



## Translations of the Middoth, &c.

Thomas Chaplin

**To cite this article:** Thomas Chaplin (1887) Translations of the Middoth, &c., Palestine Exploration Quarterly, 19:3, 132-133, DOI: [10.1179/peq.1887.19.3.132](https://doi.org/10.1179/peq.1887.19.3.132)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/peq.1887.19.3.132>



Published online: 20 Nov 2013.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 3



View related articles [↗](#)

## TRANSLATIONS OF THE MIDDOTH, &amp;c.

THE translations of Hebrew descriptions of the Temple, which have been printed in the *Quarterly Statements*, were commenced some years ago with the object of clearing up, if possible, some obscurities in the then existing translations of the treatise "Middoth." The task did not prove a difficult one, and whilst I was engaged in it the idea occurred to me that it might be both interesting and useful to put into English all that the Jewish authorities have handed down upon the subject. This rather formidable undertaking for one leading a busy and anxious life, and shut off from many helps and sources of information, became the solace and amusement of my spare half hours, and as the labour progressed I soon began to perceive how extremely valuable these Hebrew traditions are in the endeavour to form a just estimate of the plan and structure of the second Temple. My attention was first turned to the "Bêth Habbechereh" of Maimonides, which is a digest of Jewish teaching, as to the construction of the "Chosen House." From its skilful arrangement and lucidity of statement this work is every way worthy of its distinguished author, and one important advantage which I derived from the study of it was that it made me acquainted not only with the several Mishnas in which various parts of the Temple are described, but also with many scattered passages referring to the subject in the Gamara of both the Babylon and Jerusalem Talmuds, in Sifrê, Mechilta, the Toseftas, and other Jewish writings. In every instance I have myself verified his quotations from these sources, and indicated them in the notes appended to the translation.

The comment of Rabbi Obadiah of Bartenora on the Mishnas is highly esteemed for its brevity and perspicuity, and being merely explanatory, seemed to me of great value for my purpose of enabling the English reader to understand the text, especially some passages the conciseness of which gives rise to obscurity, and I have therefore translated it.

It had been my desire to append to these translations, if they were ever printed, a short description of the Temple drawn exclusively from Hebrew sources, and I had already commenced this task when ill health—and other pressing occupations—which took me away from my books, caused me to abandon it. This is not much to be regretted, because every reader interested in the subject may readily construct for himself an almost complete model of the Herodian Temple by keeping strictly to the descriptions of the Rabbis, and avoiding that stumbling-block of so many investigators, the desire to reconcile the account of Josephus with that of the Talmudic doctors. The historian, who probably never had a very intimate knowledge of the inner Temple, wrote at a distance from the spot, after the building was destroyed, and without those aids which

enabled the Rabbis, who fought out, as it were, in their discussions every handbreadth of measurement and every detail of structure, to furnish an accurate account of almost every part of the holy and beloved house, around which so many hallowed memories clung.

The neglect with which these carefully-guarded traditions have been treated is one of the curiosities of literature. Even after scholars like Lightfoot had spent years in arranging and commenting on them, they were still regarded as of little worth. In endeavouring to estimate their real value, a careful distinction must be made between the statements of the Mishnas and those of the Gamara, the latter being for the most part rather opinions than reliable traditions, except in so far as they are a repetition of passages from the Mishnas themselves. The commentaries of the later Rabbis have still less authority, and however valuable as aids to a true understanding of the ancient records, must not be received as anything more than the personal views of the writers. It is certain that Maimonides himself misunderstood the account of the Temple steps; Rashi also has shown that he could stumble; and the only sure guide to a proper understanding of the Temple, as it stood in the time of our Lord, is the text of the Mishnas carefully studied and interpreted without bias from preconceived opinions.

Two points which have been often in dispute may be considered as settled if the authority of these ancient writings is recognised. One is that the rock under the existing Dome of the Rock marks the site of the Holy of Holies, and the other that the roof of the Temple was flat and constructed in a manner exactly similar to those of many houses at Damascus at the present day.

THOMAS CHAPLIN, M.D.

18, *Anerley Park, S.E.*,  
April 28th, 1887.

---

## THE HITTITES.

THE criticism of "Altaic Hieroglyphs" is very encouraging. So much has met with approval that there is every chance of more progress being made in time.

1st. It is admitted that the language of the texts is agglutinative. Professor Sayce approves the idea of "packets," but I cannot find this idea in previous writings. It will perhaps be admitted that it is therefore wrong to look for the verb at the beginning of inscriptions.

2nd. There is a disposition to think that the language is Altaic. I have ventured to hold this view for three years. The comparison with