

## WHAT HAPPENED TO THE AKRA FORTRESS IN JERUSALEM?

### PART ONE: THE AKRA FORTRESS FROM ANTIOCHUS IV EPIPHANES TO POMPEY THE GREAT

By Clyde E. Billington, Ph.D.

In November of 2015 archaeologists Doron Ben-Ami, Yana Tchekhanovets, and Salome Cohen from the Israeli Antiquities Authority reported that they had found the Akra Fortress which was built by the infamous Seleucid King Antiochus IV Theos Epiphanes in ca. 167 BC.<sup>1</sup> He built the Akra Fortress as a way of controlling the rebellious Jews who rejected his introduction of pagan Greek religion into Judah and especially into the Temple in Jerusalem.

When pious Jews resisted, Antiochus IV Epiphanes retaliated with a harsh persecution, which then caused the Hasmonean Revolt led by the brilliant Judas Maccabaeus. Eventually Judas captured Jerusalem and cleansed the Temple of the “Abomination of Desolation” of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who had set up idols in the Temple, introduced religious prostitution, and sacrificed pigs on the Altar.

The re-dedication of the cleansed Temple by Judas Maccabaeus took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev in 164 BC, and it was the first celebration of Hanukkah. However, the strong Akra Fortress, manned by Macedonian Greek soldiers-- and also by compromising “Antiochene” Jews--resisted conquest, and it was not finally taken until it was starved into submission in 141 BC by Simon, the brother of Judas Maccabaeus.

Archaeologists Ben-Ami, Tchekhanovets, and Cohen have indeed made a remarkable discovery in the ancient City of David; they have found the remains of a massive wall with a glacis and the foundations of a massive tower connected to this wall. They report that the foundations of this tower alone are 65 feet long by 13 feet wide. These fortifications were unquestionably built by Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

Arrowheads, sling stones, and ballistae have been excavated from around this wall and the foundations of this tower. These war artifacts unquestionably date to the period of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his immediate successors, and they certainly came from the fighting between Hasmonean troops trying to capture the Akra and the Greek soldiers and compromising Antiochene Jews trying to defend it. Coins of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the remains of Greek wine jars—from the Aegean area—have also been found at this site.

The term Akra was at first used just for the high massive fortress with towers that Antiochus Epiphanes built on a hill overlooking the Temple. Incidentally, the Greek word Akra translates as “high place,” and it is cognate with the Greek word “Acropolis,” which is the high hill in Athens where the famous Parthenon is located. Akro-polis translates literally as the “High City.” It is very likely that it was Antiochus Epiphanes who gave the Greek name Akra to the fortress which he built in the City of David, since Jews at that time in Jerusalem spoke Aramaic and not Greek.

Josephus states in his *Antiquities* that the hill on which the Akra fortress was built was “high and overlooked the temple on which account he (Antiochus Epiphanes) fortified it with high walls and towers, and put into it a garrison of Macedonians.”<sup>2</sup>

I Maccabees 6:18 agrees with Josephus and also locates the Akra near the Temple. It states: “The men of the Akra had been besetting Israel in the neighborhood of the Sanctuary.”<sup>3</sup> It is clear from this passage from I Maccabees that the Akra was located close enough to the Temple—almost certainly within range of war projectiles—to be a threat, but it is also clear that the Akra Fortress did not originally include the Temple or its fortifications.

It is obvious from these ancient sources that the original “Akra” was a fortress that was built by Antiochus IV Epiphanes on a high hill in Jerusalem and that the Akra was located near the Temple. However, it appears that the term Akra was eventually expanded and used to include all of the fortifications built around the City of David by Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

This newly discovered wall and the foundations of this massive tower, which have been excavated by Ben-Ami, Tchekhanovets, and Cohen, are certainly not the original Akra Fortress high on a hill that is mentioned by Josephus, and they clearly are not located near the Temple Mount. However, this massive wall and these tower foundations almost certainly were once connected to the high Akra Fortress and to the other fortifications around the City of David.

As was noted above, the term Akra was expanded in time and used by the Jews not just for the high fortress—the true Akra—southeast of the Temple but also for all of the fortifications connected to it that were once around the City of David. These additional fortifications were also built by Antiochus IV Epiphanes as can be seen in *I Maccabees* 1:33-34 which says:

Thereupon they (the army of Antiochus) fortified the City of David with a high strong wall and strong towers so as to have a citadel, the Akra. They stationed in it a breed of sinners, wicked men, who grew strong there.<sup>4</sup>

In the above passage from *I Maccabees*, all of the fortifications that were built by Antiochus IV Epiphanes around the City of David are clearly grouped together under the term Akra, which obviously also included the actual Akra Fortress located immediately southeast of the Temple. The newly-excavated wall and the tower foundations found by Ben-Ami, Tchekhanovets, and Cohen were, by the extension of this word, a part of the Akra, but they were not the true high Akra.

The site where this wall and these tower foundations have been excavated is located in the Givati Parking Lot which is in the Tyropoeon Valley. The Tyropoeon Valley runs along the west side of the ancient City of David in Jerusalem, and it is lower than most of the City of David, and also considerably lower than Mount Zion and the Temple Mount.

In other words, the site where this wall and these tower foundations have been excavated cannot be described as “high,” and it certainly cannot be said to have ever “overlooked the temple,” as Josephus has stated was true about the high Akra. This site is also located about 200 yards away from the Temple Mount.

As was noted above, the Akra was finally taken by the Jews when its pagan defenders were starved into submission and expelled by Simon the Hasmonean in 141 BC. But the question now arises, what did Simon do with the high Akra?

*I Maccabees* 13: 52 states that Simon: "improved the fortifications of the temple mount running along the Akra and began to dwell there himself with his retinue."<sup>5</sup> In other words, Simon extended the fortifications of the Akra to include the Temple and its fortifications, and then he lived in the Akra and/or the extension of the Akra with some of his troops and family. However, Josephus completely contradicts *I Maccabees* and states:

He (Simon) also took the citadel (Akra) of Jerusalem by siege, and cast it down to the ground, so that it might not be any more a place of refuge to their enemies when they took it, to do them a mischief, as it had been until now. And when he had done this, he thought it their best way and most for their advantage, to level the very mountain itself upon which the citadel (Akra) happened to stand, so that the temple might be higher than it.<sup>6</sup>

The question that now arises is: Which ancient source is correct? The best source appears to be *I Maccabees*. *I Maccabees* was written at least 150 years before Josephus wrote his *Antiquities*, and hence it is much closer in time to the actual events. And in addition, according to my former professor, Jonathan A. Goldstein, *I Maccabees* was written as "Hasmonean propaganda," but it was based on good Hasmonean sources. It should be noted that Simon was himself a Hasmonean.<sup>7</sup>

Goldstein also maintained that Josephus unquestionably possessed and used a copy of *I Maccabees* when he wrote his *Antiquities*. So a related question is: Why did Josephus diametrically and intentionally disagree with what *I Maccabees* says Simon did with the Akra?

Before addressing these two questions, it is necessary to briefly look at what Jonathan A. Goldstein had to say about the Akra and its destruction in his commentaries to his translations of *I Maccabees* and *II Maccabees* in the *Anchor Bible Series*.

First, Goldstein rejected the testimony of both *I Maccabees* and Josephus's *Antiquities* which clearly placed the Akra at the northern end of the City of David and at the southern end of the Temple Mount. Goldstein incorrectly placed the Akra northwest of the Temple at the site where Herod the Great later built the Antonia fortress.<sup>8</sup>

The archaeological work of Ben-Ami, Tchekhanovets, and Cohen has conclusively proven that *I Maccabees* and Josephus's *Antiquities* were correct, and that Goldstein was wrong when he located the Akra at the northwest corner of the Temple Mount at the same site as the later Antonia Fortress. The area of the later Antonia was never considered a part of the City of David, and the discoveries of Ben-Ami, Tchekhanovets, and Cohen have clearly shown that Antiochus IV did indeed fortify the City of David.

Second, Goldstein rejected both *I Maccabees* and Josephus on what happened to the Akra. Goldstein believed that it was destroyed by John Hyrcanus I. He writes: "I shall explain elsewhere how Josephus came to ascribe to Simon the razing of the Akra and the cutting of the hill, deeds probably accomplished by John Hyrcanus."<sup>9</sup>

As far as I know, Goldstein never wrote anything “elsewhere” on his theory that it was John Hyrcanus who destroyed the Akra and cut down the hill on which it stood. He also never discussed his theory in any of the history courses which I took from him, and he did not mention it in any of the discussions we had outside of the classroom; incidentally, he was my graduate advisor and Ph.D. supervisor.

However, Goldstein seems to have based his theory that John Hyrcanus destroyed the Akra and cut down the high hill on which it stood on a passage in the *Antiquities*, Bk. 13, Ch. 8:3. In this passage Josephus, writing about the siege of Jerusalem in 134 BC by the Seleucid King Antiochus VII Sidetes, states that the peace terms agreed to by John Hyrcanus included breaking down “the fortifications that encompassed the city.”<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Ben-Ami, Tchekhanovets, and Cohen have provided archaeological support for the siege of Jerusalem by Antiochus VII; they discovered one of his coins in their excavations of the tower and wall in the Givati Parking Lot.

John Hyrcanus had earlier rejected the request of Antiochus VII to place Greek troops in the Akra, and it should be noted that the agreed-to-peace demands of Antiochus VII apparently did not include the high Akra. And in addition, there is no ancient text which states or even suggests that John Hyrcanus cut down the hill on which the Akra stood.

Since the Akra had earlier been connected to the fortifications around the Temple by Simon the Hasmonean, it is likely that it was by then seen as a part of the Temple’s fortifications. This was probably one reason why it was not included in “the fortifications that encompassed the city” which were to be broken down.

Antiochus VII Sidetes was mainly interested in the destruction of the protective wall around the City of David. He appears to have not asked for the destruction of the Akra where John Hyrcanus lived in Jerusalem, and he also apparently did not ask for the destruction of the walls around the Temple of which the Akra was by then a part.

Antiochus VII undoubtedly knew of the earlier revolt of the Jews which was caused by Antiochus IV Epiphanes’s pollution of the Temple. He also almost certainly knew that the Jews would not agree to any peace terms that threatened their precious Temple.

According to Josephus, Antiochus VII Sidetes was very solicitous of the Temple and even sent bulls to be offered as sacrifices. John Hyrcanus agreed to break down the walls of the City of David in order to end the siege of Antiochus VII, but there is no indication that he agreed to destroy the high Akra and the fortifications protecting the Temple. Incidentally, it is highly likely that, after the death of Antiochus VII in Persia, John Hyrcanus rebuilt these broken-down walls.

Another reason why John Hyrcanus would not have destroyed the Akra is that it had been added to and joined to the Temple’s fortifications by his father, Simon the Hasmonean. Why would he destroy what his father had built? Why also would he weaken the Temple’s protection by destroying the Akra and cutting down its hill?

There is no good reason why John Hyrcanus would have destroyed the Akra, and this is especially true for the cutting down of the hill on which it stood. Hence, Goldstein was almost certainly wrong on the issue of the destruction of the Akra by John Hyrcanus, just as he was wrong on the issue of its location.

Many of the additional arguments that will be given below in this study against Josephus's position that Simon the Hasmonean destroyed the Akra and cut down its high hill are also valid against Goldstein's theory that John Hyrcanus destroyed the Akra.

As was noted above, *I Maccabees* has Simon modifying the Akra by joining it to the fortifications around the Temple, and then living in the Akra fortress. This directly contradicts Josephus in his *Antiquities* which, as has been seen, has Simon destroying the Akra and cutting down the hill on which it once stood.

But there is another ancient source which unequivocally proves that *I Maccabees* is correct and Josephus is wrong. *The Letter of Aristeas* clearly shows that the Akra was not destroyed by Simon and that the Temple's fortifications were once joined to the Akra. *The Letter of Aristeas* thus supports *I Maccabees*.

Aristeas writes that, in order to get a better view of the Temple and of its "spectacle," he and one of his friends were allowed to ascend to the highest part of the Akra so that they could watch the rituals taking place in the area of the Altar in front of the Temple. He writes:

To obtain an accurate knowledge of everything, we ascended to the citadel (Greek Akra) of the City (of David) which lies hard by (the Temple) and watched the spectacle. The citadel (Akra) is situated on a very lofty spot, and is fortified with several towers, which are constructed up to their highest points of great blocks of stone as a defense, so we are informed, to the precincts of the temple, in order that, in case of any attack of revolution or invasion of an enemy, no one might effect an entrance within the walls which surround the house, (i.e. the Temple building).<sup>11</sup>

It is clear from the context of this passage from *The Letter of Aristeas* that the Jews possessed both the Temple and the Akra when Aristeas wrote his letter. The only time that this would have been possible was after Simon took the Akra in 141 BC. It is also very clear from *The Letter of Aristeas* that the Akra's fortifications had been expanded to include the Temple and its fortifications, which is exactly what *I Maccabees* states Simon did with the Akra. Hence, it is very clear from *The Letter of Aristeas* that Simon did not destroy the Akra when he conquered it, and he obviously did not cut down the hill on which it stood.

One further conclusion that can be drawn from *The Letter of Aristeas*, the Akra had to be located slightly east as well as south of the Temple. Aristeas says that he and his friend could see the door of the Temple, and since the Temple faced the east, this would have only been possible if the Akra was located east as well as south of the Temple. It would not have been possible to see the door of the Temple from the site of the later Antonia. Hence, also based on *The Letter of Aristeas*, Goldstein's theory that the Akra was located at the later site of the Antonia should be rejected.

Incidentally, according to *The Letter of Aristeas*, the wall around the entire circumference of the City of David at that time, including the Akra, was about 40 stadia long, i.e. about 2500 feet, which is quite small.<sup>12</sup> Since the wall and tower discovered by Ben-Ami, Tchekhanovets, and Cohen were located about 600 feet south of the Temple Mount and since these were unquestionably built by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, it would have been nearly impossible for the walls around the City of David to

have reached far enough to the north to include the Akra, if it were located at the later site of the Antonia, as Goldstein has argued.

*The Letter of Aristeas's* detailed description of the Akra, the Temple, and the Temple's rituals is almost certainly an eyewitness account. Based upon the description of the Akra and the Temple's fortifications provided by Aristeas, it is unreasonable to believe that either Simon or John Hyrcanus would have ever cut down the high Akra Fortress, which clearly provided so much strong protection to the Temple. If Jerusalem were ever attacked again by pagan armies, the Akra would have been just as difficult for an enemy army to take as it had been for Judas Maccabaeus and his Hasmonean brothers

It is not the primary intent of this brief study of the Akra to deal with the dating of *The Letter of Aristeas*, but it is very clear from the passage quoted above that Aristeas had to have seen the Akra not only after Simon had taken it, but also after he had joined it to the fortifications of the Temple.

Since Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Akra were clearly under Jewish control, Aristeas also had to have seen them before Jerusalem was taken by the Roman Pompey the Great in 63 BC. This means that at least this portion of *The Letter of Aristeas* had to have been written after 141 BC but before 63 BC.

It hence seems nearly certain that the Akra was indeed preserved and used by Simon the Hasmonean just as *I Maccabees* relates and as *The Letter of Aristeas* confirms. In addition, as will be seen, Josephus actually contradicts himself on Simon having destroyed the high Akra and having cut down its hill.

The Akra and its high hill apparently still existed in 63 BC when the Roman general Pompey the Great took the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. As Josephus relates in his *Antiquities*, Pompey's conquest was only made possible by the civil war that was being fought between the two Hasmonean brothers John Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. Pro and anti-Roman parties existed in Jerusalem, and when Pompey marched on Jerusalem, Hyrcanus's pro-Roman group surrendered the city to the Romans. Josephus writes:

Now there was a sedition of the men that were within the city, who did not agree on what was to be done in their present circumstances, while some thought it best to deliver up the city to Pompey, but Aristobulus's party exhorted them to shut the gates because he (Aristobulus) was kept in prison (by Pompey). Now these prevented (i.e. acted before) the others, and seized upon the temple, and cut off the bridge which reached from it to the city, and prepared themselves to abide a siege; but the others admitted Pompey's army in, and delivered up both the city and the king's palace to him. So Pompey sent his lieutenant Piso with an army, and placed garrisons both in the city and in the palace to secure them, and fortified the houses that joined to the temple.<sup>13</sup>

Having the gates of the city opened to him by the supporters of the High Priest John Hyrcanus II, Pompey the Great entered into Jerusalem and then attacked the rebels who were inside of the Temple's fortifications. Josephus relates:

Pompey pitched his camp within (the walls of the city of Jerusalem) on the north part of the temple where it was most practicable; but even on that side there were great towers and a ditch

had been dug, and a deep valley begirt it round about, for on the parts towards the city were precipices.<sup>14</sup>

Josephus is here saying that the Temple's fortifications to the south near the City of David were too strong to attack and had "precipices." In other words, the high Akra hill still stood, and it is nearly certain that the Akra itself still stood. Hence Pompey attacked the Temple's fortifications on its weakest side, the north.

Pompey will eventually take the Temple by building a dirt ramp over this northern ditch/ valley so that he could attack the Temple's northern wall. As Josephus relates, the Temple was only taken because the Jews would not fight on the Sabbath unless they were attacked.

Once he discovered this fact, Pompey ordered his soldiers to not attack on the Sabbath but only to work on building this ramp. Once this ramp was finished, Pompey moved his siege engines and battering rams up against the northern wall of the Temple's fortifications—on the Sabbath-- and then began to batter down a portion of the northern wall of the Temple's fortifications; hence the Temple fell to him. After slaughtering its defenders, Pompey entered the Temple, but he did not loot it.

But what of the Akra? First, it is clear from Josephus's *Antiquities* that the Akra was not located north of the Temple at the site of the later Antonia. The area where Herod the Great later built the Antonia was actually located north of the ditch/ valley across which Pompey had to build a ramp in order to attack the northern wall of the Temple. Therefore, the Akra could not have been located at the later site of the Antonia as Goldstein has argued.

Second, the area south of the Temple was clearly deemed by Pompey to be much more difficult to attack than the area north of the Temple. It should be noted that there was a bridge—almost certainly with a staircase-- that linked the Temple's southern fortifications, which almost certainly included the Akra Fortress, to the City of David to the south. As Josephus relates, this bridge was destroyed by the rebels who held the Temple. This clearly indicates that the Akra was still in existence in 63 BC. Even though there is no source that explicitly so states, it is nearly certain that the bridge linking the Temple Mount to the City of David was later rebuilt. Part two of this article will deal with the question: Who then tore down the Akra and cut down the hill on which it stood?

## **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE AKRA FORTRESS IN JERUSALEM?**

### **PART TWO: THE AKRA FORTRESS AND HEROD THE GREAT**

By Clyde E. Billington, Ph.D.

As was seen in Part One of this article, the Akra Fortress was still standing when the Roman general Pompey the Great took Jerusalem in 63 BC. As was also seen in Part One, the Jewish supporters of the High Priest Hyrcanus II opened the gates of the city of Jerusalem to Pompey, who then only had to defeat the resisting Jewish supporters of Aristobulus II who were holed up in the Temple. Pompey attacked the Temple from the north, and not the south where the strong Akra Fortress was located. In other words, he had no reason to destroy the Akra and to cut down the hill on which it stood.

Who then tore down the Akra and cut down the hill on which it stood? The best candidate is Herod the Great who completely re-engineered the Temple Mount and the entire area around it. The Akra for him would have been a symbol of Hasmonean glory, and he clearly was jealous of and hated the Hasmoneans, who are also frequently called the Maccabees.

It was Herod the Great who basically killed almost all of the members of the Hasmonean family, including two of his own sons who were born of his beautiful Hasmonean wife Mariamne, whom he also murdered along with her mother and brother. Herod the Great had no reason to want to preserve the Akra and the hill on which it stood, but he had good reasons to want them both gone. The Akra would have been seen by the Jews and also by Herod the Great himself as a monument to the glorious victories of Judas Maccabaeus and the other members of his Hasmonean family.

The building of his fabulous new Temple gave Herod a good excuse to rid himself of a monument that glorified the heroic Hasmoneans. The early Hasmoneans had freed the Jews from Seleucid control and had cleansed the Temple. On the other hand, Herod the Great and his father Antipater had played key roles in subjugating the Jews to Rome.

In addition, only a profligate builder like Herod the Great would have thought of removing the top of an entire hill so that his glorious new Temple would be the highest structure in that area. The massive artificial hill which Herod built for his tomb at Herodium and his building of the city of Caesarea and its harbor clearly show that he loved huge building projects. Since Herod built a massive hill at Herodium for his tomb, removing the Akra hill to build his new Temple fits his personality quite well.

The removal of the high Akra hill would have also spotlighted and added to the glory of Herod's fabulous new Temple. Incidentally, it also seems very likely that Herod built the Antonia Fortress north of the Temple so that it would not be associated in any way with the Akra Fortress which was located southeast of the Temple.

As far as the destruction of the Akra and the cutting down of its hill are concerned, Herod the Great had the motive, the means, the opportunity, and the will to do so. The cutting off of the top of an entire hill does not fit any of the Hasmoneans, but it does fit the personality of Herod the Great. But,



why does Josephus in his *Antiquities* contradict *I Maccabees* and say that the Akra and its hill were destroyed by Simon the Hasmonean?

The answer to that question is that Josephus was trying to protect his friends and relatives in the Herodian family; hence he did not want anyone to blame Herod the Great for the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. It could be easily argued that the Akra Fortress would have provided far better protection for the Temple than Herod's Antonia Fortress and his new Temple walls; Herod's new Temple walls were breached by the Romans in a relatively short period of time in 70 AD.

Actually, Herod did not build the Antonia to protect the Temple itself—it was located too far away—but rather he built it as a barracks for soldiers so that they could control and also police the Temple Mount. Clearly Herod's fortifications for the Temple were far more vulnerable to enemy attack than were those built by the Hasmoneans and the Akra built by Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

On the other hand, the Akra Fortress, which had protected Zerubbabel's Temple in the days of Simon, was never taken—even by the Romans—in a direct assault. The Hasmoneans themselves had tried and failed to do so for more than 20 years, and later Seleucid kings also failed several times to retake it from the Hasmoneans. The truth is that Herod greatly weakened the Temple's fortifications rather than strengthened them by tearing down the Akra Fortress and its high hill.

Herod Agrippa II and his sisters Bernice and Drusilla, who was the wife of the Proconsul Festus, were still alive when Josephus was writing his histories, and the Flavian family that then ruled Rome favored the Herodian family. Josephus needed someone to blame for the destruction of the Temple's old Akra fortifications other than Herod the Great, and Simon the Hasmonean, who captured the Akra more than 200 years earlier, was the best candidate.

Josephus was clearly a sycophant of the Flavian family of Roman emperors. For example, he went out of his way to absolve Titus of the crime of burning the Jewish Temple in 70 AD by blaming it on angry Roman soldiers who got out of control.

It appears that Josephus did the same for Herod the Great and his destruction of the high hill on which not only the Akra, but also the palaces of David and Solomon had earlier almost certainly once stood. It is almost certain that the site on which Antiochus IV Epiphanes built his Akra was the site where David and Solomon earlier had a fortress and a palace(s).

According to II Samuel 5:9, King David, after he conquered Jerusalem from the Jebusites, lived in a fortress-palace in the "City of David." The Hebrew word that is used for this fortress-palace is "metsudah," from which comes the later name Masada. It appears that David conquered and confiscated a Jebusite palace-fortress, and then added to it and made it his palace.

It does not make sense for David to have had a fortress in another—lower—place in the City of David. Fortresses almost by definition were built on the highest place in a city; so the high hill of the Akra was earlier almost certainly the site of the fortress-palace of David. The almost certain location of the palace of David earlier on the Akra hill is another good argument for Herod the Great being the one who destroyed the Akra and cut down the hill on which it stood.

Later Solomon almost certainly also built his own palace-- or maybe added to and/or completely renovated David's palace-- on this very same high hill near the Temple. Again, it should be noted that

this hill was once located just to the south and east of the Temple and at the northern end of the City of David. Whoever controlled this hill also controlled the Temple Mount and the City of David.

The connection of David and Solomon to the site of the high hill on which the Akra later stood can be seen in the *Antiquities* Bk. 15, Ch.11:3 where Josephus, while writing about the construction of Herod's new Temple, states:

The hill was a rocky ascent that declined by degrees towards the east parts of the city, till it came to an elevated level. This hill it was on which Solomon, who was one of the first of our kings, by divine revelation encompassed with a wall; it was of excellent workmanship upwards and around the top of it.<sup>15</sup>

This passage from the *Antiquities* contradicts Josephus's earlier statement that Simon destroyed the Akra and cut down the hill on which it stood. Josephus is here stating that the Akra hill still existed when Herod began building his Temple. This passage from Josephus is also clearly stating that the Akra hill was the very same hill on which the palace of Solomon was once located.

This passage from the *Antiquities* may also be suggesting that Antiochus IV Epiphanes built the Akra using the remains of walls built by Solomon around his palace. By any means, the palaces of David and Solomon were almost certainly once located on the very same spot where the Akra was later located.

It appears that Josephus, or more likely one of his scribes, was using a very good historical source which dealt with Herod's building of his Temple, and, as has been noted, this source clearly states that the high hill of the Akra was still standing when Herod began his reconstruction of the Temple Mount. This historical source was almost certainly based on an actual eyewitness account dating to ca. 20 BC when Herod began his reconstruction of the Temple and the Temple Mount. Fortunately, Josephus failed to catch his own contradiction.

It is also nearly certain that all of the kings of Judah mentioned in the Old Testament ruled from a palace(s) on this same high hill. The royal palace(s) on this high hill was/ were burned down by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 586 BC, and thus only ruins would have remained. It appears nearly certain that Antiochus Epiphanes built his Akra on the site of these ruins.

Even if Simon or any one of the other Hasmoneans had destroyed the Akra, it is highly unlikely that they would have intentionally disturbed the ruins of the palaces of David and Solomon or that they would have cut down a hill on which these famous Jewish kings had once built their palaces.

However, Herod the Great, who was a very jealous and vainglorious man, would probably have enjoyed removing the remains of the palaces of ancient Jewish kings who were more famous and certainly far more popular than he was with the Jews. Herod the Great appears to have wanted to completely obliterate any remains of Israel's glorious past history, and his building of a fabulous new Temple seems to have given him the excuse to do so.

Herod's destruction of Israel's history can be seen in his deconstruction of the Temple of Zerubbabel, his nearly certain elimination of the ruins of the palaces of David and Solomon, his destruction of the Akra in which the Hasmoneans had lived, his destruction of the Temple's former

fortifications built by the Hasmoneans, and his complete reshaping of the Temple Mount and the northern area of the City of David by cutting down the hill on which the Akra once stood.

Now for some archaeological implications for Herod the Great's almost certain destruction of the Akra and his cutting down of the hill on which it stood.

First, *The Letter of Aristeas*, *I Maccabees*, and Josephus's *Antiquities* make it very clear that the high hill on which the Akra was once situated was located very close to the Temple, and directly to its southeast. The only area which fits these qualifications is the area which now lies to the east of the area between the Dome of the Rock Mosque and Al Aqsa Mosque. However, it is also possible that the high Akra Hill also once extended a little further south beyond the current southern wall of the Temple Mount.

Second, it seems likely that the double and triple Huldah Gates at the southern end of the Temple Mount were drilled through rock that was once a part of the high hill on which the Akra once stood. The now-sealed Huldah Gates led to massive sets of stairs which once led up from the City of David to the new Temple Mount platform which Herod had constructed. It is also very likely that the Al Aqsa Mosque was built on at least part of the cut down remains of the Akra hill.

Third, there can be very little left of the archaeological remains of the palaces of David, Solomon, and the other kings of Judah at the northern end of the City of David; probably at most only some ruins that were lower down in the City of David or on the sides of the high Akra hill.

Fourth, Herod very likely re-used and re-purposed most of the stones from the Akra and its fortifications, probably after reshaping them to fit his own architectural needs and his own building style. It is probable that some of the massive stones that still form the foundation for the southern wall of the Temple Mount came from the Akra Fortress. It is also likely that stones from the cut-down Akra hill itself were quarried by Herod for use in building the Temple and its fortifications.

And fifth, Herod had to have had some place to dump the huge amount of unwanted stone, rubble, dirt, etc. which he removed from several places including: the Akra Fortress, the high hill on which it stood, the ruins of the palaces of David and Solomon, the deconstructed rubble from Zerubbabel's Temple, etc.

To my knowledge no archaeologist has ever reported finding any massive dump site for this rubble anywhere in the Jerusalem area. This leads to the question, what did Herod do with this massive amount of rubble? It is very likely that Herod used this rubble as fill material in the wide ditch/ valley that once existed between the Temple building and the Antonia Fortress to the north. It was across this ditch/ valley that Pompey had built his ramp to attack the northern wall of the Temple.

As Josephus relates and as archaeology has proven, Herod cut and moved huge stones to build a retaining wall along the west side of the Temple Mount in the valley that once existed between the Temple and the Antonia to the north. It seems highly likely that the empty valley/ ditch just to the east of these massive retaining stones was filled with the rubble and archaeological materials which came from Herod the Great's complete reconstruction and reconfiguration of the Temple Mount.

In other words, the massive amount of rubble, which Herod very likely dumped as fill north of the Temple, would have come from the following: (1. the Akra Fortress, (2. the ruins of royal Jewish

palaces, (3. ruins of a Jebusite fortress, (4. stone rubble cut away from the Akra hill, (5. rubble from the deconstructed Temple of Zerubbabel, (6. rubble from the bridge linking the Akra to the City of David, (7. construction rubble from Herod's new Temple, and (8. maybe the Altar stones polluted by pig blood that were removed by Judas Maccabaeus. In addition, the remains of Pompey's ramp are still almost certainly located in this valley.

If this supposition is correct, which is highly likely, then these archaeological materials will be found buried between the Dome of the Rock Mosque and the remains of the Antonia to its north. Unfortunately, the area where this fill was almost certainly dumped is now a part of the Temple Mount platform. Hence no archaeological excavations can be carried out to search for this dumped fill material, which must be loaded with ancient artifacts.

Two final points, first, any proper reconstruction of the geography and history of the City of David must recognize that the current site does not look anything like it did in the days of King David. The entire top of a high hill is now missing and so also are all of the ruins of the ancient fortresses and palaces which once stood on this hill.

And second, any arguments made by critical scholars against the existence of David and Solomon, and the importance of their kingdoms, which are based on the absence of archaeological evidence in Jerusalem, are fatally flawed since there is solid historical proof that this archaeological evidence was destroyed and/ or made inaccessible by Herod the Great.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. Israel Antiquities Authority, "Acra Fortress from Hasmonean Era May be Identified," Press release, Nov. 3, 2015, reprinted in *Artifax*, Spring, 2016, p. 21. This story was also covered in a variety of sources: Haaretz, Nov. 3, 2015; Jerusalem Post, Nov. 4, 2015; Bible History Daily of the Biblical Archaeological Society, Nov. 10, 2015; and the Times of Israel, accessed June 21, 2017. While I don't generally recommend the Wikipedia, its article on this discovery is quite good.
2. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* in *Josephus: Complete Works*, trans. by William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), Bk. 12, Ch. 5:4, p. 257.
3. Jonathan A. Goldstein, *I Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 41, *Anchor Bible Series* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), p. 312.
4. Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, p. 205.
5. Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, p. 481.
6. Josephus, *Antiquities*, Bk. 13, Ch. 6:7, Whiston p. 276.
7. See Goldstein's Introduction Part IV in his *I Maccabees*, pp. 62-89.
8. Goldstein repeatedly asserts in both his *I Maccabees* and *II Maccabees* that the Akra was located under the later Antonia at the northwest corner of the Temple Mount. See Goldstein's map of the Temple area in *II Maccabees, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 41A in the *Anchor Bible Series* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), p. 509
9. Goldstein, *I Macabees*, p. 483.
10. Josephus, *Antiquities*, Bk. 13, Ch. 8:3, Whiston, p. 279.
11. H. St. J. Thackeray, trans. *The Letter of Aristeas* (London: MacMillian and Co., 1904), p. 23.

12. Ibid. See also Thackeray's footnote 2 on page 23 that gives the distance around the walls of the City of David as 50 stadia, which is roughly 3,100 feet.
13. Ibid. Bk. 14, Ch. 4:2, Whiston, p. 292.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid. Bk. 15, Ch. 11:3, Whiston, p. 335.