



The Stone of Foundation and the Site of the Temple

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1½ cubits base gives an intercolumniation of 5·9 cubits, or about 7' 10", being very nearly the same as that of the synagogue of Arbela, which is exactly 6 cubits = 8 feet. Adding 6 cubits on either end of the building (in imitation of the plan of the Tell Hum synagogue), we obtain a total interior length of 52 cubits, being 4 cubits short of the length of the great synagogues of Tell Hum and Kerazeh.

The capitals of the pillars are of a very simple character. Attached pilasters seem to have been built against the walls either in or outside. A stylobate of simple moulding, identical with that of the pedestals on which the pillars stood and sixteen inches high, ran round the building.

In the little keep I found, besides pillar-shafts of dimensions identical with those of the synagogue, three lintels which probably belonged to the three southern doors of the synagogue. The longest, 8' 4" by 2' 4", represents two lions flanking a base, which may perhaps represent the pot of manna (see Photograph No. 73, old series). They are boldly though roughly cut; the stone is broken in two. The other two have sunk centres with a surrounding conventional border of a very effective twisted pattern.

It would be very interesting to know the date of this building, but of this we have no positive evidence.

It is known that Rabbi Simeon bar Iochái built twenty-four synagogues at his own expense. Among these were the synagogues of *Kefr Birim*, *El Jish*, and *Meirún* (where he is buried), visited by Major Wilson, also one at *Etham*, of which we have, I believe, found the site, with two others as yet unknown at *Tiria* and *S'asa*. This famous doctor and builder, called "the great light," and also "the spark of Moses," is said to have been the author of the cabalistic book *Zohar*. He lived about 120 A.D.

The six synagogues enumerated above date, therefore, from the very commencement of the second century. It is extremely probable that the synagogue of Umm el 'Amed may be attributed to the same date and the same builder.

CLAUDE R. CONDER, Lieut. R.E.

THE STONE OF FOUNDATION AND THE SITE OF THE TEMPLE.

[The substance of this paper has already appeared in the *ATHENÆUM*.]

I.

THE question whether the "stone of foundation" was a portion of the solid rock or a movable stone is one of considerable interest in connection with the topography of the temple. If the former, it will be easy to fix with all but absolute certainty its position, and from it as a starting-point, to lay down the sites of the temple, altar, and courts, with no

more uncertainty than the uncertain value of the cubit renders inevitable.

The use of the word אבן would imply that it was a movable stone, but its (supposed) history, as given by the Rabbis, quite removes it from the category of ordinary stones and represents it as the centre* or nucleus from which the world was founded. "It is taught that from it the world was founded, which is the same as to say from Zion the world was created. The doctrine of the Bareitha is that Rabbi Eliezer said the world was created from its middle, as is said, 'when the dust groweth into hardness and the clods cleave fast together' (Job xxxviii. 28). Rabbi Joshua said the world was created from the sides. . . . Rabbi Izaak (Niphka) said the Holy One, blessed be He, threw a stone into the sea, and from it the world was created" (Yoma, 54b). Rashi explains: "Zion was first created, and around it the clods were compacted together until the world was completed on every side." The teaching of the Talmudic doctors therefore indicates clearly that the *aven sheteyah* was rock, and not a detached stone, and also affords an explanation of the use of the word אבן in connection with it. Originally, according to their ideas, it was a stone, but when from it the world was created, either by a process of accretion from without, as R. Joshua held, or by a kind of growth from within, as taught by R. Eliezer, it was no longer a stone, though still retaining the name, but the foundation of the world, the holiest spot on earth,† "Zion the perfection of beauty," the place where the ark of the covenant was deposited, and where alone the "visible majesty of the divine presence" manifested itself.‡

The notion that it was a movable stone appears to have arisen in later times, and to rest upon no better authority than that of the Toldoth Yesu—a work containing so many silly and blasphemous stories that its statements can hardly be regarded as worthy of serious consideration. Moreover, the testimony of this book is by no means of a definite character, for whilst, according to Buxtorf (Lex. Talm. 2541), it represents the stone as identical with that which the patriarch Jacob anointed at Bethel, the edition of Wagenseil gives quite a different account of its

* In subsequent times the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was made the site of this as well as of some other traditions stolen from Mount Moriah.

† The Rabbis have, indeed, a quibble that the chamber over the Holy of Holies was holier than the most holy place itself, because it was entered only once in seven years, whereas the Holy of Holies was entered every year (Pesach. 86a).

‡ The expression "from the time of the former prophets" (Samuel, David, and Solomon) appears intended to indicate that in the time of the second temple there was no doubt about the site of the Holy of Holies in Solomon's building. Tosefta Yoma (ch. ii.) expressly notes that the ark had been placed upon the stone of foundation. About the extent of the holiness of the most holy place towards the east in the second temple there was a doubt (Yoma 51b, and R. Obadiah on Midd. iv. 7).

origin—namely, that King David, when digging the foundation (of the temple), found it “over the mouth of the abyss” with the name engraved upon it, and that he brought it up and placed it in the Holy of Holies.

On the whole, then, it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than that the *aven sheteyah* was a portion of rock projecting three finger-breadths upwards from the floor of the Holy of Holies, covering a cavity which was regarded as the mouth of the abyss, revered as the centre and foundation of the world, and having the ineffable name of God inscribed upon it.*

II.

The statements made in the Talmud, and repeated over and over again with great accuracy by rabbinic writers, supply us with the following data—viz.:

1. The stone of foundation (in other words, the solid rock) was the highest point within the mountain of the house, projecting slightly above the floor of the Holy of Holies.

2. There was a gradual descent from it by means of several flights of stairs to the floor of the mountain of the house opposite the eastern gate, the difference of the level of these two points being twenty-two cubits (and three finger-breadths).

3. A line produced from it through the centre of the house towards the Mount of Olives would intersect the top of that mount.

4. From it the rock sloped downwards on the western, northern, and southern sides, as well as on the eastern, a “solid and closed foundation” six cubits high being made all round the house in order to raise the floor to (within three finger-breadths of) its summit. On the eastern side this solid foundation was covered by the steps leading down to the court, but whether these steps extended along the whole breadth of the house is uncertain.

5. Although the difference in level of the floor of the mountain of the house at the eastern gate, and the floor of the temple was (as above stated) twenty-two cubits, the rise of the ground outside the courts, from east to west, was such that the floor of the temple was only twelve cubits above it at the southern and (perhaps) northern gates of the upper court.

The summit of the Sakhrah under the great dome of the rock is the only spot in the whole enclosure which answers to these data, and it will not be difficult to show that it answers to them in a very remarkable degree.

The Holy House, with its courts, was not in the centre of the enclosure,

* It is impossible not to suspect in these Jewish traditions the origin of the sacredness which the Mohammedans have attached to the Sakhrah. The “stone,” which was the foundation of the world, might afford a fitting resting-place for the Prophet on his mysterious journey, and the “great abyss” may well have suggested the awful legends which still cling to the “well of souls.”

but was nearer to its western boundary than to its northern, nearer to its northern than to its eastern, and nearer to its eastern than to its southern; in other words, the largest free space was on the south, the next on the east, the next on the north, and the smallest on the west. In the Tosifoth Yom Tov and Middoth, the following measurements are given—viz.:

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------------|
| Northern space | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 115 cubits. |
| Breadth of court (north to south) | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 135 " |
| Southern space | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 250 " |
| | | | | | | | <hr/> 500 |
| Western space | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 100 cubits. |
| Length of court (west to east) | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 187 " |
| Eastern space | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 213 " |
| | | | | | | | <hr/> 500 |

What authority the author may have had for this statement I know not, but taking it as a useful hypothesis from which to work, and reckoning the cubit at twenty inches,* we find (1) that if the centre of the Sakhrāh be regarded as the centre of the Holy of Holies, the northern boundary of the mountain of the house would come to within a few feet of the northern limit of the present platform, where is the scarped rock discovered by Captain Warren; (2) that the northern boundary would come to within a few feet of the entrance of El Aksa, a point near which other considerations would lead to the supposition that the mountain of the house terminated; (3) that the western boundary would fall a few feet west of the foot of the present western ascent to the platform; and (4) that the eastern boundary would fall within a few feet of the present eastern wall.

The difficulty presented by the large space left on the west between the present boundary wall and the boundary of the ancient enclosure, as here supposed, may be met by remembering the probability that there were houses (treasuries, dwelling-houses, &c.) on the western side, and that these may have occupied the space.

As to the levels. Within 153† feet east of the centre of the Sakhrāh the rock should descend 10 feet; 93 feet farther east, where the court of

* The choice of 20 inches is of course purely arbitrary. In building their tabernacles the Jews still make use of the hand-breadth, closing the hand and doubling in the thumb. Such a hand-breadth, as I have ascertained by repeated measurements, is seldom less than $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, giving a cubit of 21 inches. Sometimes the point of the thumb is made to project upwards and included in the hand-breadth, which of course makes the latter much larger, and brings the cubit to 26 or 27 inches. It may be hoped that it is still within the bounds of possibility that the ancient standards preserved in Shushan Habbireh (at the eastern gate) may be recovered.

† I here follow Rabbi Obadiah in taking the distance between the altar and the lowest of the steps leading up to the porch to be three cubits (cf. Midd. iii. 6, and the Commentaries).

the women began, there should be another descent of 16 feet 8 inches; and 225 feet still farther east another of 10 feet. Altogether the ground should be 36 feet 8 inches lower than the top of the Sakhrāh at a distance of 513 feet towards the east.

Within 58 feet of the centre of the Sakhrāh on the north and on the south the rock should descend 10 feet (to the level of the upper court), and 54 feet farther on the south, and perhaps on the north, other 10 feet (to the level of the mountain of the house at that part).

Captain Warren's valuable sketch-map of the levels of the Haram Area which faces page 159 of "Our Work in Palestine," shows that if the Sakhrāh be thus taken as representing the Holy of Holies nearly all these levels will fall in without straining.

On the north there is some reason to suppose that the descent from the court was not so rapid as on the southern side. The house Moked, which was there, is understood by the rabbinic writers to have been built on the ground, and the northern half of it was certainly outside of the court, so that we need not be surprised to find that the rock makes its farther descent at a greater distance from the Sakhrāh on the north than on the south, which the map shows to be the case. The descent into the court of the women is a greater difficulty, because the drop of the rock appears to be too far east, but it will be evident that these distances and measurements cannot be regarded as absolutely exact. The doubt about the cubit prevents it. Also the uncertainty as to whether the stairs leading up to the court projected into the court or outwards towards the mountain of the house. Those between the court of Israel and the court of the women are generally supposed to have projected outwards towards the latter, but the slope must have commenced farther west, because there were chambers under the court of Israel opening into the court of the women. The steps leading up to the court of the women from the east are believed to have been outside that court in the chel. Possibly some of these steps may have been cut in the rock itself. Another element of uncertainty is *the possibility of the top of the Sakhrāh having been cut away since the temple was destroyed*,* also the question to what extent the space eastward of the courts was filled up artificially. A not unimportant topic of inquiry is whether there were steps leading up to or from the eastern gate of the mountain of the house, or whether that gate was on a level with the ground outside and inside, questions to which I have not been able to find a satisfactory answer in the Jewish writings. Rashi, indeed (in Berachoth 54a), speaks of the eastern gate being "outside of the mountain of the house in the low wall which was at the foot of the house," but it is not certain from this that he understood steps to lead up to the higher level,

* This is in fact a very probable supposition. Possibly the Mohammedans may have shaped it to suit their purposes, and made the gutter upon it to carry off the blood of their sacrifices.

nor is his opinion on such a subject decisive. Maimonides intimates that from the eastern gate to the end of the *chel* was one level; apparently this was from the inner side of the gate. (Beth Habbech vi. 1.)

Relative to the summit of the Mount of Olives the position of the Sakhrah is precisely that indicated in the Talmud as the position of the Holy of Holies. I have repeatedly proved by observation that a person standing on the top of the mount (near the minaret) may look straight through the little dome (judgment-seat of David) and the door of the dome of the rock towards the Sakhrah, and conversely, that a person placing himself at the eastern door of the latter building and looking away in a line at right angles to the door, will look straight at the top of the Mount of Olives, a few feet south of the centre of the minaret.

THOMAS CHAPLIN, M.D.

JERUSALEM, *September 24th*, 1875.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE ALTAR OF ED.

THE following letter expresses difficulties which have been felt by many with reference to Lieut. Conder's proposed identification of the Altar of Ed. The paper has been shown to Lieut. Conder, who has furnished a reply to the various points raised by Dr. Hutchinson. The substance of this is appended.

"Let us run through the narrative, and see how clearly it both implies and states that the Witness Altar stood on the *left* or *eastern* bank of Jordan; that it was erected by Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh within the borders of their own inheritance, and therefore could not possibly be identified with the western Kurn Surtabel.

The Lord had given "unto Israel all the land which He sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein" (Josh. xxi. 43). And so Ephraim, in whose territory the Kurn stands, was in full possession and enjoyment of his lot, stretching from the Mediterranean right up to the west bank of the Jordan.

Mark this fact as bearing on the argument, and recollect also that Shiloh, the great rendezvous, whence Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh started for their inheritance, was also in Ephraim, and only about four and a half miles west of the Kurn.

The western tribes being in full enjoyment of their inheritance, and Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh having faithfully fulfilled the compact (Numb. xxii. 17-19; xxxi. 32), Joshua solemnly blesses and dismisses them to their trans-Jordanic inheritance, warning them significantly to "take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses, the servant of the Lord, charged" them (Josh. xxii. 5). As a result of this warning the trans-Jordanic tribes raised this Witness Altar in their own isolated inheritance for the information and instruction of their descendants. When and where was this altar raised?