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HERODIUM - HEROD THE GREAT'S PRESTIGE BUILDING PROJECT

Herod, known as Herod the Great, ruled over Palestine (now Israel) from the year 37 B.C.E. to the year 4 B.C.E.[1] He was one of the greatest builders in the history of this country. Herod ruled in the intermediate period between the Hellenistic era and the Roman one. This transition is expressed in his building projects as well as in the cultural material and other fields. He built towns, temples (including the sole Jewish temple at Jerusalem) fortresses, palaces, harbours (mainly the one at Caesarea Maritime), water projects, theatres, hippodromes, gymnasia and other structures. He did it not only all over his kingdom but also beyond its borders, in Syria, Asia Minor and Greece (as at Rhodos, Chios and Nikopolis.)[2]

One of the most famous building projects built by Herod is the one named after himself — Herodium. Josephus Flavius, who is our best historical source (ill. 1) for this period as well as the main source for Herod's building activities (apart from archaeology), has left us the following description:

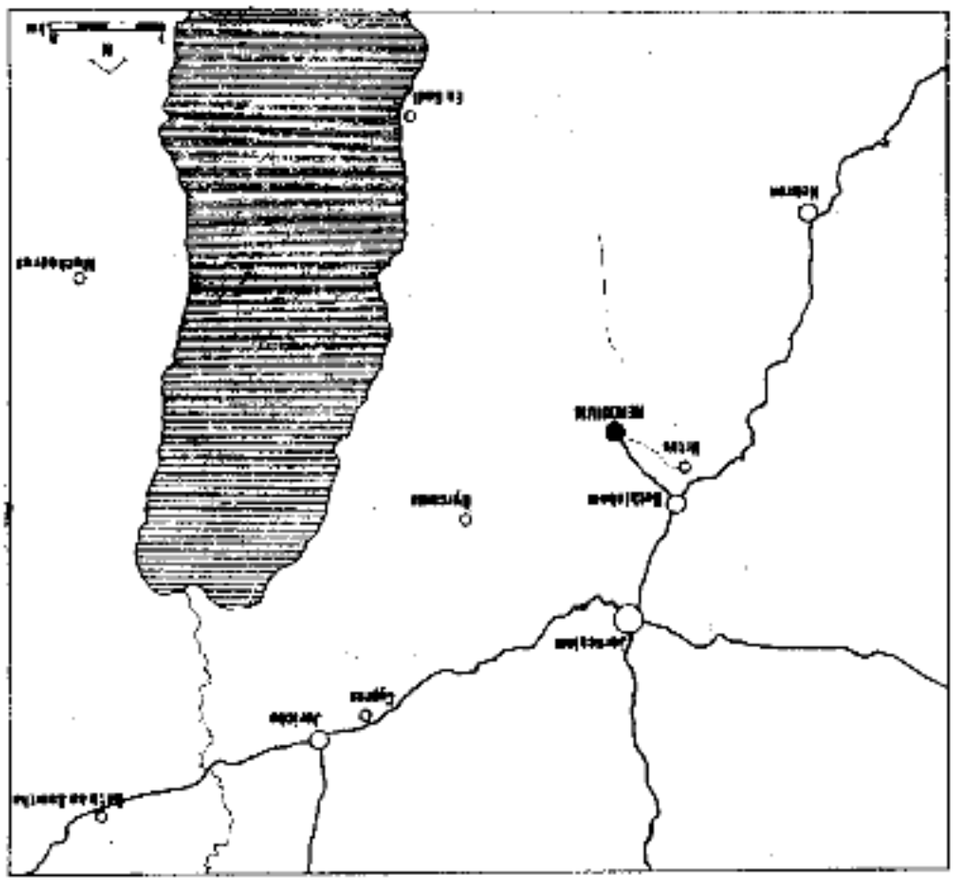
«When the wedding-ceremonies were concluded, Herod constructed another fortress in the region where he had defeated the Jews after his expulsion from the realm, when Antigonus was in power. This fortress, which is some sixty stades distant from Jerusalem, is naturally strong and very suitable for such a structure, for reasonably nearby is a hill, raised to a (greater) height by the hand of man and rounded off in the shape of a breast. At intevals it has round towers, and it has a steep ascent formed of two hundred steps of hewn stone. Within it are costly royal apartments made for security and for

1. See Schalit, A., *Koenig Herodes: der Mann und Sein Werk,* Berlin, (1969).
2. See Netzer, E., Herod's Building Projects: State Necessity or Personal Need? (Symposium), *The Jerusalem Cathedra* I (Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute, Wayne State University Press), Jerusalem (1981), pp. 48-61; 73-80.

ornament at the same time. At the base of the hill there are pleasure grounds built in such a way as to be worth seeing, amoung other things because of the way in which water, which is lacking in that place, is brought in from a distance and at great expense. The surrounding plain was built up as a city second to none, with the hill serving as an acropolis for the other dwellings.»...

(Ant. XV, 9, 4 (323-325)[3]

The mountain of Herodium, (Giabal Fureidi), which is situated south-east of Bethlehem, about 15 km. south of Jerusalem, can be seen from long distances due to its conic shape, like a vulcano (see Fig. 1).



Ill. 1. Map of Herodium and its surroundings.

The site, which was first identified by E. Robinson as Herod's palace[4], fortress and burial place (according to Josephus) was surveyed several times in the past, mainly during the second half of the 19th Century. All the explorers have described a round unique structure, which is hidden

3. For similar text see *B.J.* I, 21, 10 (419-421). From this text one may learn about the existance of a second Herodium. To our mind it must be a mistake and thus see Netzer, E., Greater Herodium, *Qedem* (Monographs of the Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) 13 (1981), p. 103, 1.

4. See Robinson, R. and Smith, E., *Biblical Researches in Palestine* II, London, (1841), pp. 169-174.

today inside the mountain as well as many remains north and below the conic mountain, including a large pool (70 × 46 m. in size).

The first excavations at the site were conducted by V. Corbo, who exposed in 1962-1967 a large part of the round building[5]. G. Foerster did some complimentary work in 1968-1969[6]. E. Netzer began in 1972 the first excavations of the structures below and north of the mountain (Lower Herodium), a work which is still in progress[7].

The decision to build Herodium (no known ancient settlement existed here before) was a result of events which occured on the site in the year 40 B.C.E. Herod, the young governor of the Galilee, escaped secretly from Jerusalem during a revolt against the Romans (who conquered Judea already in the year 63 B.C.E.) conducted by Mattathias Antigonous, member of the Jewish Hasmonean Dynasty, together with the Parthians[8]. At the grounds where later Herodium was built, a battle developed between Herod and his bodyguards against Antigonous and his people. The battle was won by Herod, who was close to looking his career and his life. It took Herod more than 15 years to come back to the site and build a multi-purpose project; — a combination of a palace, a fortress, his burial estate, a district (toparchy) capital and a memorial to the crucial battle as to his own name. (Herod built numerous towns and buildings which he named after Marcus Antonius, Augustus, Marcus Agrippa, and his own family members).

Although the site of Herod is divided into two main features, the mountain which we call the «Mountain Palace Fortress» and «Lower Herodium» (Ill. 2), the lower campus — both units compose together one widespread campus, about 50 acres in size, planned and built following one homogeneous layout. On the mountain, the round building, 63 m. in diameter, was first built (to a high of about 30 m.), which was covered soon afterwards, to half of its hight, by a massive fill. The other half projected above the newly created conic shape. This fill covered, part of the slopes of the original hill below the building as well.

The building itself was surrounded by a cylindrical structure originally seven stories high (two substructural vaulted corridors and five

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5. See Corbo, V., L'Herodion di Gebal Fureidis, *Liber Annuus* 13 (1963) pp. 219-277; idem, L'Herodion di Gebal Fureidis, *Liber Annuus* 17 (1967) pp. 65-121.

6. See Foerster, G., Herodium (Notes and News), *Israel Exploration Journal* (1969) pp. 123-124.

7. See Netzer, E., *Greater Herodium* (F. N. 3 above).

8. See Josephus *Ant.* XIV, 13 7-9 (352-360).

stories of corridors each having its ceiling based on wooden beams). Inside the cylinder, a palace wing was designed, in a manner of a villa. It included a large courtyard with collonaded corridors on three of its sides (Ill. 3). The courtyard, which probably was gardened, was also decorated by exedrae, one on each of its short sides. To the west of the courtyard the main part of the «villa» was built. At one end a large triclinium (15 × 10 m) was built — a hall, which during the first Jewish revolt against the Romans turned out to be a Synagogue (one of the early ones exposed in Israel). Close to the triclinium were the dwelling rooms and a bathhouse in the Roman style. The Bathhouse's round tepidarum is, until today, still covered by a cupola made out of curved stones — one of the earliest cupolas found in Palestine. The villa was origibnally decorated with painted walls (in the fresco technique), stucco, Opus-sectile and mosaic floors, etc.

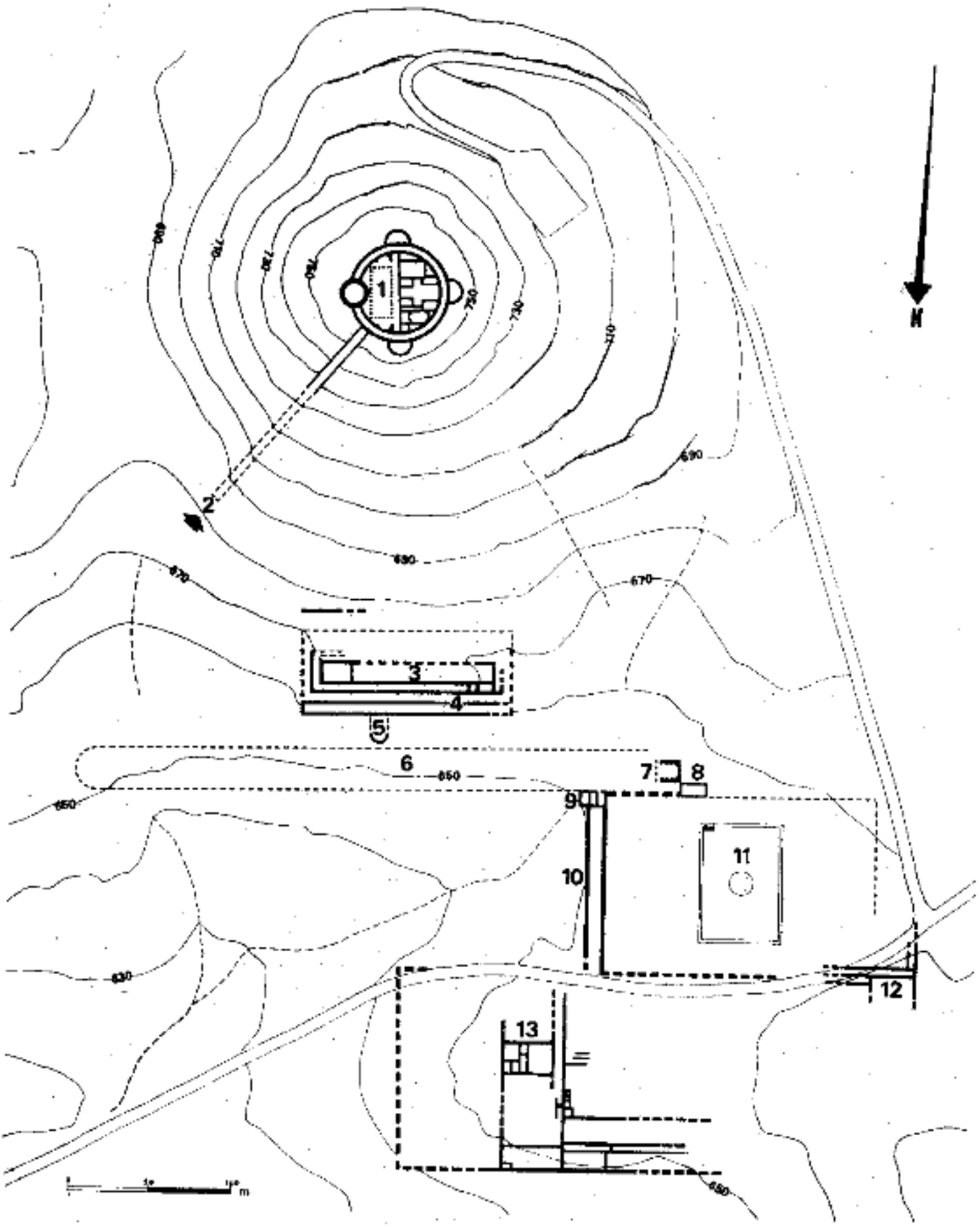
Four towers encircled the round building, three half rounded and the fourth (to the east), round, 18.6 m. in diameter (see Fig. 2). Whereas the three towers were divided regulatr floors, originally 6-8 stories each with rooms in every story, the preserved lower part of the eastern tower is solid, up to 20 m. above bedrock (excluding a water cistern and two small storate rooms. In analogy to the three high towers built by Herod in Jerusalem (named Phasael, Hippicus and Miriamme), and described in detail by Josephus[9], it is possible to restore 4-5 stories above the existing base (altogether about 45 m., similar to Phasael or Hippicus). These missing stories were probably used (besides being a watch-tower) for a secondary dwelling unit meant for enjoying the marvellous surrounding view (of the Judean desert) and breeze winds on hot days — both were missing in the inner villa. According to Josephus, the three towers of Jerusalem also included palacial rooms, on top of their solid bases of which only one has been preserved to the hight of 20 m. (probably Phasael's)[10]. (Ill. 4-5).

A long wide and straight flight of steps led up to the mountain. Its lower part was in the open whereas the upper part had been covered by a corridor, situated inside the artificial fill. Attached to this staircase (just

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9. See Josephus *BtJ.* V, 4, 3-4 (161-175).

10. The remains of this tower are known today as The Tower of David; see Johns C.N., The Citadel, Jerusalem. A Summary of Work since 1934, *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* 14 (1950) pp. 121-190; and Geva, H., 'The Tower of David' - Phasael or Hippicus? *Israel Exploration Journal* 31 (1981) pp. 57-65.



Ill. 2. General plan of Greater Herodium. 1. The mountain palace-fortress; 2. The main stairway to the mountain; 3. The large palace; 4. The large palace's substructural halls; 5. A tentative balcony adjacent to the large palace; 6. The course; 7. The monumental building; 8. Building B 14; 9. A rectangular structure — the southeastern corner of the pool complex; 10. A. damlike wall with gallerys on top; 11. The pool complex, with the pool in its center; 12. The service building; 13. The northern wing.

at the bottom of the fill) three large water cisterns were curved into the bedrock, a reservoir for troubled times.

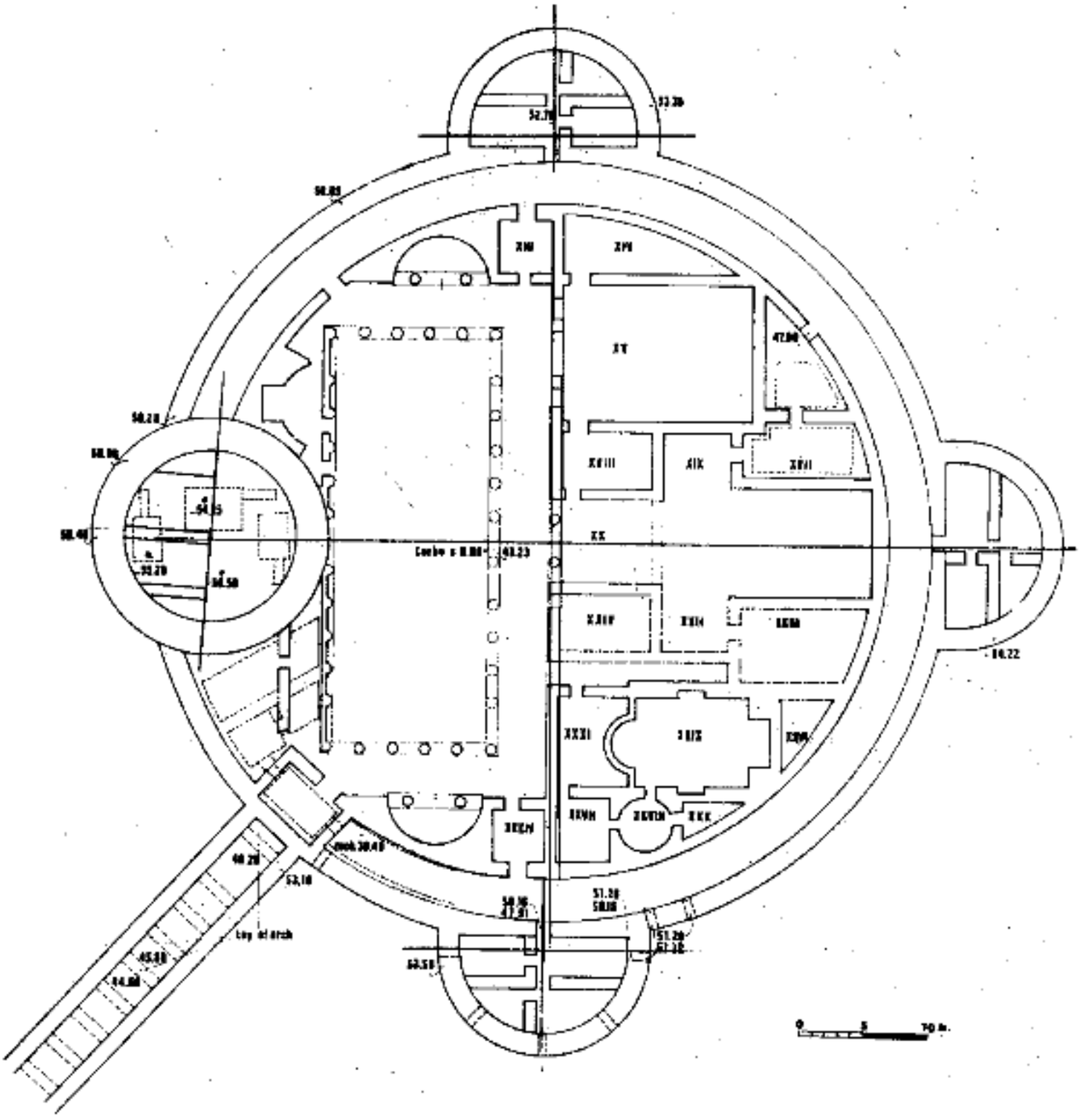
It is hard to define a definite architectural protorype to this unique building. We do reject a scholarly widespread opinion seeing Augustus's mausoleum in Rome as the proto-type. The building here was used as a palace and following the Jewish laws a tomb can never be attached to a dwelling house. Besides, architecturally, the Mountain Palace Fortress is noneccenrtic versus the centric building in Rome. In our mind the Antonia, one of Herod's first building projects, (a square building with four corner towers, one higher than the rest, combining a place and a fortress) — probably had been the proto-type. The Mountain Palace fortress, however, is in itself a combination of a palace, a fortress (the cylinder, the towers and the steep slopes of the fill) and a monument which could have been easily seen from long distances as well as from Jerusalem.

Lower Herodium is comprised of several units. The central unit was the large pool which got its water (like the rest of the site) from a 6 km long acquaduct built by Herod from the spring of today's village, Artas. The pool was surrounded by a huge formal garden 120 × 110 m. in size (see fig. 3). In order to build this garden a whole section of a valley was blocked and levelled (with a fill up to 8 m.). A special structure (like a dam) was built to the east of the garden containing two long halls — one on the garden level and the other below (see Fig. 4) (Ill. 6). The garden itself was surrounded, on three sides (north, west and south) by wide collonades situated about 1,5 m, higher than the garden[13]. The pool was probably used for swimming, sailing in miniature boats, as a water reservoir and as a central architectural focus «the heart» of Lower Herodium. A round foundation (13.5 m. in diameter) exposed in the center of the pool probably carried originally a pavilion in the shape of a tholos.

The major part of the buildings at Lower Herodium were built, in a «U» shaped cluster, around this large garden (the «Pool-Complex»). Only small sections of this cluster (its major part was to tte north) were exposed so far, indicating toward palacial use as well as attached service wings (see Fig. 5). Two bathhouses, in the Roman style, were exposed here. One of the two (south-west to the Pool Complex) is the largest ex-

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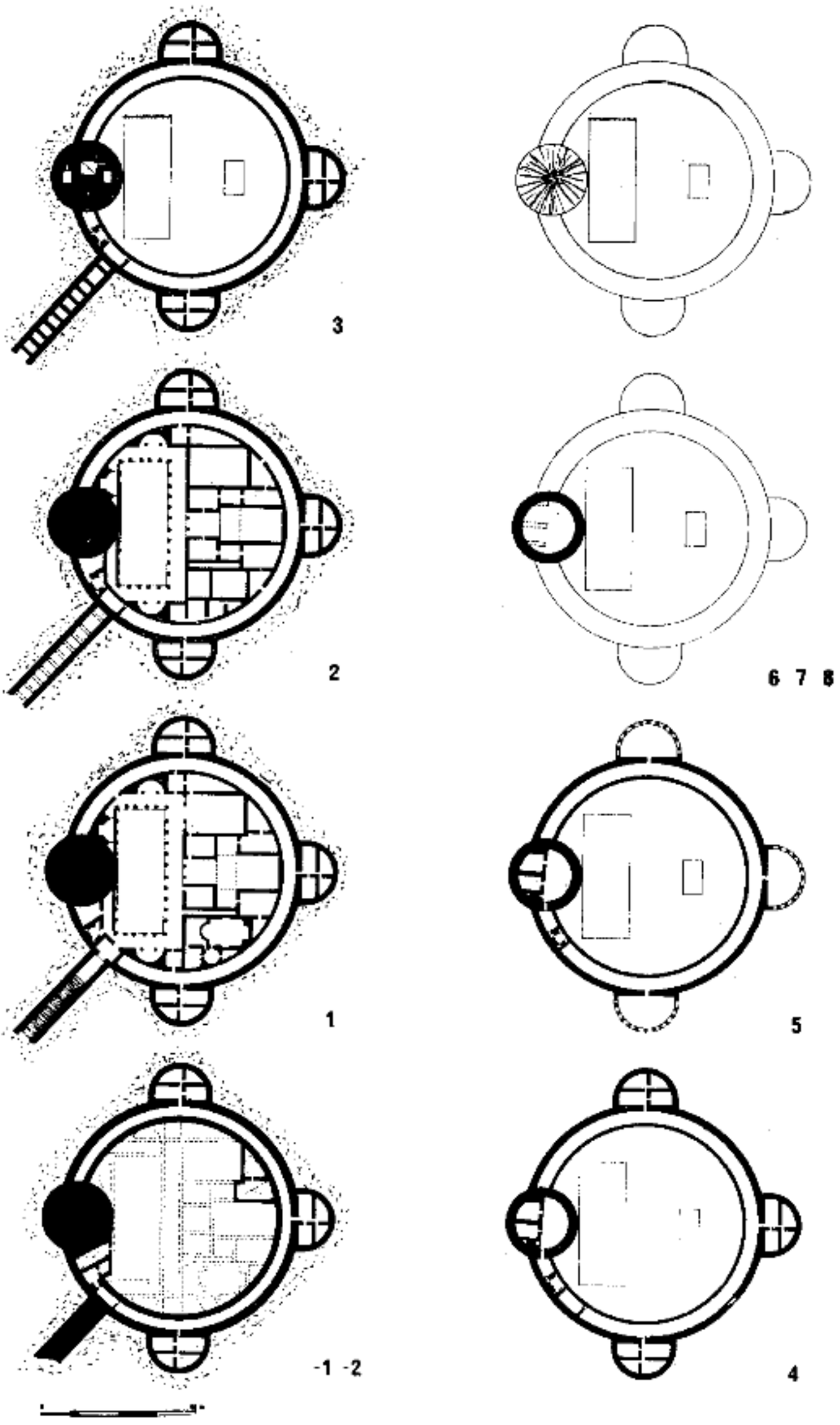
11. See Segal, A., Herodium, *Israel Exploration Journal* 23 (1973) pp. 27-29.
12. See Netzer (F.N. 2 above) pp. 73-75.
13. The collonades were located in the 1984 Soason, not yet published.



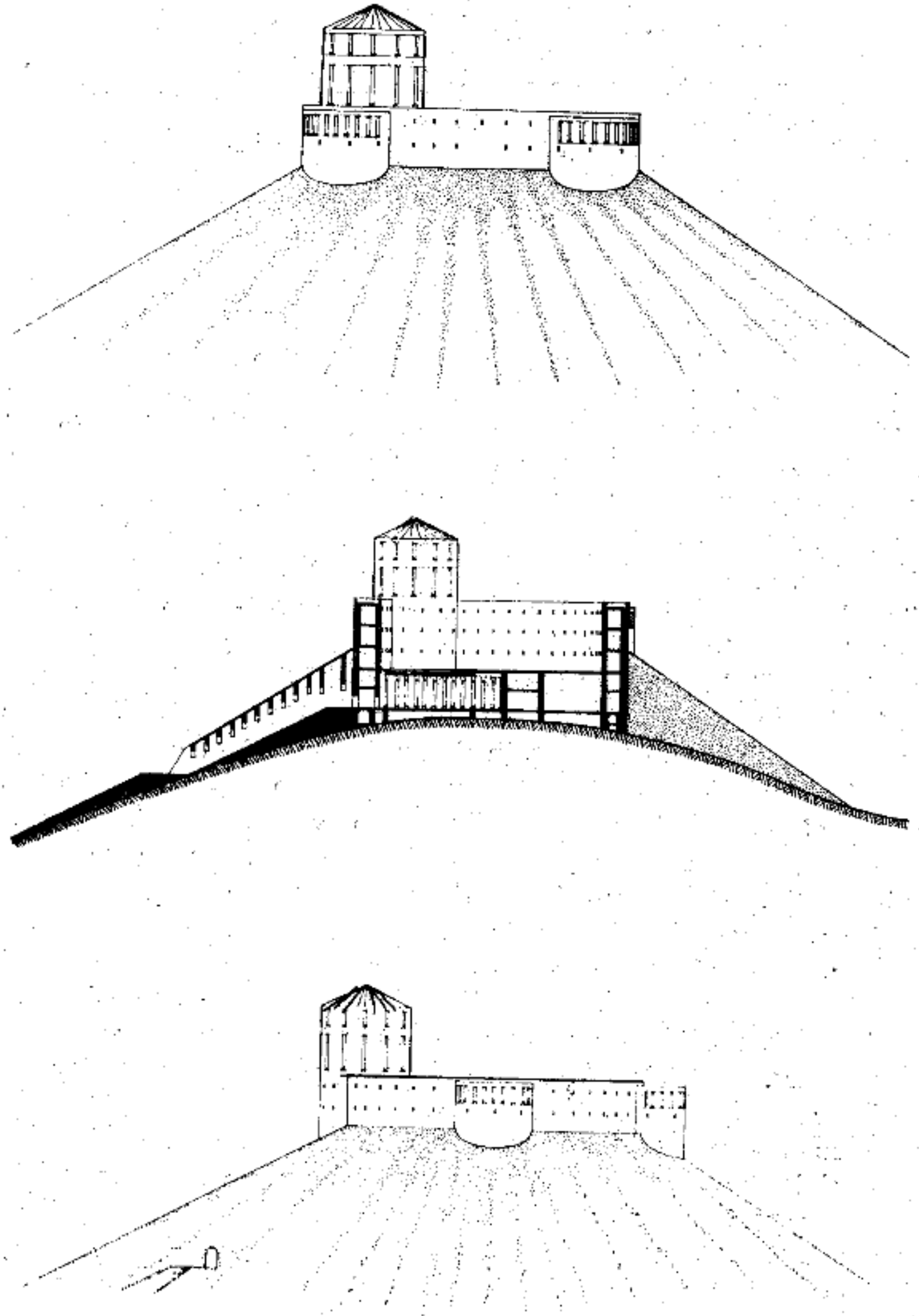
Ill. 3. Up-to-date corrected plan of the mountain palace-fortress.

posed so far among Herod's palaces[14] (Ill. 8). It included two caldaria, the first 23 × 8 m. in size (with niches on all sides) and the second rounded, 4 m. in diameter, probably used as a laconicum. This bathhouse, like many other rooms of Lower Herodium was decorated with painted walls etc. Most of its rooms were paved with mosaic floors, partially decorated (see Fig. 6).

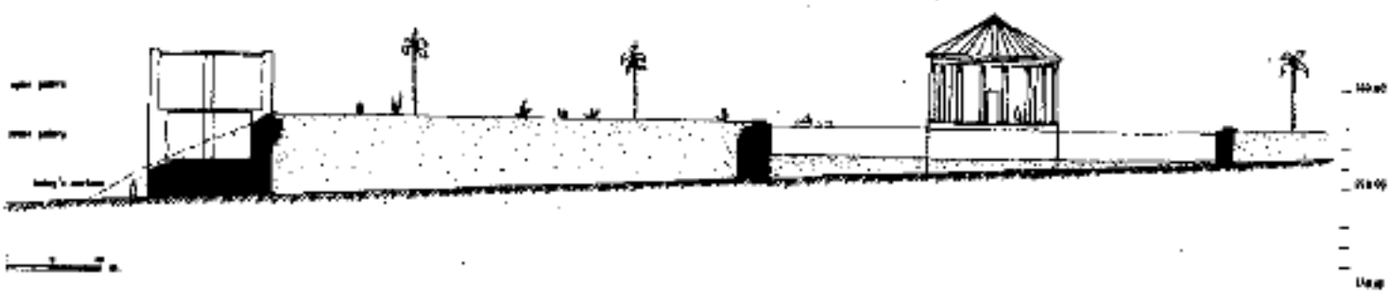
14. Excavated in the 1983 Season and published here for the first time.



Ill. 4. Restored plans of the different floors of the mountain palace-fortress.



Ill. 5. Restored sections through and elevations of the mountain palace-fortress, the upper ones facing south-east anh the lower ones facing south.

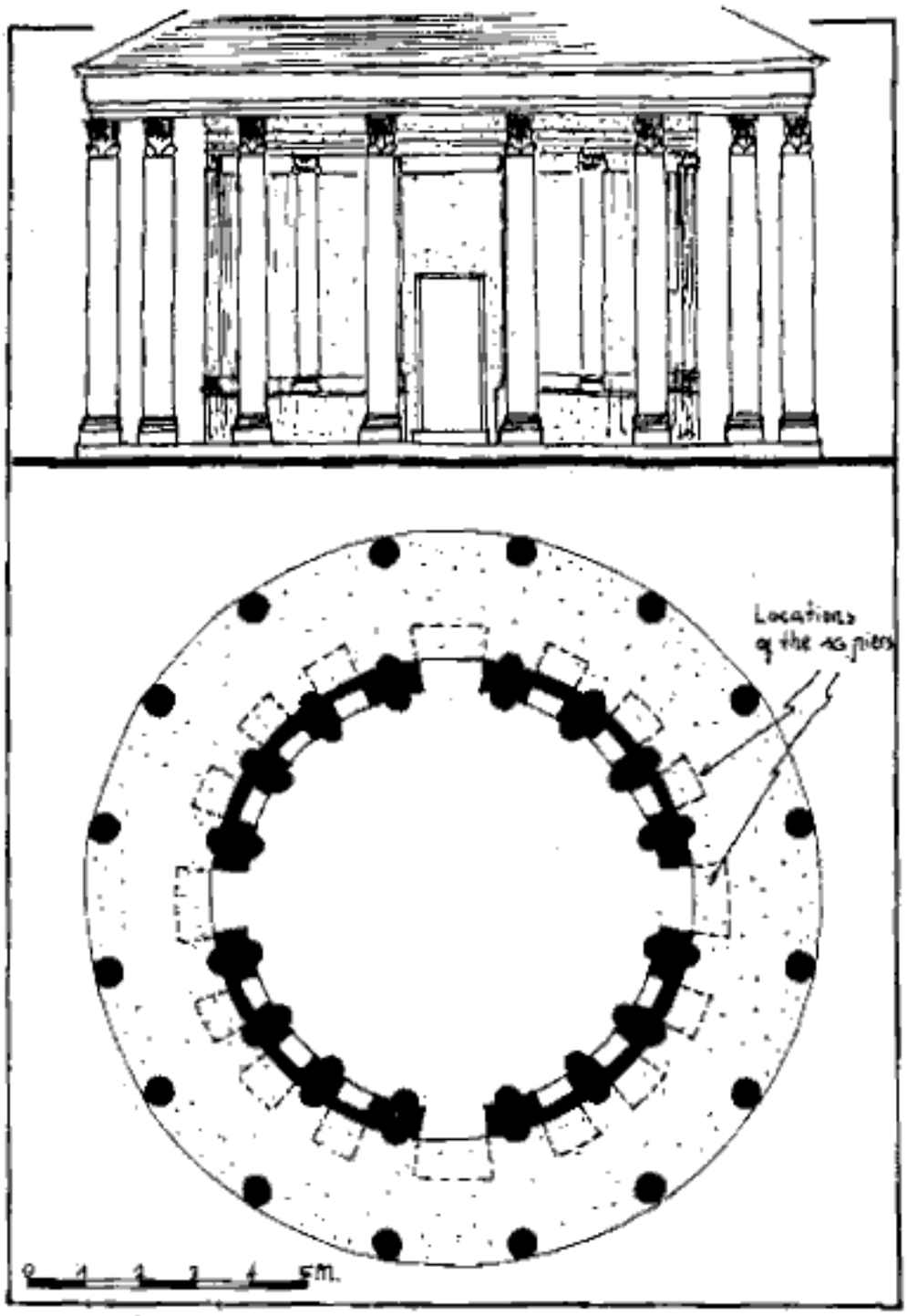


Ill. 6. Restored schematic section through the pool complex, facing south.

North of the mountain, on one architectural axis with the Mountain Palace Fortress exist the remains of Greater Herodium's largest structure — 130 × 55 m. in size. Although only the foundations are left of this huge building, we believe it should have served as the main palacial wing of the whole complex. Its location and position (being higher than the rest of Lower Herodium), points toward this conclusion. The northern part of the substructure, which has been left including the remains of two halls 130 × 5 m. each, was probably used for storage, by tiself 2/3 of the capacity of Masada's (Herod's famous palace-fortress near the Dead Sea) central group of storage halls[15].

Below this large building lies a long artificial terrace about 350 × 30 m. in size (see Fig. 7). At the western narrow edge of this terrace was exposed a building 15 × 14 m. in size, comprised of one elaborate hall (see Fig. 8 and Ill. 9). The hall was surrounded by niches having pilasters on top of pedistals in between. The thickness of this building's walls suggests a monumental upper-structure which may have crowned this building. (Ill. 10). However, its position toward the long artificial terrace (which we have named the «Course») points to a mutual relationship between the course and this building (which we call the «Monumental Building», until its final function will be defined). Although a preliminary thesis of this building being Herod's Mausoleum was disapproved during its exposure, a possible connection to Herod's tomb is still valid. A group of elaborate ashlar stones, many of which are decorated (see Fig. 9), which were found close to the Monumental Building (housed in the building of a church in the Byzantine period from the 5-6 cent. A.D.) is believed by us to have been taken from an unknown monument which once perhaps composed the entrance to the so far unlocated tomb (see Fig. 10). A large ritual-pool (9 × 6 m., closed in a rectangular building) exposed close to

15. See Yadin, Y., Masada (see F.N. 14 above) pp. 87-105.

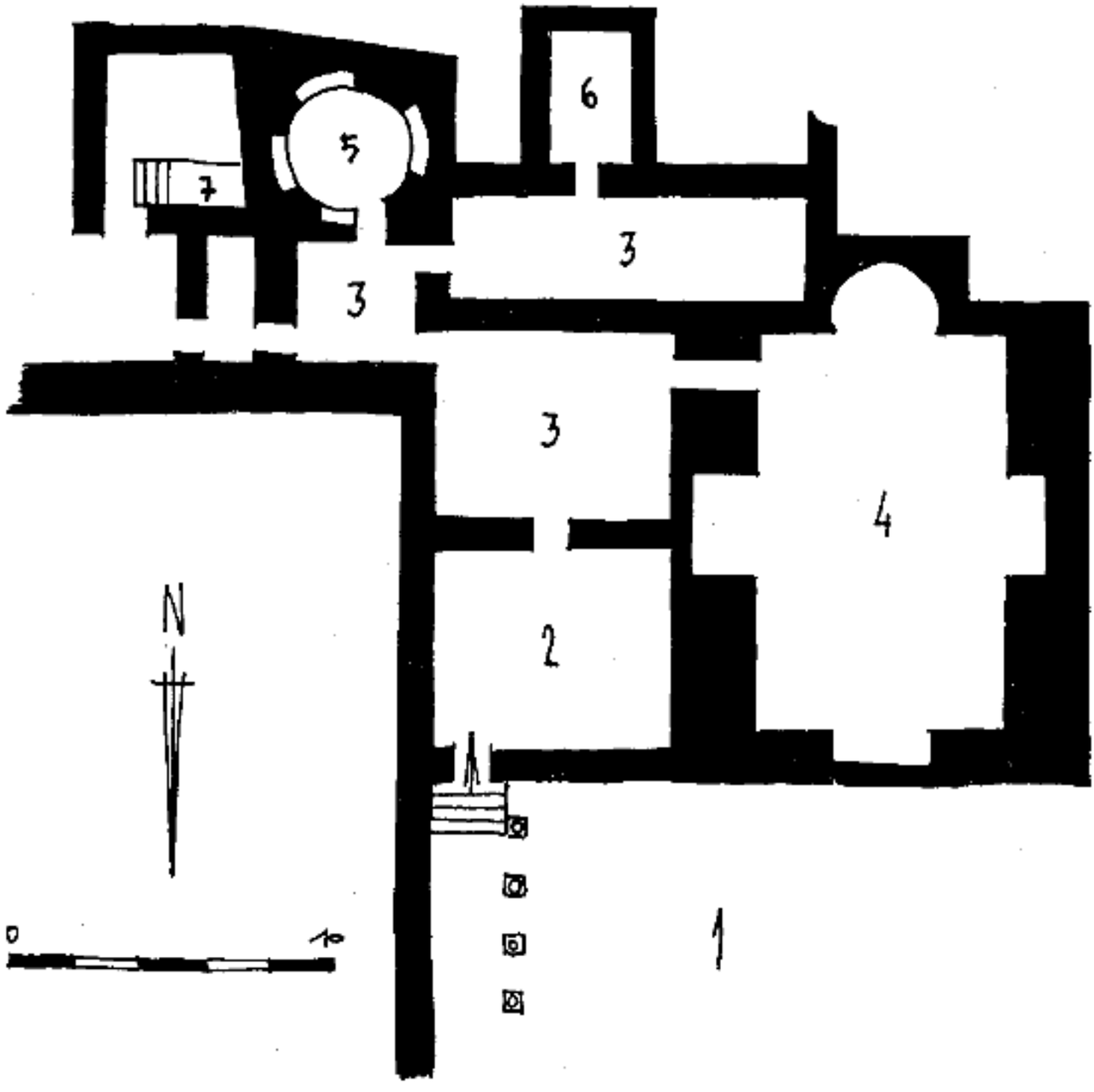


Ill. 7. Proposed reconstruction of the round structure (B 102) as a tholos.

the Monumental Building, strengthen the assumption of having here elements of Herod's burial estate. According to this assumption the long Course served as grounds for the funeral ceremony (the funeral itself is described in detail by Josephus[16] as what we would call today a military ceremony; whereas the Monumental Building could have served as a triclinium for the use of the mourners. (The tentative upper structure of the Monumental Building, or roof, could have, perhaps, served as a «Nefesh»[17].)

16. See Josephus *B.J.* I, 33 q, 670-673 *Ant.* XVII, 8, 3 (196-199).

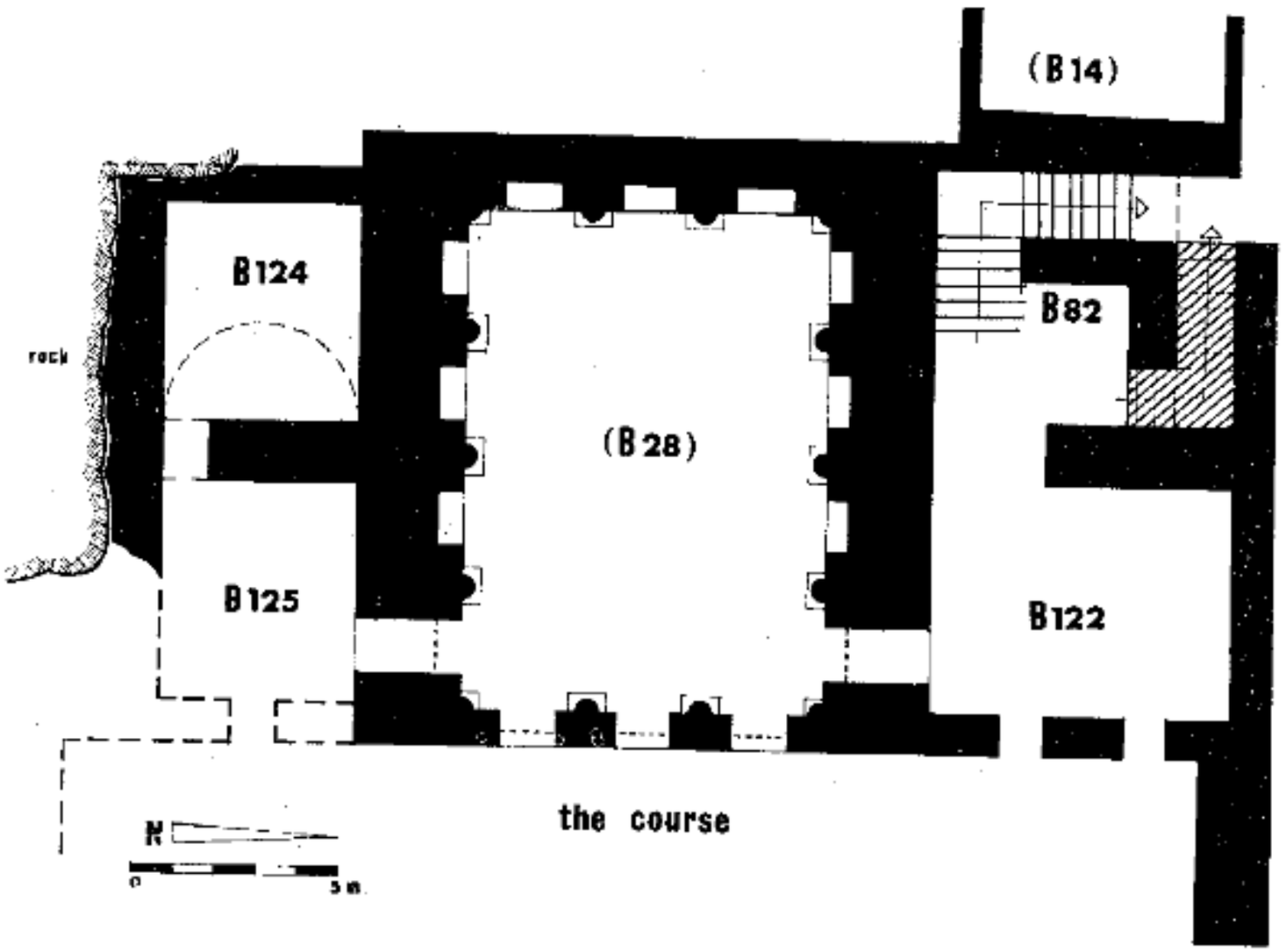
17. See Avigad, N. *Ancient Monuments in the Kidron Valley,* Jerusalem (1959) pp. 66-73 (in Hebrew).



Ill. 8. Plan of the large bathhouse, in the Roman style, exposed in Lower Herodium.

Herodium, perhaps the biggest palace of the Early Roman Period, had been designed carefully, using one grid system, various architectural axes as well as focal points. Its design may have been influenced by the missing Hellenistic palaces at Antioch on the Orontes, Alexandria and elsewhere — but it may have been, on the other hand, already influenced by the developing Roman architecture as well as some genuine ideas of Herod and his architects. No doubt, the Mountain Palace Fortress was a genuine, original design of the later «School».

Herodium, as a palace, existed probably until the end of Herod's (Archelaus) days (6 A.D.). Hereafter it was maintained by the Roman



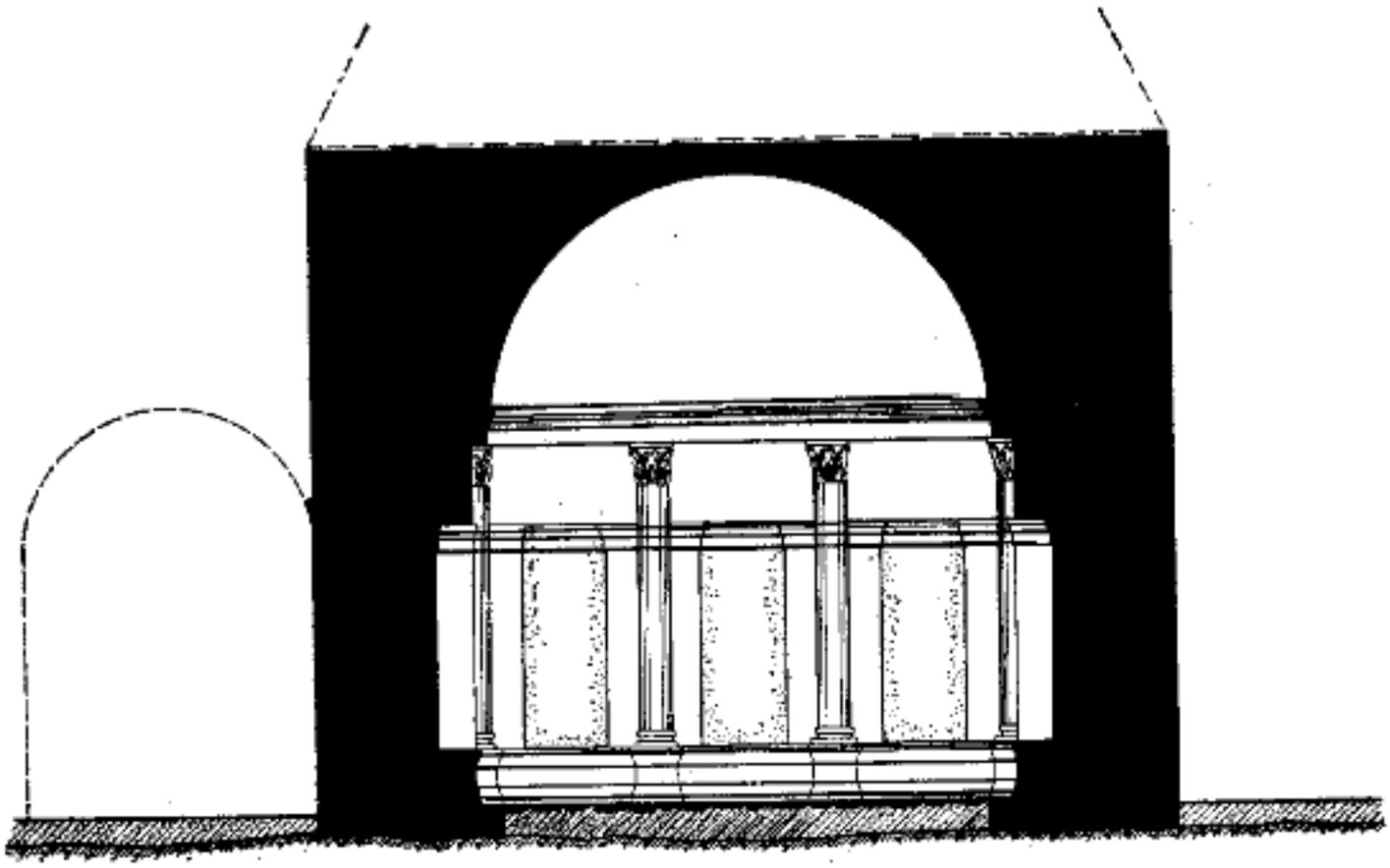
Ill. 9. Restored plan of the monumental building and its close surroundings.

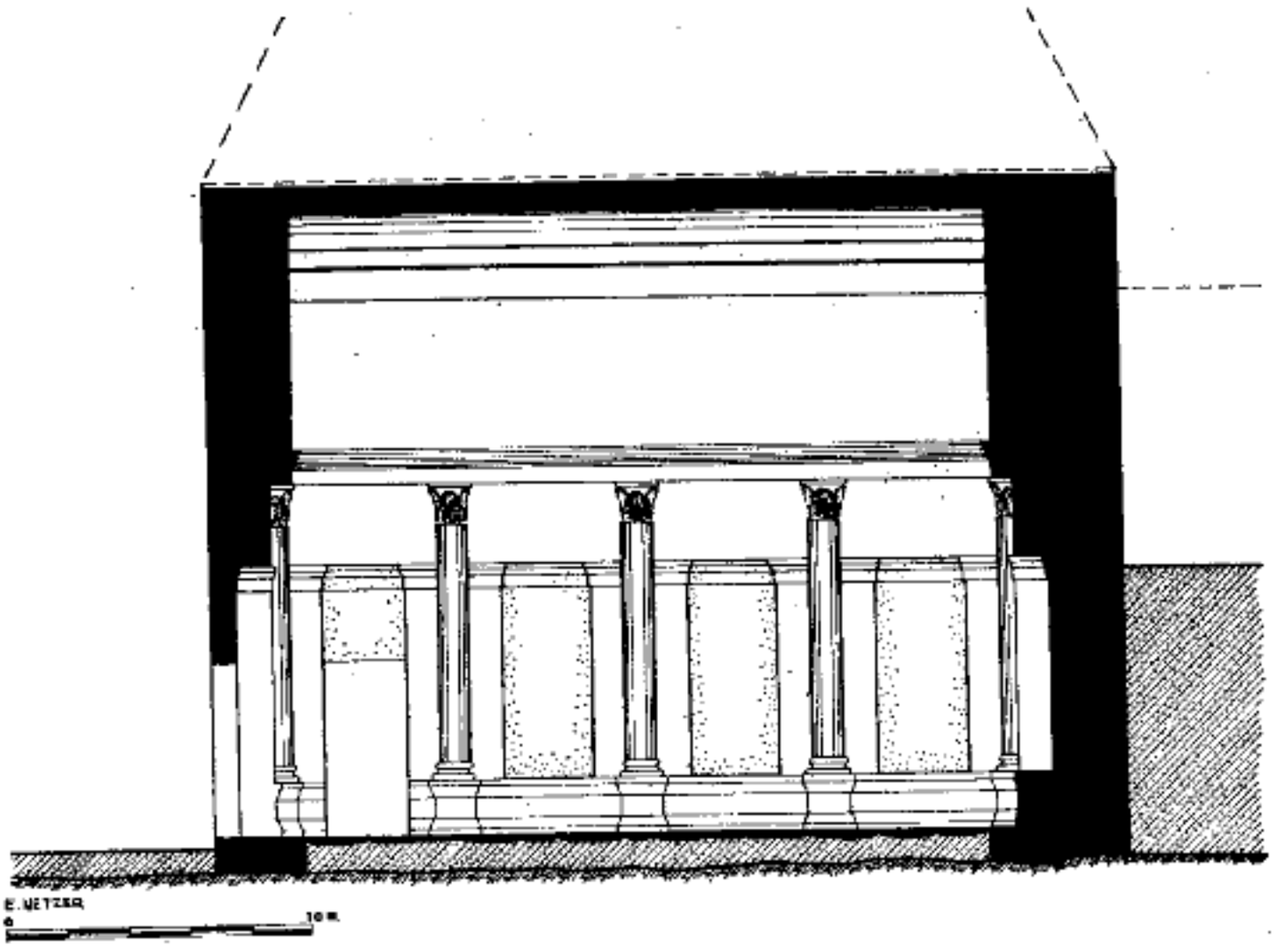
governors (the procurators) until its occupation by Jewish rebels in the first Jewish revolt against the Romans (at 66-73 A.D.). It was then deserted, soon after the revolt was suppressed.

The site (which was already partially in ruins), was again in use only for a short while during the second Jewish revolt against the Romans, during a short period in the years 132-136 A.D.

Byzantine settlers settled here in the 5th cent. A.D. They well exploited the extensive ruins of Herodium — partially by clearing and restoring the ruins and partially by building new structures beside and on top of the old ones. Three small Byzantine churches in the area of Lower Herodium were exposed by us, since 1972, all of them paved with mosaic floors (see Fig. 11).

The site was neglected in the beginning of the Arab era (the 7th cent. A.D.) and never rebuilt again.





Ill. 10. Restored sections through the monumental building. The upper section faces west anh the lower faces south.

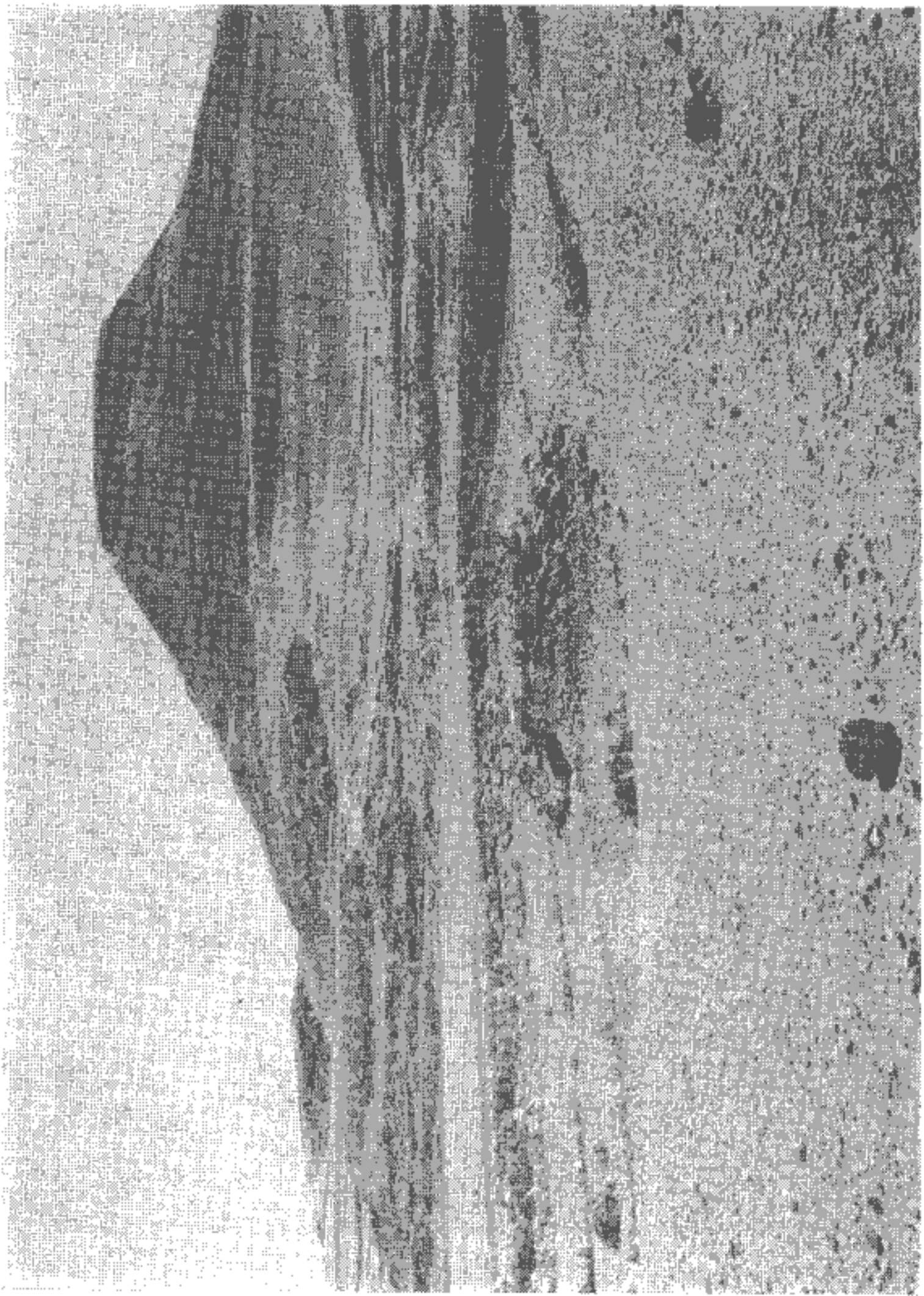


Fig. 1. Herodium's mountain with the large pool of lower Herodium in the foreground —facing south.



Fig. 2. A view into the Mountain Palaace Fortress (facing south). Notice the solid vase of the round eastern tower, the remains of the cylindrical structure and the peristyled courtyard of the inner «Villa».

Fig. 3. The pool, in the center of Lower Herodium, surrounded by the leveled grounds (the garden in Herods' days) with the Monumental Building in the foreground, facing south. Taken in an early stage of the excavations.



Fig. 4. A corner of the «Earth Dam» structure to the east of the large Pool Complex, at Lower Herodium.

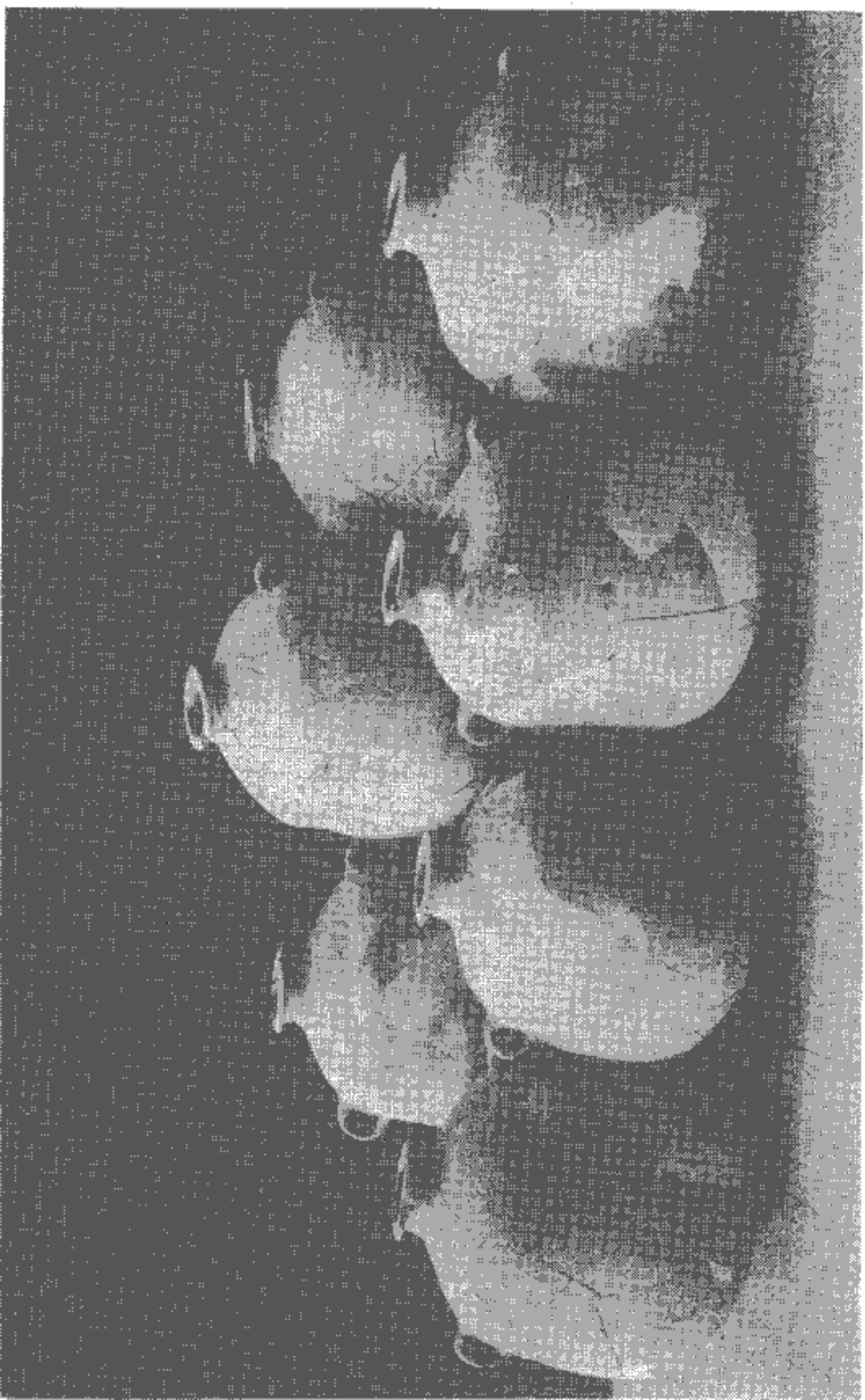


Fig. 5. A group of storage jars found together in a storage hall in Lower Herodium.

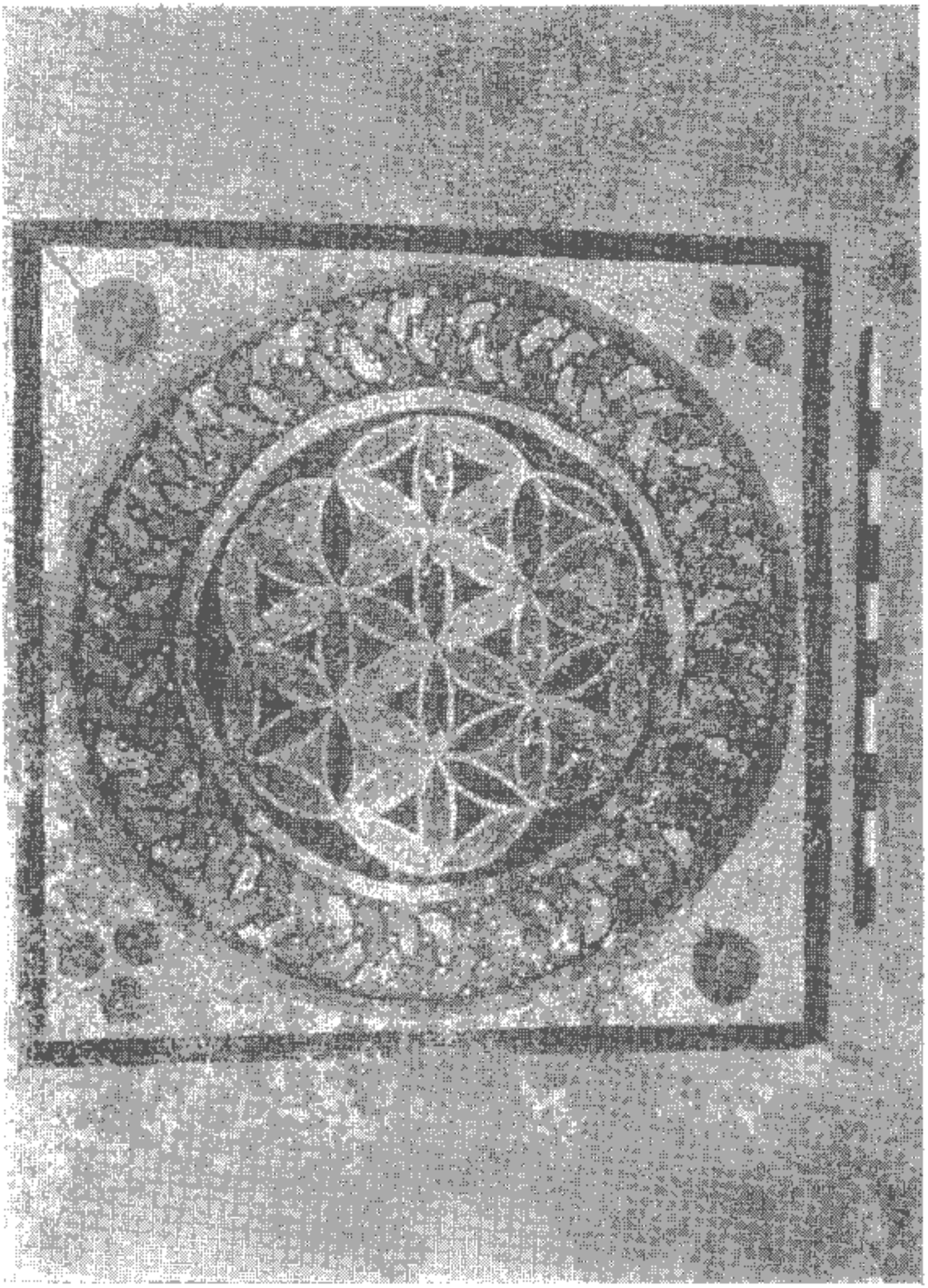


Fig. 6. Mosaic floor from the large Bathhouse, in the Roman style, exposed in Lowe Herodium.

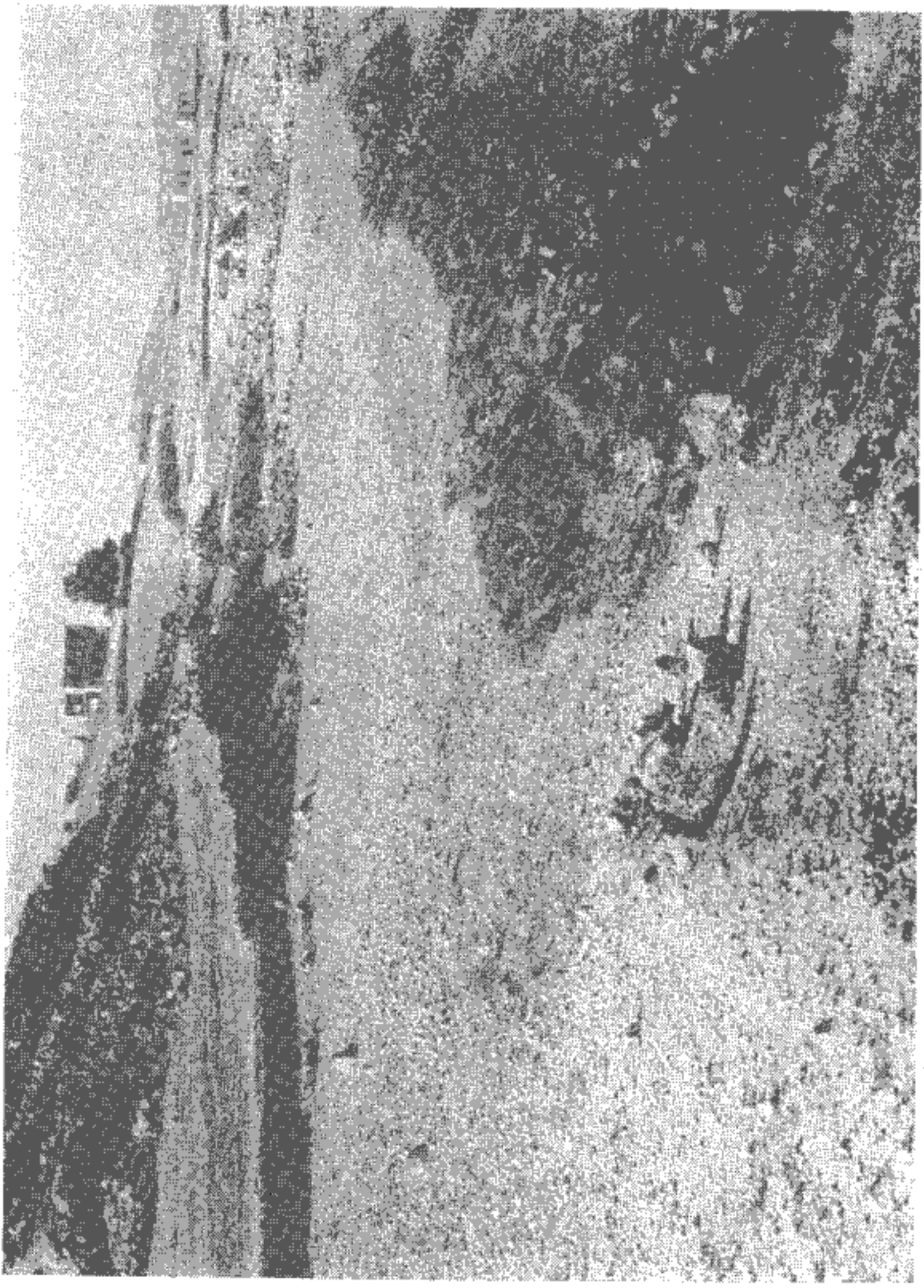


Fig. 7. The «course», an artificial long terrace which was prepared, perhaps, for Herod's funeral (facing west).



Fig. 8. The Monumental Building (its inner hall), facing north. The division walls belong to the Byzantine period.

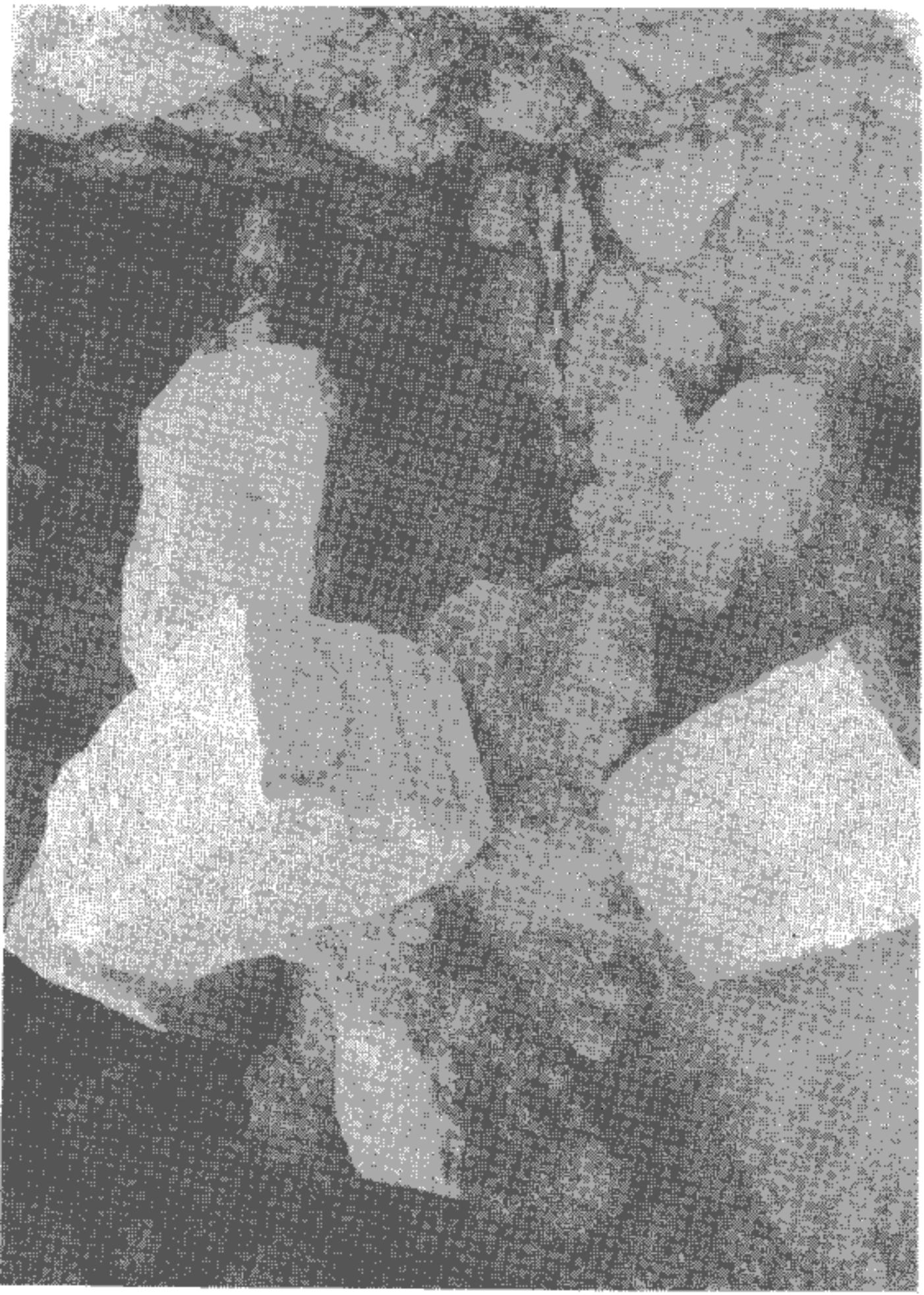


Fig. 9. Fallen ashlar stones from an unknown monument, reused in the building of a Byzantine church.



Fig. 10. The Byzantine church exposed south-east of the Monumental Building, built with reused ashlar stones taken from an unknown monument.

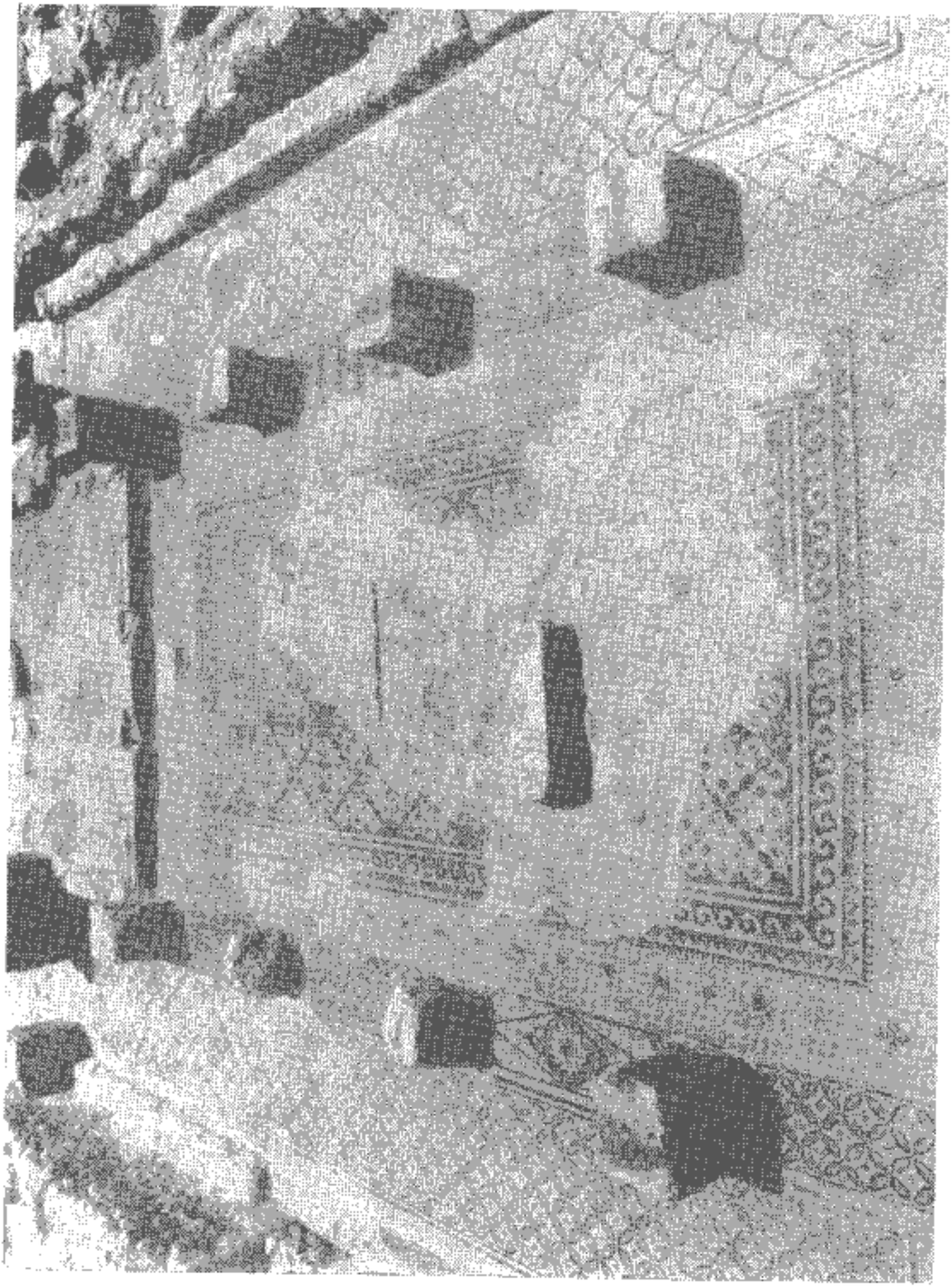


Fig. 11. A floor of a Byzantine church exposed north of the pool complex. The inscription mentions the dedication of the church to St. Michel.