

The Palatial Mansion



Seven-branched menorah, shewbread table, and an altar incised in plaster, from Herodian period, found in the Jewish Quarter excavations.

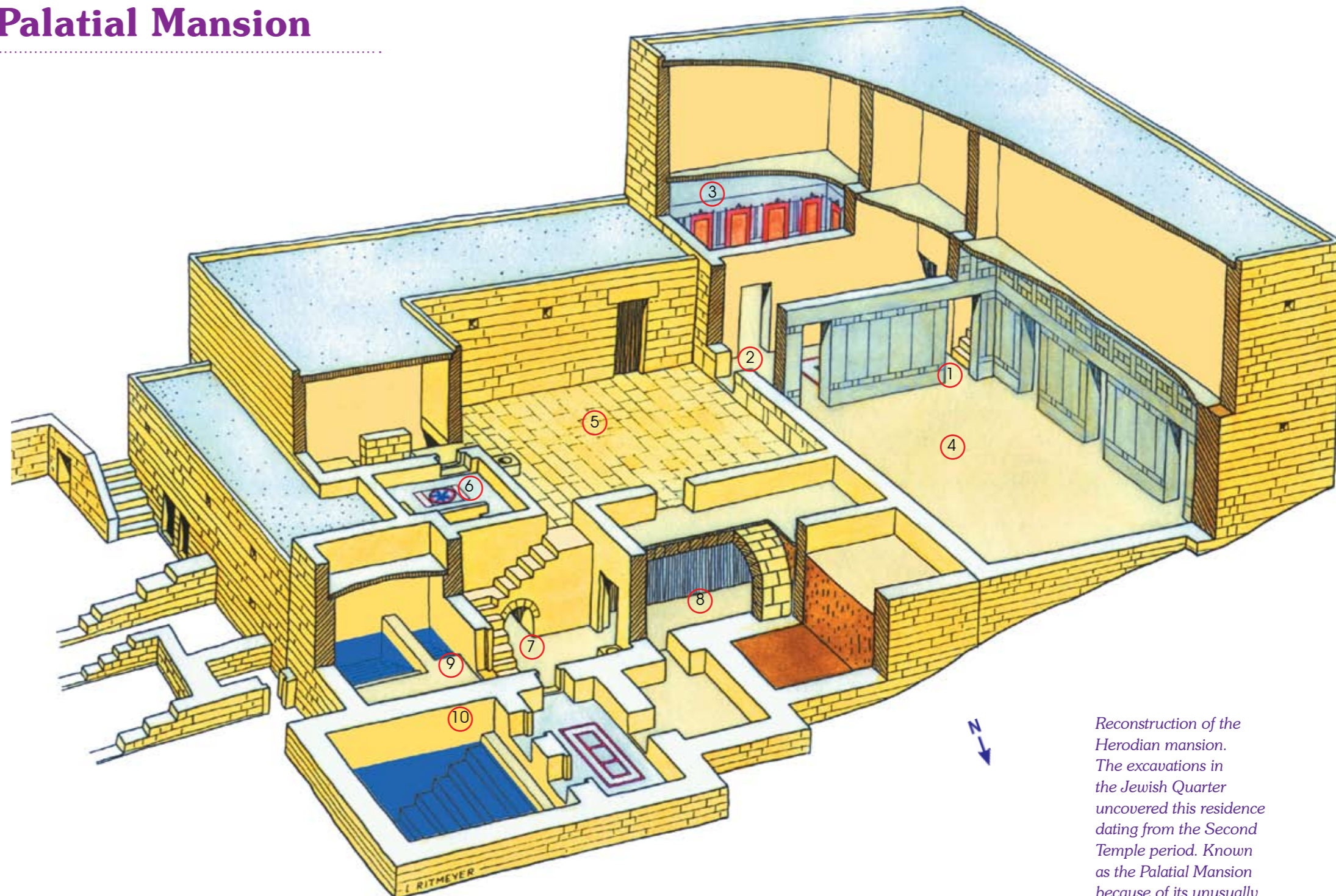
The so-called Palatial Mansion was located on the eastern slope of the Upper City just opposite the southwest corner of the Temple Mount. Built on two levels, the ground floor was designed as living quarters while the lower level contained storerooms and water installations.

Its overall plan, centered around a paved courtyard, is evidence that, despite its large size, it was a single unit and not divided into smaller residences. The entrance to the building (1) was from the west via steps leading down into a vestibule (2), where a mosaic floor with a central rosette pattern was found almost completely intact, with the charred beams of the ceiling lying on top of it.

From the vestibule, one could either turn into the fresco room (3) on the right, which had panels painted in red and yellow on its plastered walls in the style of the Pompeian frescoes or, to the left, into the magnificent Reception Room (4) with its stuccoed walls and ceiling.

From the vestibule, the visitor entered directly into the courtyard (5), to reach the rooms of the eastern wing. Of this wing only one of the ground-floor rooms, a bathroom (6), with a low bench and a stepped sitting pool, has been preserved. Its floor was paved with a simple patterned mosaic. This bathroom was probably used before descending into one of the two mikvehs that lay underneath the courtyard and which are not visible here.

A stairway on the northern side of the courtyard leads down to the basement level of the eastern wing. Again there is a vestibule (7) from which one could gain access to a large vaulted storeroom (8) on the west. On the basement's eastern side were two additional mikvehs, one of which had a side bath (9). The second mikveh (10), in the foreground



Reconstruction of the Herodian mansion. The excavations in the Jewish Quarter uncovered this residence dating from the Second Temple period. Known as the Palatial Mansion because of its unusually large size—6,500 sq. feet (600 sq.m)—it is now part of the restored Herodian Quarter.

of the drawing, was much larger and had a vaulted ceiling. This mikveh was exceptional in that it had a double doorway and an entrance porch paved with mosaics.

The sumptuous fittings of this major structure make it worthy of the term

“palace.” It contains four ritual baths, one of which, with its separate doors for entry and exit, evidently served a number of people. This, coupled with the traces found of a great conflagration, point to a possible identification with the palace of Annas the High Priest. The high priest’s

palace is recorded by Josephus (War 2.426) as having been burnt together with the palace of Agrippa and Berenice in 70 A.D. It was only a short walk from here to the Royal Bridge, where the priests could cross directly to the Temple platform without first having to descend into the Tyropoeon Valley.