavation area was divided into two parts (called M1 and M2). Area M1 included the southwestern quarter of the excavation area, while area M2 reached from the end of area M1 in the south to the modern road alongside the Archaeological Park of the City of David in the north.[22] The discovery that is of special importance to the present study took place in 2007 in the M1 area: a substantial late Second Temple layer was uncovered (out of 12 occupational strata unearthed in total). This discovery was discussed by the excavators in several papers, especially in 2007,[23] 2008,[24] and 2011.[25] The Second Temple layer has two parts – northern and southern.[26] The southern part revealed remains of a structure labeled by the excavators as "a large impressive edifice."[27] However, only a northeastern corner of this structure was unearthed in 2007.[28] The structure consists of the eastern (more than 14 m long and 5 m high, approximately 1.5 m thick and built of large, roughly cut heavy fieldstones) and northern walls, as well as parts of the interior

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[21]  More recent findings in the Givati Parking Lot include substantial Hellenistic fortifications (identified by the excavators as the Seleucid Acra, see Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2007; this identification is, however, disputable), as well as several impressive objects, e.g., a hoard of 261 golden Byzantine coins (Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2010) and a Greek abecedary fragment (Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2008b, 195-202).
[22]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2007, 23-24.
[23]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2007.
[24]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2008a.
[25]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011a; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b.
[26]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011a, 231.
[27]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b, 61; likewise in Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2007, 19.
[28]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b, 61-63.

comprising at least three elongated halls preserved to a height of two stories and orientated northwest-southeast.[29] The basement level of this structure was supported by rows of large vaults made of smooth, rectangular-cut limestone ashlars.[30] As judged from fragmentary remains (including scattered fragments, found in the debris, of colored frescoes in shades of red, yellow, and green framed by thick black lines), the structure was lavishly decorated.[31] It was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE (dating based on finds of pottery[32] and coins[33]).[34] According to the excavators, the newly unearthed palatial structure may be identified as the palace of Queen Helena of Adiabene.[35]

It is worth stressing[36] that architectural elements of this building and its walls were reused in a Late Roman mansion (essentially built in the late third or early fourth century and used until 363 CE) erected over the remnants of the Second Temple structure.[37] Its walls were used as solid foundations, while architectural fragments such as column drums and shafts, parapets, and capitals were also incorporated as *spolia* into the Late Roman structure.[38] This reuse certainly adds to the impression that the Early Roman structure was of massive size and elaborate decoration.[39]

In turn, in the northern part of the M1 excavation area a number of plastered water installations were found north of and next to the "large impressive edifice": three baths (interpreted as *miqva'ot* – ritual baths), a rectangular bath, and a large water cistern.[40] Given the fact that several other water installations (a ritual bath and an adjacent cistern) were uncovered in area M2 adjacent to the installations from area M1, this area has been labeled by the excavators as "a large purification annex."[41]

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[29]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011a, 234; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b, 63.

[30]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011a, 2314.

[31]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b, 63.

[32]  See Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b, 69-75.

[33]  See Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b, 78.

[34]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011a, 235.

[35]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2007; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011a; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b.

[36]  Lipiński 2015, 203.

[37]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011a, 233-234; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b, 61; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2013.

[38]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b, 63. In fact, several spectacular objects were found in this Late Roman layer, especially a late Roman bust of a boxer and an impressive gold earring inlaid with pearls and emeralds. See Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2013, 170.

[39]  Notley/Garcia 2014, 39.

[40]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2008a; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b, 63-64, 66-67.

[41]  Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b, 61.

There are certainly two different ways to approach the results of the Givati Parking Lot excavations. On the one hand, they dramatically change scholars' perception of the Lower City, which was once believed to be a dominantly poor neighborhood without elaborate and wealthy structures. As far as we can judge from the extant data, the newly unearthed structure was definitely of considerable proportion and eye-catching ornamentation, and no other such building has ever been uncovered in the past 100 years of exploration of the Lower City of David. In this sense, D. Ben-Ami's and Y. Tchekhanovetz's identification may be labeled as "the intriguing suggestion" or "the best known candidate."[42] On the other hand, the archaeological record for the Lower City of David is incomplete – we do not know (and may never get to know) the entire archaeological landscape of this part of Jerusalem in the first century CE. Because of this, every identification of a structure based only on its scale and character is relative (subject to constant change as the archaeological record grows). Above all, a more plausible identification could be suggested if, for instance, any objects of Parthian provenance were found (not as ethnic but as geographic-cultural markers).[43] Perhaps we would speak about a certain identification if other tangible proof (such as unambiguous inscriptions) was unearthed. However, none of this has been the case so far, and this hinders us from confirming Ben-Ami's and Y. Tchekhanovets's identification.[44]

## The Adiabenean Mausoleum and *Le Tombeau des Rois*

Our knowledge about the resting place of the Adiabenean royalty in Jerusalem comes not only from Josephus (unlike in the case of the palaces of the Adiabenean royalty in Jerusalem), but also from several other ancient sources. The available sources provide us with a number of clues about the location and character of this structure. These will now be presented chronologically and provided with basic philological, archaeological, and historical commentary.

In Ant. 20:95, Josephus tells us that both King Izates II and his mother Queen Helena were buried "at the pyramids" located three stadia from the city of Je-

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[42]  Notley/Garcia 2014, 39.

[43]  There are definitely types of pottery that could be labeled as distinctively Parthian that were also found in Adiabene (for instance, for pottery from Arbela, see Nováček/Chabr/Filipský/Janiček/Pavelka/Šída,/Trefný/ Vařeka 2008, 279-281; for pottery from Nineveh, see Eiland 1996), and it is theoretically possible that some members of the Adiabene royalty may have taken such objects with them to Jerusalem. On the other hand, Jewish sources definitely paint a picture of royal converts from Adiabene as being fully and exemplarily integrated into the Jewish society of the Second Temple Period, which speaks against this possibility. Without Ant. 20:17-96, one could not even guess that they were converts/newcomers/outsiders to Jewish religious and cultural affairs! See Marciak 2014, 129-138, 255-261.

[44]  A similar point was made by Reich 2011. 325.

rusalem, and that the structure was built beforehand on Helena's order. Two particular details of Josephus' report are worthy of commentary. First, there is no doubt that the term πυραμίς (used by Josephus only twice more: in Ant. 2:203 for Egyptian pyramids and in Ant. 13:211 for the tomb of the Maccabees, which is said to have been crowned with seven pyramids) can be interpreted as a crowing element of Hellenistic-Roman graves that was very widespread and can still be seen today in other sepulchral structures in Jerusalem (see Figure 3), as well as elsewhere in the Near East (see Figures 4-5). The crucial question arises as to whether *Le Tombeau des Rois* in its current shape contains such architectural elements. The simple answer is that it does not. At the same time, several explanatory observations have been offered in past scholarship. First, it has been pointed out that the pyramids may have been dismantled at some point in history – especially by the Roman legions while levelling the surrounding area after they moved their camp from Mount Scopus closer to the city walls (Bell. 5:106-108).[45] Second, M. Kon, as well as L.H. Vincent with A.M. Steve, attempted a reconstruction of the pyramids based on the architectonical remains found in *Le Tombeau des Rois*, and, indeed, at least six stones could well fit one conical pyramid like the one at Absalom's Tomb in Jerusalem.[46] Thus, it appears that in this way the archaeologists succeeded in creating the impression that one cannot dismiss the identification of *Le Tombeau des Rois* as the sepulcher of the Adiabenean royalty only on the account of its current lack of pyramids.[47]

Second, Josephus' measurement of the distance (a Greek *stadion* measured ca. 600 Greek feet and was equal to about one-eighth of a Roman mile; this ancient measurement accounts for ca. 555 m[48]) between the sepulcher and Jerusalem has provided for a long-debated controversy. Namely, the extent of Jerusalem's wall in the north (from where the Roman attack came) was not certain for decades. This refers to the northernmost wall of Jerusalem (also known as Agrippa's wall or the Third Wall), the identification of which has been a notorious archaeological controversy for decades.[49] In short, scholars placed the Third Wall either beneath the present northern wall, erected in the sixteenth century on behalf of the Ottoman sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent (and hence also known as the Turkish Wall), or at the line of archaeological remains of

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[45]   N.P. Clarke 1938, 88-89.
[46]   Kon 1947, 20-23, 74-79; Vincent/Steve 1954, 353.
[47]   Marciak 2014, 157. However, the search for the remains of the pyramids was undertaken again in 2008/2009 and 2012 by French archaeologists. The excavations of the western terrace (above the vestibule) turned out to be inconclusive: the remains of two structures were found, but it was not possible to measure their dimensions. See Murphy-O'Connor 2010, 18-19. In 2012, the excavations concerned the northern terrace, and negative evidence was concluded. See Caillou/Le Bohec 2014.
[48]   Liddell/Scott/Jones 1968, 1631; Avi-Yonah 1968, 121; Barish 1983, 186.
[49]   For an overview, see E. Stern 1993, 744-746.

walls running some 800 m west to east at a distance of some 450 m north of the Turkish Wall.[50] Recent excavations in Jerusalem located in the historic district known as the Russian Compound in Jerusalem (see Figure 6) led by R. Avner and K. Arbib under the auspices of the Israel Antiquity Authorities seem to have finally solved the long-debated enigma. Namely, the remains of a Roman-period wall more than 1.8 m wide and a tower were found, alongside more than 70 Roman ballista and sling stones.[51] As far as the sepulcher of the Adiabenean royalty is concerned, Josephus' distance is ca. 555 m, while *Le Tombeau des Rois* is located ca. 700 m from the Turkish Wall (which is too far) and ca. 250 m from the recently uncovered Third Wall (which is, in turn, too close).[52] Thus it seems that there are only two possible conclusions: first, *Le Tombeau des Rois* is located too close to the Third Wall and we must look further north; or second, given the fact that no comparable sepulchral structures are known further north, we cannot put too much weight on Josephus' references.[53] In this context, it has rightly been pointed out that we cannot expect absolute accuracy from Josephus' topographical references since, as has been proven in other cases, he can be both correct and badly mistaken.[54] In this light, we must remain with the general conclusion that the clues that we find in ancient sources about the sepulcher of the Adiabenean royalty only allow for an approximate location and very general idea of the structure's appearance. In turn, *Le Tombeau des Rois* is indeed located in the general vicinity of that approximate location, and its current physical shape generally fits the architectural requirements.

Josephus also mentions the sepulcher of the Adiabenean royalty three times in *De Bello Judaico* (Bell. 5:55, 5:119, 5:147). He names this structure Ἑλένης μνημεῖα – "the Monuments of Helena." Again, none of these references describe the structure as such, but they are made by Josephus only in passing while reporting on the military activities of the Roman legions and Jewish insurgents during the siege of Jerusalem in 69-70 CE. In Bell. 5:54-66, Josephus mentions the Roman approach towards Jerusalem from the north. Some Jewish defenders took the advancing Roman legions by surprise when they left the city "through the gate opposite the Monuments of Helena" (διὰ τῆς ἀντικρὺ τῶν

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[50]  E. Stern 1993, 744-746.
[51]  Ngo 2016.
[52]  Avi-Yonah 1968, 121; Hamrick 1985, 228; Barish 1983, 185.
[53]  Marciak 2014.
[54]  Broshi 1982. Furthermore, given the fact that Josephus (Bell. 2:320, 2:530, 5:149-151, 5:246, 5:504) happens to distinguish between the *City of Jerusalem* (enclosed by the Second Wall) and the *New City* (northern suburbs enclosed by the Third Wall, built only under King Agrippa I in 41-44 CE), it has also been speculated that in Ant. 20:95 Josephus means the City of Jerusalem and not the area enclosed by the Third Wall. See N.P. Clarke 1938, 93-94; Kon 1947, 2-4; Simons 1952, 57-59; Barish 1983, 185-186; Marciak 2014, 158.

Ἑλένης μνημείων πύλης) and made a sudden attack. Similarly, in Bell. 5:109-119 Josephus recalls another Jewish raid during the siege starting at the part of the wall of Jerusalem called the Women's Towers (Bell. 5:109) and reaching "as far as the Monuments of Helena." In turn, in Bell. 5:109-119 Josephus delivers a detailed description of Jerusalem's three defensive walls. In this context, we learn that Helena's Monuments were located between two other landmarks of Roman Jerusalem: east of the Tower of Psephinus and the Royal Caverns. Josephus' reference to the Monuments of Helena in *De Bello Judaico* are useful in two ways: they indicate a general geographic and topographic context and show that Helena's Monuments were an eye-catching element of Jerusalem's landscape in its northern districts. At the same time, their value for topographic identification is greatly limited by the simple fact that the two other landmarks referred to by Josephus, the Women's Towers and the Tower of Psephinus, are not extant. If the Royal Caverns are to be identified with *Salomon's Quarry/the Cave of Zedekiah*,[55] which is a widely held, though not undisputed, identification,[56] only then do we know the easternmost marker of the general location of the Monuments of Helena.

Three later non-Jewish sources also mention the sepulcher of the Adiabenean royalty: Pausanias (second century CE), Eusebius of Caesarea (fourth century CE), and Jerome of Abdera (fourth century CE).

The first reference is made by a Greek writer, Pausanias (who lived in Asia Minor in the second century CE), in his work *Graeciae descriptio* (a sort of travel guide with interesting stories).[57] Namely, in *Graeciae descriptio* 8.16.4-5 Pausanias mentions what he considered to be two of the most magnificent graves in the world: the Mausoleum (the grave of Mausolus, King of Halicarnassus) and the grave (τάφος) of Helena in Jerusalem. However, Pausanias gives only one detail about the physical appearance of Helena's grave. According to Pausanias, it had a secret mechanism: the stone doors to the grave opened on their own once a year, at an appointed time, and shut again in the same way after a short interval. Most importantly, it was not possible to unlock them on any other day without using force to damage the whole mechanism.

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[55] Given the fact that the location of the Third Wall  now seems to be settled (as not being under the Turkish Wall), the Greek term διά 5:147 should be understood as "past" and not "through." See Marciak 2014, 157.

[56] Simons 1952, 13-14, 461, and n. 1; Avi-Yonah 1968, 121; Benoit 1976, 114; Hamrick 1985, 228. The most notable opponent is Kloner 1986, 121-129.

[57] M. Stern 1980, CVIII, 196.

In this context, it should be noted that Pausanias wrote his *Graeciae descriptio* as a sort of travel guide that had to be appealing for its audience.[58] This explains Pausanias' taste for various miraculous details. Furthermore, it is well known that part of Pausanias' knowledge, even when it was acquired on his travels, was based on written or spoken local traditions, which, in many cases, he could not verify.[59] The tomb of Helena was apparently one of such cases. To have been able to verify the tradition of a "secret mechanism" in person, Pausanias would have had to witness the opening mechanism functioning twice, on at least two consecutive years. What is more, he would also have had to make sure that the entrance did not open on its own or in any other way in between those times.[60] This would have involved at least a twelve-month stay in Jerusalem and a sort of vigilant guard on every day and night at Helena's grave, which is extremely unlikely. Thus, even if Pausanias saw the tomb, which in itself is likely,[61] it is extremely unlikely that he saw the mechanism functioning personally. Instead, he must have relied on local tradition for his report on the exact details of the "miraculous" mechanism.[62]

The two other references to the sepulcher of the Adiabenean royalty in Jerusalem in non-Jewish sources are much shorter. In *Hist. eccl.* 2.12.3, Eusebius paraphrases Josephus' account of a great famine in Jerusalem (Ant. 20:101, as well as Acts 11:29-30), but also adds that the graves (στῆλαι) mentioned by Josephus are still shown to visitors in the suburbs of Jerusalem. In turn, in describing the journey of his friend, Paula, to Jerusalem, Jerome writes that Paula "passed Helena's mausoleum on her left and entered Jerusalem." Given the fact that Jerome mentions Paula's last stop before reaching Jerusalem as being Gibeah (probably the site of Tell el-Ful),[63] we can assume that Paula came to Jerusalem from the north through the Mount of Scopus. If the modern Nablus Road even approximately matches the path of the ancient approach,[64] Jerome's testimony suggests the location east of the modern Nablus Road. An ArcGIS 10.5 analysis of the *least cost path* (based on the SRTM Digital Elevation Model) between Tell el-Ful and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem also shows that the least cost path from Gibeah leads through the nearest vicinity of *Le Tombeau des Rois* (see Figure 7).

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[58]   Habicht 1998, 21.
[59]   See Frazer 1913, LXXVI-LXXVII; Habicht 1998, 21; C.P. Jones 2001, 33-39.
[60]   Marciak 2014, 160-161.
[61]   Frazer 1913, XX-XXI; M. Stern 1980, 194; Habicht 1998, 17.
[62]   Marciak 2014, 160-161.
[63]   E. Stern 1993, 445-448.
[64]   Robinson 1841: 362; Kloner 2003: 46*.

The most widely shared identification of Helena's Monuments is *Le Tombeau des Rois*, first explored by F. de Saulcy in 1853. Let us first take a look at the current state of the structure and then overview F. de Saulcy's findings.

*Le Tombeau des Rois* is located north of today's Old City of Jerusalem on the Nablus Road, at a distance of about 700 m from the Damascus Gate (see Figure 6).[65] This sepulchral structure is in fact a very large complex (see Figure 8) that was hewn into the rock below the surrounding surface area and includes a number of distinctive elements:[66] a monumental staircase (9 m wide), a small forecourt with two cisterns, an arched opening leading into the main courtyard (26 by 27 m and cut into the rock to a depth of 8.5 m), a richly decorated vestibule in the western face of the courtyard, the actual entrance to the burial complex, and the underground burial complex itself, which consists of two levels housing one central hall and seven burial chambers (see Figure 9).

Three of the aforementioned elements of the burial complex require more detailed attention: the vestibule, the entrance to the burial complex, and the underground burial complex.

First, there can be no doubt that the vestibule (preceded by three steps) is a high-quality piece of Hellenistic-Roman sepulchral art.[67] The façade (27.5 m long) was of the *distyle in antis* type, with two Ionic columns supporting a richly decorated entablature: the architrave is decorated with interlaced leaves and fruit with a rosette in the center, the Doric frieze above contains a decoration of interlaced triglyphs and discs with a bunch of grapes flanked by two wreaths and acanthuses in the center, and, lastly, the cornice features projecting ledges.

Second, the actual entrance to the underground burial complex (in the southern side of the vestibule) comprises a rock-cut stepped trench descending towards the inside of the burial system (beneath the vestibule's southern face). The trench may be sealed with a rolling stone, which rests in a transverse channel on the left side of the descending trench.[68] This appears to be the basic shape of the entrance mechanism. Additionally, one may also point to visible signs of grooves

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[65] Vincent/Steve 1954, 346.
[66] For modern detailed descriptions, see Küchler 2007, 985-995; Kloner/Zissu 2007, 231-234; and Marciak 2014, 146-162. However, the studies of Kon 1947 and Vincent/Steve 1954 are still indispensable.
[67] For detailed descriptions, see Fedak 1990, 146; Jacoby 1998, 460; Kloner/Zissu 2007, 232; Marciak 2014, 148.
[68] Kloner/Zissu 2007, 232; Marciak 2014, 148-149.

that the stone slab covering the entrance could be put into (in order to cover the entrance with the same pavement as that of the vestibule).[69]

Some scholars have suggested a reconstruction of the mechanism opening the passage to the burial chambers. According to M. Kon, the stone slab concealing the entrance could not be raised from the outside, but only by a special mechanism functioning with the force of gravity.[70] In contrast, J. Fedak suggests that the entrance was blocked only by a rolling stone that could be operated by a simple system of ropes and pits from the courtyard, parallel to other sepulchers of this type in the ancient world.[71] All in all, it appears that the entrance to the underground burial chambers must indeed have been protected, but there is no need to look for an overly complicated opening mechanism to conform to Pausanias' testimony since, as we have already seen, its existence is highly doubtful.

Third, it is important to understand the nature of the underground burial system.[72] The system has two levels. On the upper level, there is a central hall (chamber A, without any burial installations) to which one is led through the entrance from the vestibule and which leads through separate entrances to four other burial chambers (B, D, F, and H). In turn, chamber G can be accessed through a shaft from chamber F, while two other burial chambers, C and E, are located on the lower level and can be accessed through stepped passages in chambers B and D, respectively. It should be noted that chambers G and H do not appear to have been architecturally finished[73] (and chamber H also lacks any burial installations[74]). Except for the central hall and the unfinished chamber H, all other chambers are equipped with different numbers of the two most common types of burial installations hewn into the rock: *kokhim* and *arcosolia*. It is estimated that a burial complex of this scale could serve for the burial of between approximately 40 and 50 primary burials, and even more secondary burials.[75]

Although the structure on the Nablus Road did not remain intact for centuries (both because of its sepulchral reuse after 70 CE and also due to looting over the centuries), F. de Saulcy managed to uncover several objects that are of great importance for identifying the structure.

[69]   Kloner/Zissu 2007, 232; Jacoby 1998, 460; Marciak 2014, 148-149.
[70]   Kon 1947, 54-62.
[71]   Fedak 1990, 146.
[72]   Two different systems for naming chambers exist for *Le Tombeau des Rois*. The first was formulated by Vincent/Steve and is used here, and the second comes from Kon 1947 (followed by Kloner/Zissu 2007).
[73]   Vincent/Steve 1954, 348; Küchler 2007, 994.
[74]   Kloner/Zissu 2007, 233.
[75]   Barish 1983, 166 suggests 40 primary burial places; Kloner/Zissu 2007, 234 suggest 50.

First, a group of thirteen coins were found. The oldest one was minted on be-half of King Herod the Great, and the latest coin is dated to the third year of the Jewish uprising against Rome – that is, from 68/69 CE. [76] This finding sets the primary chronological context for the use of this structure. Second, a num-ber of artefacts of clearly non-Jewish provenance were also uncovered, inclu-ding a figurine of triple Hecate and *urnae* with cremated bones. This in turn suggests a reuse of the complex as a burial place by non-Jews[77] at some point after 70 CE. Third and most importantly, several sarcophagi or their parts were found inside the burial chambers, including the most well-known sarco-phagus with a two-line inscription (no. 5029 in the Louvre Catalogue).

Sarcophagus no. 5029 has sunken panels with six blocked-out discs on all sides of the chest: two on the front and back and one on each side, with a plain and gabled lid.[78] It should be stressed that other sarcophagi (or their parts) are decorated more ornately (mainly with motifs of rosettes, discs, and blocked-out panels in large quantities) than this one.[79] This sarcophagus was found inside burial chamber C.[80] The two-line inscription is placed between the two discs and reads:[81]

צדן מלכתא
צדה מלכתה

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[76]   De Saulcy 1865b, 315.

[77]   On the chthonic cult of Hecate and cremation in Roman Palestine, see Berg 1974, 128-140; Kloner/Zissu 2007, 234; Rocca 2008, 261-262; Kloner 2003, 44*.

[78]   Hachlili 2005, 121.

[79]   It is even suggested that the production of sarcophagus no. 5029 was unfinished. See Foer-ster 1998, 297-298 and Notley/Garcia 2014, 38. For the production and ornamentation of Se-cond Temple sarcophagi (including those coming from *Le Tombeau des Rois*), see Foerster 1998.

[80]   It has been suggested that chamber G, being on the axis with the façade, was planned as the center chamber for the burial of Queen Helena. This idea is architecturally plausible. In this context, it should be stressed that no sarcophagus was found in chamber G. Further-more, Vincent/Steve 1954, 350, 354-355, 360 paid attention to de Saulcy's description, which said that the passage to chamber C, where sarcophagus no. 5029 was found, was filled with debris, including ossuary fragments and partial human remains (de Saulcy 1865a, 375-376), and that part of the sarcophagus lid was sheared off so that it could fit into the passage. According to Vincent/Steve, these circumstances testify to a great deal of haste in transferring the coffin to the secret chamber on the eve of the arrival of Roman forces to Jerusalem. This is plausible, but it should also be noted that the archaeological sub-stance of *Le Tombeau des Rois* witnessed many subsequent intrusions, and therefore nothing very precise can be said about its final moments before the Roman siege of Jerusalem. Furthermore, the speculation that the care shown by the last Jewish owners of the struc-ture points to a specific identification of the person interred in the sarcophagus (especially as Queen Helena) would border on phantasy. The latest excavations by Caillou/Le Bohec 2014 suggest the year 54 CE (the finding of a coin in the final layer) as the end of works on the complex (to be precise, on the staircase and the courtyard).

[81]   Yardeni/Price/Misgav 2010, 165-167.

The inscription is written in two different scripts, classified as the Seleucid-Aramaic script (the upper line) and the Aramaic "square" (or Jewish formal) script (the lower line).[82] The first line reads *ṣdn mlkt'*, and the second one reads *ṣdh mlkth*.[83] Thus, we actually have one personal name (*ṣdn*/*ṣdh*) and one female royal title (*mlkt'* and *mlkth*, meaning *the queen*) written twice in two different scripts.[84] The provenance of the personal name has been much disputed.[85] According to the latest study by E. Lipiński,[86] it goes back to the name $^f$*Ṣi-id-da-a-nu*, attested in Assyria in cuneiform script. The geminated *d* and the vocalization show that the name derives from the same root as Akkadian *ṣuddû*, "to supply with food" and is augmented with the suffix -*ān*. Consequently, the feminine name *Ṣiddān* means "nurse." The lower-line spelling *Ṣdh* can in turn be related to the name Σαδδα, attested in the Damascus area, and Σαδα from Dura Europos. The geminated *d* indicates that it derives from the pa''il of the same root and should thus have the same meaning.

Many scholars have attempted to connect this sarcophagus with Queen Helena. It should, however, be stressed that there is no linguistic connection whatsoever between the personal name on the sarcophagus and the only name that is unambiguously used in ancient sources for the mother of King Izates II of Adiabene – Helena. This name is recorded in both Greek and Mishnaic Hebrew (Ἑλένη and הלני). Furthermore, although the skeleton found in sarcophagus no. 5029 crumbled away after the sarcophagus was opened, anthropological analysis (conducted on very fragmentary remains) indicated that the skeleton was that of a young woman,[87] which disqualifies Helena.[88] At the same time, if any geographical attribution of the epigraphical evidence could be allowed, the paleographical character of the upper line points to the geographic region of

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[82] Yardeni/Price/Misgav 2010, 165-167; Lipinski 2015, 202.

[83] Yardeni/Price/Misgav 2010, 165-167; Lipinski 2015, 202.

[84] The first line is also frequently labeled as Estangelo, or "close to Enstangelo." See Renan 1865, 551-552; de Vogüé 1889, 179; Schürer 1909, 170-171, n. 65; Dussaud 1912, 43; Naveh 1975, 122; Fitzmyer/Harrington 1978, 132; Vermes/Millar/Goodman 1986, 164, n. 66; Drijvers/Healey 1999, 1-21.

[85] For an overview, see Marciak 2014, 153-154.

[86] Lipinski 2015, 202.

[87] De Saulcy 1865b, 316-322 (analysis of Pruner-Bey); Dussaud 1912, 44-45.

[88] Helena was the sister and wife of Monobazos I and the mother of Izates II, and she outlived them both. The reign of Monobazos I is approximately dated to between 5 BCE and 30 CE (with one certain date being the emission of his coin in 20/21 CE). In turn, Izates II's reign is approximately dated to between 30 and 55 CE, but several events can be safely fixed to this reign: the famine in Jerusalem in ca. 44-48 CE, his conflict with the Parthian King Vardanes in ca. 43 CE, participation in the campaign of Meherdates in 49/50 CE, and conflict with Vologases in the early 50s CE. See Marciak 2014, 235-235 and Marciak 2017, 350-359. There is no way that Helena could have been described as a young woman after ca. 50 CE.

Syria and Northern Mesopotamia, while that of the lower line points to Jewish Palestine. This appears to be one of the strongest arguments in favor of the identification of this structure as being connected with Adiabenean royalty. Thus, next to the general context (approximate location and architectonical splendor), the finding of the unusual and geographically telling inscription on the sarcophagus hidden in the sepulcher before 70 CE speaks in favor of the identification of *Le Tombeau des Rois* as the resting place of the Adiabenean royalty in Jerusalem. However, sarcophagus no. 5029 could belong to another female member of the royal courts of Izates II and Monobazos II, especially to one of their wives. Namely, the extant literary sources indicate that a large number of members of the Adiabenean royalty moved to Jerusalem (Ant. 20:71; Bell. 4: 566-569; Bell. 5: 252-253; Bell. 6: 355). What is more, Parthian kings used to have harems, and this custom is attested for Izates II by Josephus (Ant. 20:85 and 89). In this light, it is most natural to assume that if *Le Tombeau des Rois* is to be identified as the resting place of the Adiabenean royalty, then the only intact sarcophagus belonged to one of its female members, who remains anonymous to us – probably one of the wives of Izates II or Monobazos II.

**Conclusions**

In summary, several conclusions can be drawn from the latest state of the archaeological research on structures in Jerusalem attributed to the royal converts from Adiabene. First, although the excavations in the Givati Parking Lot admirably succeed in changing scholars' past perception of the archaeological landscape of the Lower City of David in the Late Second Temple Period (as well as in the times of *Aelia Capitolina*), they still lack any tangible data that could allow for a convincing identification of the recently unearthed structure as the palace of Queen Helena. Second, *Le Tombeau des Rois* is indeed located in the general vicinity of the approximate location indicated by the ancient sources, and its current physical shape generally fits the architectural requirements gleaned from the ancient accounts. However, the most tangible clue is the finding of the unusual two-line inscription on sarcophagus no. 5029, which was found in the pre-70 CE context. If any geographical attribution of the two-line inscription could be allowed, it would be Northern Mesopotamia (Seleucid Aramaic script) and Palestine (Aramaic "square"/Jewish [formal] script), which is very suggestive of the historical-geographical connection of the royal converts of Adiabene. At the same time, there is strong negative evidence for the identification of sarcophagus no. 5029 as that of Queen Helena. The sarcophagus likely belonged to a female member of the Adiabenean royalty that settled in Jerusalem before 66 CE, probably to one of the wives of Izates II or Monobazos II.
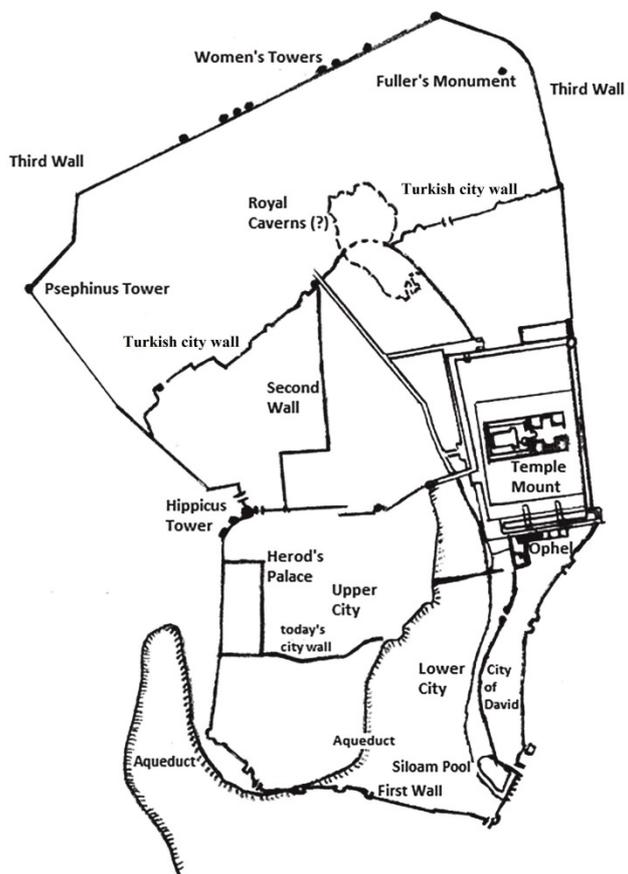
**Figures:**



Figure 1: Sketch of Jerusalem's Districts in the First Century CE (redrawn after J.J. Price 1992)

Figure 2: Temple Mount and City of David (*The Holyland Model of Jerusalem*, Israel Museum; photograph by M. Marciak)

Figure 3: Jewish Tombs in the Kidron Valley (photograph by M. Marciak)

Figure 4: Obelisk Tomb in Petra (photograph by M. Marciak)

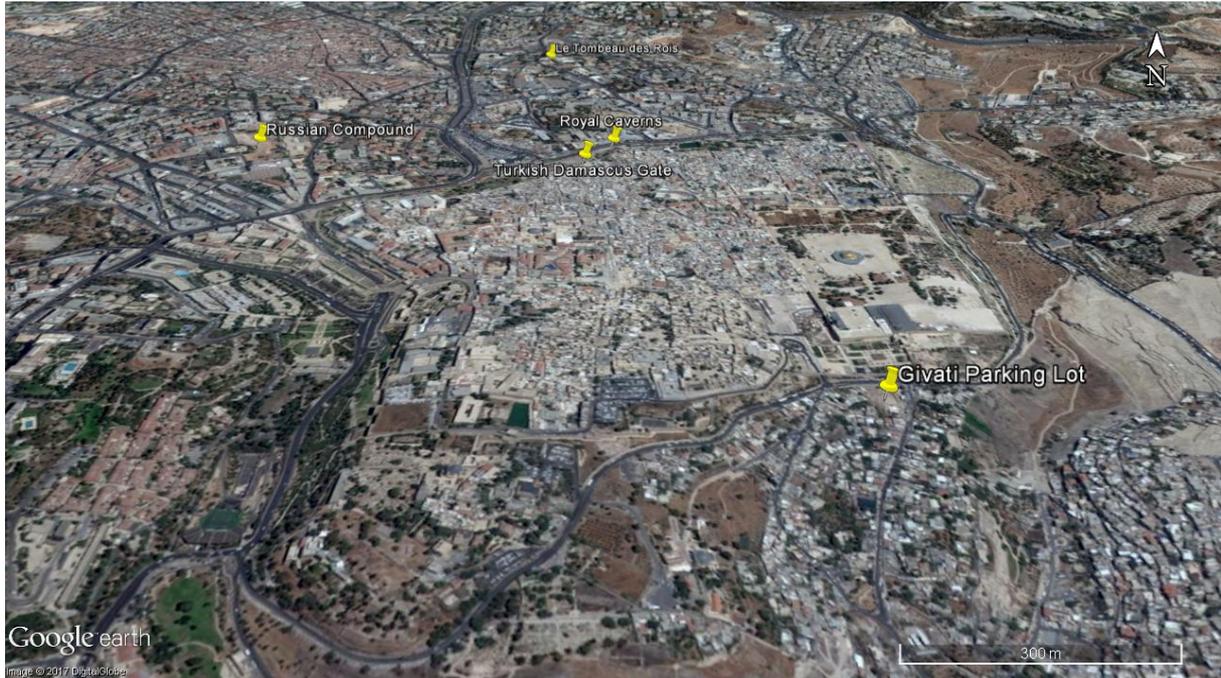Figure 5: Hellenistic Tombs in Elazığ (Ancient Sophene / Modern Southeastern Turkey; photograph by M. Marciak)

Figure 6: Archaeological Sites and Modern Jerusalem (Google Earth Pro Image)
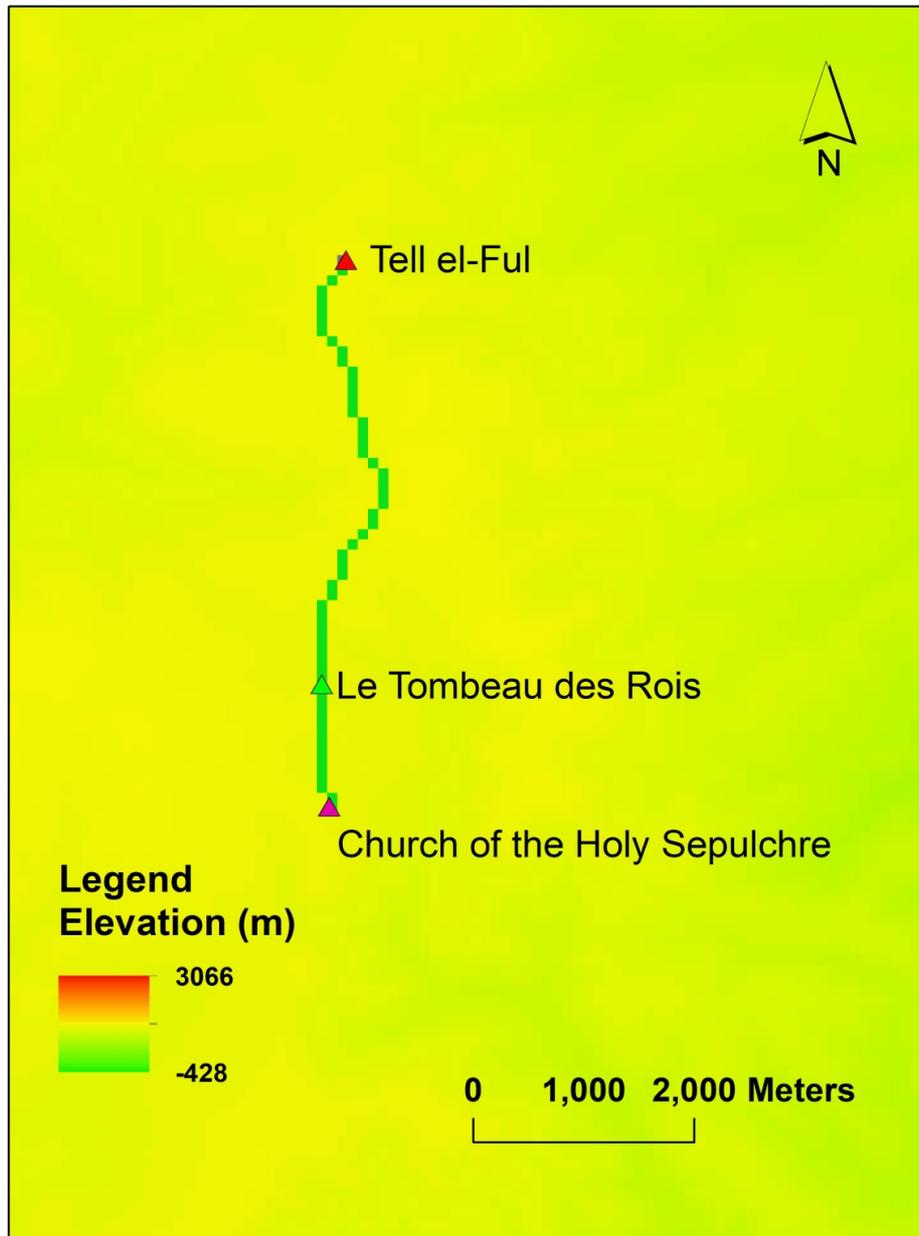
Figure 7: Least Cost Path Analysis Between Tell el-Ful and Church of the Holy Sepulchre (M. Marciak)
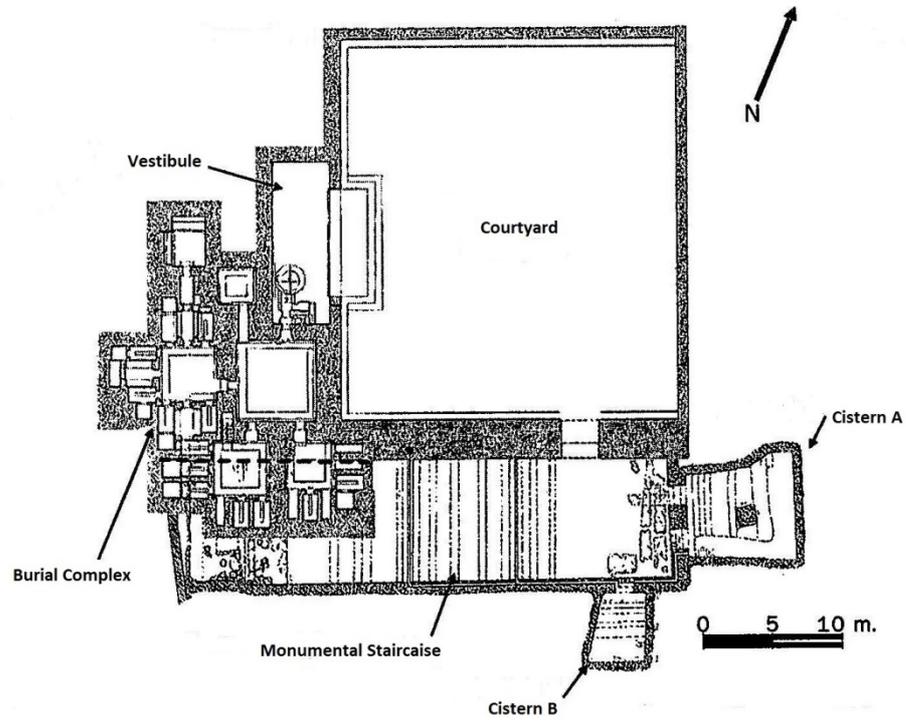
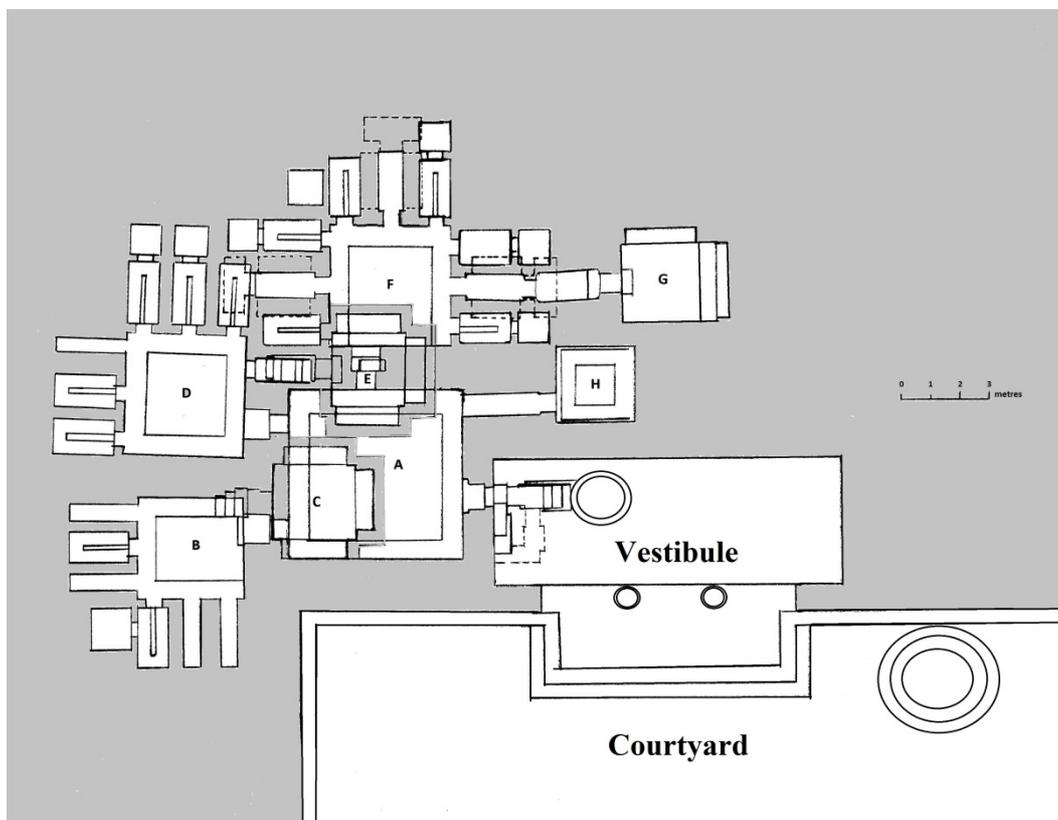Figure 8: Plan of *Le Tombeau des Rois* (after Kloner / Zissu 2007, 611)

Figure 9 : Plan of *Le Tombeau des Rois* including the underground chambers
(redrawn after Vincent/Steve 1954, pl. LXXXIX)

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Dr. Michał Marciak
Uniwersytet Jagielloński
Instytut Judaistyki
Józefa 19
PL–Kraków 31-056
E-Mail: Michal.marciak@gmail.com