

Herodian Jerusalem in the Light of the Excavations South and South-West of the Temple Mount*

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THE archaeological project south and south-west of the Temple Mount, conducted continuously since 1968 on behalf of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Israel Exploration Society, has concentrated mainly on the area called the Ophel — the upper part of the south-eastern spur of Jerusalem, stretching southwards from Mount Moriah to the City of David — and on the western slope of that hill, towards the central valley (the Tyropoeon) and eastwards towards the Kidron Valley. As the excavations have shown, this was one of the focal points of settlement in the city in the period of the Second Temple, in Byzantine times and under the Umayyads.

In the present article, we shall concentrate particularly upon the splendid picture revealed in the area adjacent to the Temple Enclosure concerning the Herodian period, from the beginnings of Herod's huge construction project until the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman legions in A.D. 70. Herod's building activities brought about a decisive change in the topography of this area, in which the Temple Enclosure was doubled in area, adjacent valleys were filled in, the entire platform was enclosed and porticoes were built all around the Temple, with emphasis upon the southern one, the Royal Stoa, oriented upon 'Robinson's Arch'. This latter magnificent structure towered high over the southern part of the Temple Court, and it was 'a structure more noteworthy than any under the sun', according to Josephus (*Ant.*, XV, 412).

As our excavations progressed, more data have accumulated on the fine planning of the area south and west of the Temple Mount. The splendour here is especially evident in the huge supporting walls, with their accurate courses of enormous, smoothly-bossed ashlars, and in the abundance of architectural fragments, many bearing geometric ornamentation and some with floral motifs; most of these fragments were discovered amongst the rubble along the walls. This ornamentation, which was partly preserved *in situ* only in the domes of the Double Gate (Fig. 1), fits in well with the known artistic repertory of Herodian Jerusalem. Of great interest are the gates of the Temple Mount and the stairways leading up to them, the few remains of structures,

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the paved streets and the water systems and tunnels — extensive works which display modifications, repairs and expansions over the years, from the days of Herod down to the destruction in A.D. 70. Indeed, John 2:20 notes that the building of the Temple lasted 46 years (that is, till c. A.D. 27/8); in the Talmud (*BT, Shabbat* 115a and parallel texts) we find indications of building activities in the days of R. Gamaliel the Elder; Josephus (*Ant.*, XX, 219) relates that construction was completed only in the days of Albinus, close upon the outbreak of the First Revolt.

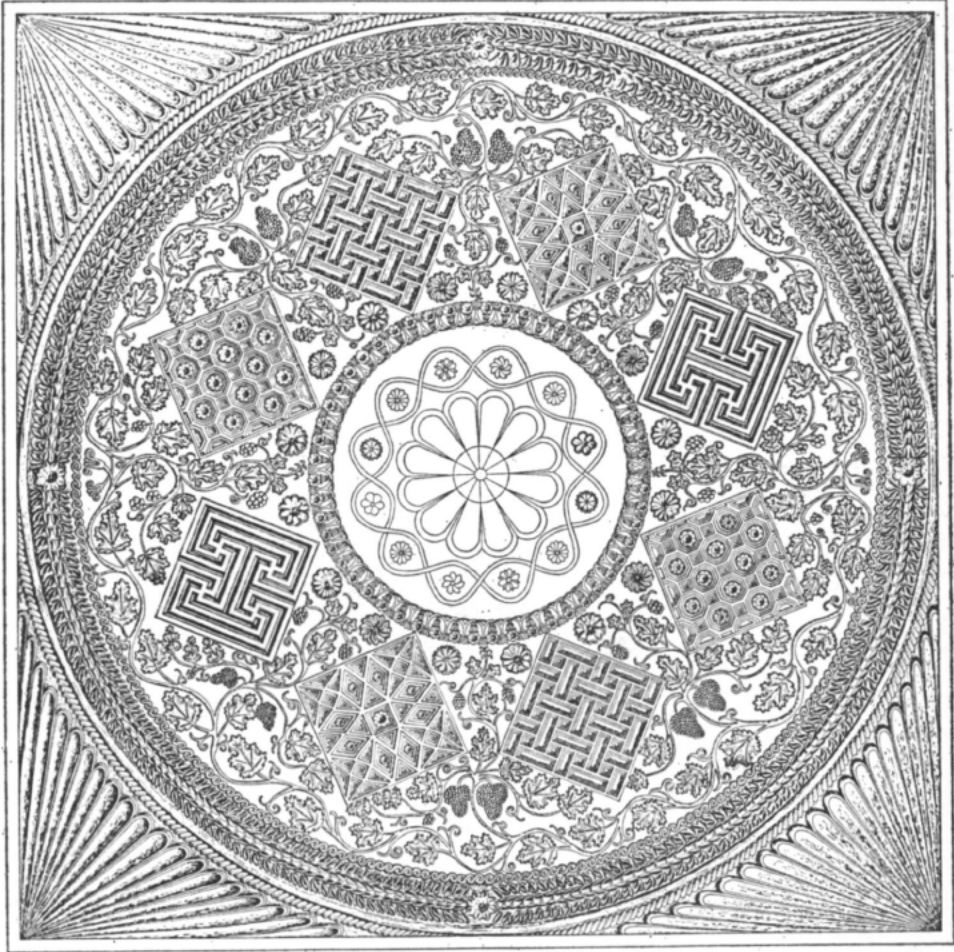


Fig. 1. Decoration of the ceiling of a dome of the Double Gate.

From our excavations, as from the results of the excavations of Nahman Avigad and of Magen Broshi in the Jewish and Armenian Quarters, we learn of the magnificence of this metropolis in the first century A.D. and we can see a correspondence between the archaeological findings and the literary descriptions of Jerusalem at its

zenith (especially those of Josephus). We should note here particularly what Pliny the Elder wrote of the city (*Hist. Nat.*, V, xv, 70): 'longe clarissima urbium orientis, non Iudaeae modo' — 'by far the most famous city of the East, and not of Judaea only', and the talmudic passage (*BT, Succah* 51b): 'Whoever has not seen Jerusalem in its splendour has never seen a fine city.'

Particular attention should be paid to the excavation area at the southern end of the Western Wall — near 'Robinson's Arch', the remains of a huge arch jutting out from the upper courses of the wall, and spanning the paved street which ran north-south, resting in the west on a pier built parallel to the wall and some 12.50 m. from it. During the excavations, it became clearly evident that this arch, together with a row of arches stretching to the south at regular intervals, each successively lower, formed a monumental stairway which led from the paved street up to the portal of the Royal Stoa (Fig. 2). This discovery well suits the overall plan of the area, and conforms with Josephus, who mentions four gates in the Western Wall, from the southernmost of which descended many steps to the Tyropoeon Valley (*Ant.*, XV, 410).

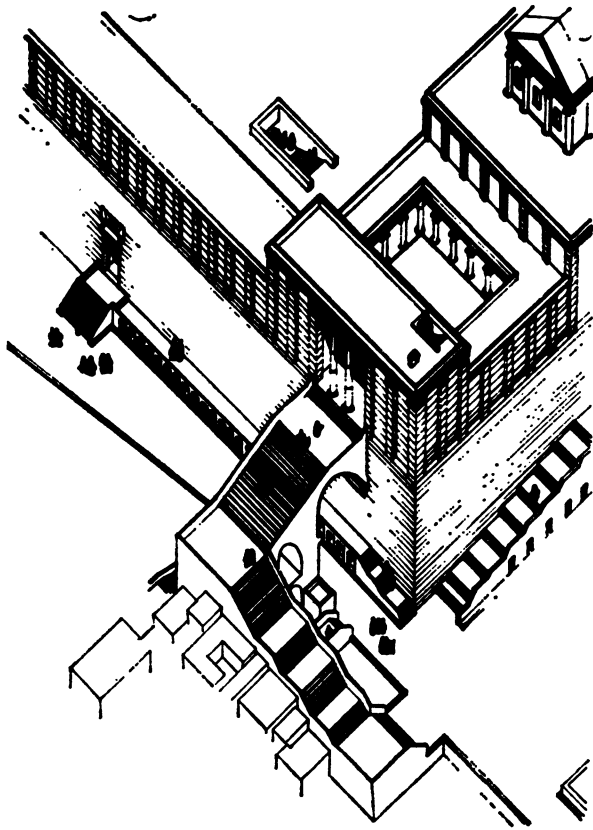


Fig. 2. The reconstruction of the south-western corner of the Temple mount, with the staircase leading to the Royal Stoa.

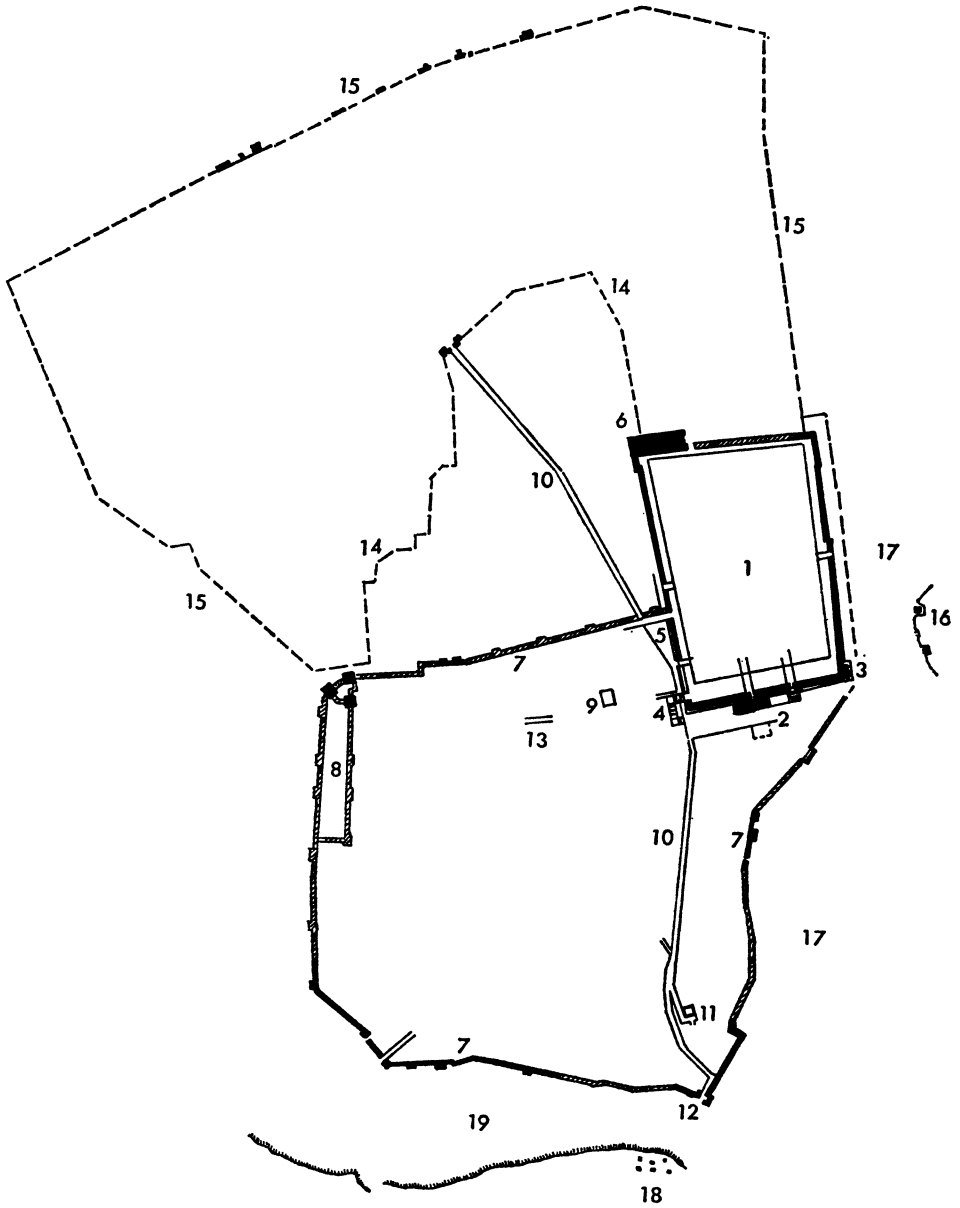


Fig. 3. Jerusalem in the Herodian period. 1 — Temple area; 2 — southern gates; 3 — archway to 'Solomon's Stables'; 4 — archway to Royal Stoa; 5 — xystus; 6 — Antonia Fortress; 7 — 'First Wall'; 8 — royal palace; 9 — Hasmonean palace; 10 — Tyropoeon street; 11 — Pool of Siloam; 12 — Dung Gate; 13 — remains of Herodian street; 14 — 'Second Wall' (according to Vincent); 15 — 'Third Wall'; 16 — monumental tombs; 17 — Kidron Valley; 18 — necropolis of the priestly family of Hanan; 19 — Hinnom Valley.

Of special interest to us is the paved street, some 12.50 m. wide, with raised margins flanking it (Pl. 35); a part of its continuation running north-south was discovered by Bliss and Dickie in the southern Tyropoeon, and it undoubtedly reached the ancient 'Dung Gate' at the southern end of the Lower City, which led out to the Hinnom Valley. To the north, our street forked, just after 'Robinson's Arch'. The larger branch — the main street of the city — turned to the north-west, continuing up the Upper Valley (*el-Wad* in Arabic) towards the Damascus Gate, while the other branch continued along the line of the Western Wall up to the Antonia Fortress (Fig. 3). The continuation of the main street is indicated by the large aqueduct which runs some 8 m. below the level of the street's pavement for its entire length, down to the ancient 'Dung Gate'. This aqueduct, much of which was stone-vaulted, has been examined for some 170 m., and was probably utilized to gather rainwater from the roofs and streets stemming out from the main street.

It appears that the main street was the artery of the two principal markets — the Upper Market on the north-west and the Lower Market on the south — and it was flanked by shops, including the cells within the pier of 'Robinson's Arch' (Pl. 36:B) and those immediately to the north and south, opening onto the street. Clear evidence of the contents of these shops was found in the large quantities of stone vessels, weights, pottery and coins; we can thus surmise that they served those coming to the Temple, especially the pilgrims.

The south-western corner of the Temple Mount was the junction of the paved streets, and was the focal point of daily life in the city. Nearby, north of the pier, a stairway was found leading from the main street over a vaulted structure and up towards the Upper City (Fig. 4). At the corner of the Temple Mount a narrow street, also paved, leads up eastwards from the main street and continues along the Southern Wall to the Double Gate and thence eastwards, descending over vaulting from the Triple Gate down to the south-eastern corner of the Temple Mount — and possibly even to the spot denoted in talmudic sources as the 'pinnacle of the Ophel', at the top of the slope of the Kidron Valley. On the paving of this street, near the south-western corner of the Temple Mount, a large ashlar was found, with a niche on its inner face and, on its edge, the Hebrew inscription ... לבית התקיעה להב (Pl. 36:A). Z. Ben-Hayyim has suggested that the last word be restored to read להב[ריז], 'To the place of trumpeting to [declare]'. This stone had been toppled down from the peak of the corner, from a spot atop the Temple chambers where one of the priests would blow a trumpet on Sabbath Eve, to announce the entrance of the Sabbath and the cessation of all labour, and on the exit of the Sabbath, to announce the resumption of labour, as is mentioned by Josephus (*War*, IV, 582). We may also note that this spot provided a view of the entire city, and the sound of the trumpet would have been heard clearly throughout the markets of the city.

The narrow paved street running along the Southern Wall ascended to the broad series of stairs before the Double Gate. To its south, and parallel to it, spread a broad, paved plaza; here surely the throngs of pilgrims would gather, especially at the major

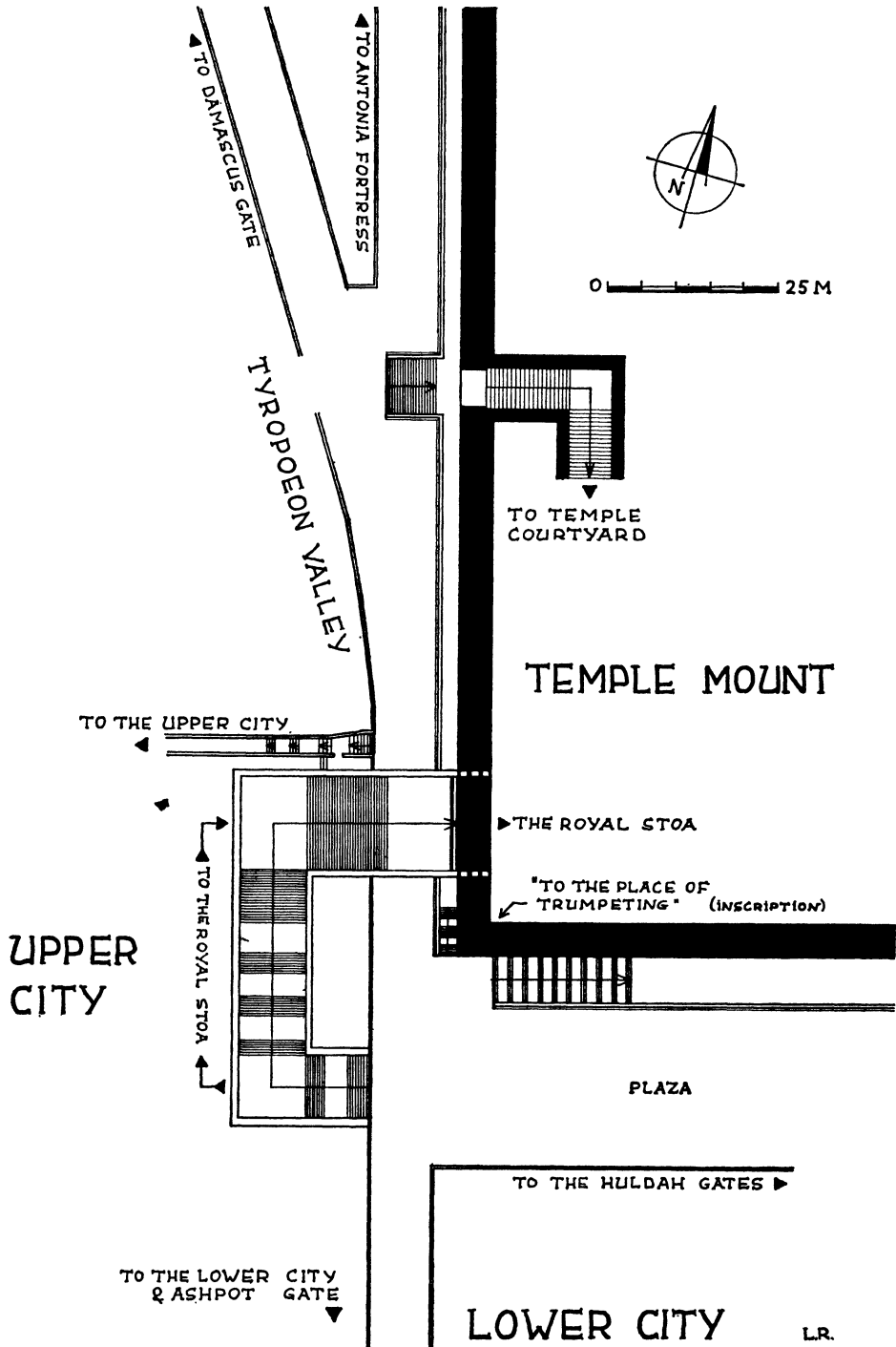


Fig. 4. The south-western corner of the Temple Mount and the steps rising to the Royal Stoa over 'Robinson's Arch'.

festivals, before the gates of the Temple Enclosure. The series of 30 stairs here, some 64 m. wide, is quite well preserved; in contrast, the stairs before the Triple Gate to the east were much narrower, as may be deduced from the width of the vaulting found there, identical to that of the gate itself. It may well have been that these stairs here, on the south of the Temple Mount, were the מעלות [or: המעלה בהר הבית], the 'stairs at the Temple Mount', mentioned in talmudic sources, e.g., *Tosefta Sanhedrin*, 2, 2: מעשה ברבן גמליאל והזקנים, שהיו עומדים על גב מעלות בהר הבית — 'the top of the stairs' possibly being the narrow paved street immediately before the gates.

Another problem concerns the two large structures found destroyed down to their foundations, one between the two stairways and the other to the east, near the Triple Gate. The former is characterized by its cisterns and pools, and it may well have served as a ritual bath complex for those coming to the Temple, prior to their entry into the sacred enclosure. We should note that south of the Double Gate a subterranean tunnel was found running from south to north towards the gate, and there were niches in its walls for holding oil lamps. This may have been a מסיבה (winding passage), like that described in the Mishnah, *Middoth*, 1, 9: '... he would go out and go along the מסיבה that leads below the citadel, where lamps were burning here and there, until he reached the Chamber of Immersion. R. Eliezer b. Jacob said: He used to go out by the מסיבה that leads below the Rampart and so he came to the Tadi Gate.' The Tadi Gate is now in the northern wall of the Temple Mount.

Another tunnel, of very fine construction, was discovered below the Southern Wall, east of the Triple Gate (some 34 m. west of the south-eastern corner of the wall; Pl. 37); it is some 21 m. long, built of Herodian ashlar, and its southern entrance is through a vaulted chamber in the face of the Southern Wall. It may well have led to the subterranean system of treasure chambers within the Temple Mount.

The destroyed building east of the Triple Gate is today represented by numerous ornamented architectural fragments, including pieces of a monumental Hebrew inscription, as yet undeciphered. It may be assumed that this structure — adjacent to the Triple Gate, one of the entrances to the Temple Enclosure (Mishnah, *Middoth*, 1, 3) — was the seat of the *Beth-din*, one of the three courts at the Temple, that 'at the gate of the Temple Mount' (Mishnah, *Sanhedrin*, 11, 2).

We should also note two large structures on the Ophel, south of the Southern Wall, ascribed to the Herodian period: one is about 50 m. south of the Double Gate and is characterized by a series of huge cisterns and a plastered pool; the finds here, especially pottery (including Rhodian jar handles, Hebrew stamp impressions on jar handles: יהד and ירשלם, and an Aramaic ostrakon), indicate that it was originally built in the Hellenistic period, at which time it was already a building of some importance. The other structure is on the south-eastern edge of the Ophel, at the top of the slope of the Kidron Valley, some 90 m. south of the Triple Gate (Pl. 38). A large building had stood here in the period of the Monarchy, which was superseded by a huge tower belonging to the fortification system, built at the edge of the scarp overlooking the

Kidron Valley, discovered long ago by Charles Warren. This building was constructed on the rock-hewn terraces on the upper slopes of the Ophel — terraces levelled out with fill containing Bronze and Iron Age sherds; the fill was stabilized by supporting walls forming a straight platform for the large structure. These building remains — apparently to be ascribed to the 'Beth Millo' mentioned in 2 Kings 12:22, which was razed at the time of the destruction of the First Temple — were reutilized in the Herodian period as the base of a large two-storey building, the upper storey of which is attested to by a small patch of mosaic. We may hypothetically identify this building as one of the palaces built by the royal family of Adiabene, converts to Judaism, which stood in the Lower City according to Josephus (*War*, IV, 567; V, 252–253; VI, 355).

One of the conclusions which can be derived from the archaeological evidence of the Herodian period found in the excavations adjacent to the supporting walls of the Temple Mount is that the decisive modifications to the topography of this area are indeed the result of Herod's project. We may also note that most of the structures predating Herod's time were razed to make way for his massive construction works, while pools and cisterns, as well as some channels and even early tombs, were reutilized and incorporated into the new public projects. During the entire Herodian period this area played a very important role as a centre of public life in Jerusalem and as a focal point for the masses of Jerusalemites and pilgrims before the gates of the Temple Enclosure.

Another conclusion concerns the main street of Jerusalem, which ran along the Tyropoeon Valley between the Temple Mount and the Lower City, on the one hand, and the Upper City, on the other hand. This street was the artery of commercial life of the city, serving the Upper Market on the north-west, as well as the Lower Market on the south. The street passed beneath 'Robinson's Arch' and the south-western corner of the Temple Mount. This spot was one of the foci, and the streets crossing the main street here led to the Temple gates to the east, as well as to the Upper City on the west; here, too, the monumental stairway led up to the portal of the Royal Stoa.

Indeed, the descriptions in Josephus and in the Mishnah concerning this very area are in close accord with the archaeological findings, as revealed in our excavations.



Remains of the paved street at the south-western corner of the Temple Mount.

HERODIAN JERUSALEM

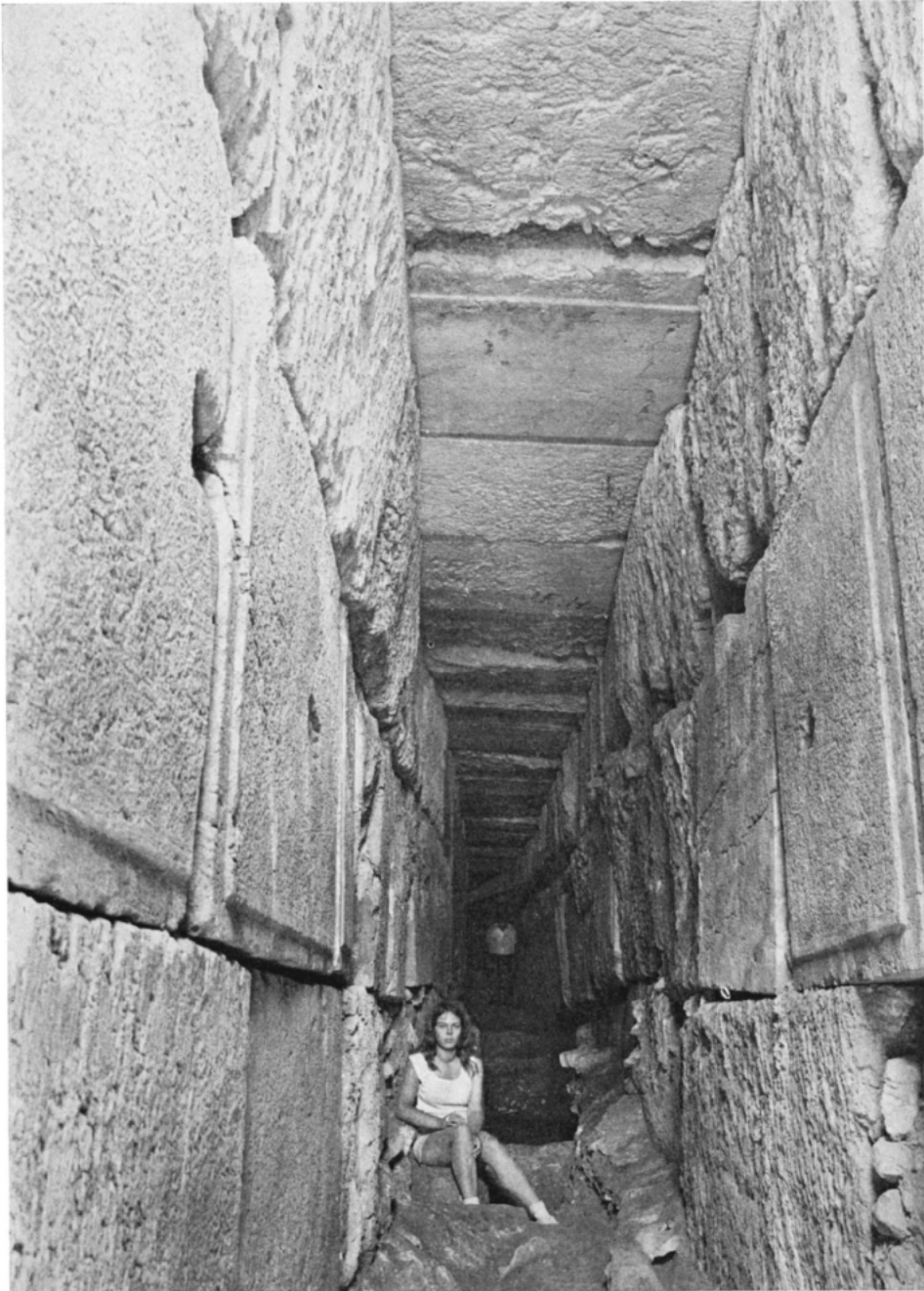
PLATE 36



A: Hebrew inscription.



B: The pier supporting 'Robinson's Arch' (looking from south-east); on left, cells of shops; on right, narrow paved road leading from main road to Upper City.



Tunnel under the southern wall east of the Triple Gate.

HERODIAN JERUSALEM



Massive Herodian building at the south-eastern corner of the Ophel, founded on remains from the period of the monarchy. Left, the Early Byzantine city-wall.