

The Royal Stoa in the Southern Part of the Temple Mount

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THE ROYAL STOA IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE TEMPLE MOUNT

By BENJAMIN MAZAR

The extensive archeological excavations conducted near the retaining walls of the enclosed Temple area in Jerusalem enable us to arrive at certain conclusions regarding the elaborate design of the Herodian construction project, particularly since it was conceived in the area of Robinson's Arch, and the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount.

This was undoubtedly one of the focal points of the metropolis during the period of Herod's Temple. Here was the axis of the paved streets: of the main street, which ran the length of the Tyropoeon valley, and served the large markets; and the streets that branched out from it, eastward — to the gates in the southern and western walls of the enclosed Temple area, and westward — to the Upper City, and Herod's palace. From this point, one ascended from the mainstreet up to the Royal Stoa on a monumental staircase, which rested on Robinson's Arch, and on the row of arches extending to the south of it, in measured distances, each arch lower than the other.

It is noteworthy that Josephus, in referring to the four gates of the Western Wall, pays particular attention to the fourth gate, which was the most southerly one, and from which one descended, on many stairs, to the Tyropoeon valley. From that point, a row of stairs led to the Upper City (*Antiquities*, XV, 410). Near this site, beside the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount, a large, hewn stone with a niche in its inner side was discovered. Bordering on the niche was a Hebrew inscription: לבית התקיעה להב[ריזז] "to the House of Trumpeting [*to proclaim*]." This stone must have fallen down from the top of the priests' bureaus, where one

of the priests customarily sounded a trumpet on the eve of the Sabbath, to announce its advent (Josephus, *Wars*, IV, 582).

In describing the enclosed area of the Temple Mount, Josephus devotes considerable attention to the Royal Stoa (βασιλεων στοά), saying that "It is a structure more worthy to be spoken of than any other under the sun" (*Antiquities* XV, 411–416). This magnificent stoa extended from the eastern valley (the Kidron valley), to the western valley (the Tyropoeon valley). The main part of it was a long, rectangular Hall of Columns, built in the design of a basilica. The columns, 162 in number, stood facing each other, in four rows, the length of the hall. The first, or southern, row was set into the outer stone wall. Here, a statement of Rabbi Judah concerning the Temple Mount is of interest: סטיו לפנים מסטיו נקראת, היתה איסטונית = "It was called 'istōnīt ['stoa-like'], one stoa within another." This resembles Josephus' own description of the stoa's of the Temple Mount, where he refers to them as διπλαῖ . . . αἱ στοαὶ "the double stoas" (*Wars*, V, 190).

According to Josephus, the columns divided the basilica hall, whose width was about 39 meters, and whose outer wall was 1.5 meters thick. There were three areas of space: the middle, and two lateral areas. The middle area was one and a half times as wide as the lateral ones, and twice as high. Josephus is also informative in stating that it required three men, holding each other with extended arms, to reach around each column.

Generally speaking, one receives quite a clear picture regarding the character of the Royal Stoa from Josephus' descriptions; one that is borne out with considerable accuracy by the outer measurements that have been made, and by the limited investigations we have carried out at the Huldah gates. This applies, as well, to the passages leading from underneath the Royal Stoa to the interior of the enclosed Temple area, and to the columns, whose diameter is approximately 1.45 meters, and to the fragments of the Corinthian capitals. The large, and decorated arch-stone, discovered along with other decorated Herodian building stones, is particularly instructive. It was found in the heaps of debris piled up

outside the southern wall, and adjacent to it, east of the eastern Huldah Gate (the Triple Gate), together with a fragment of a monumental Hebrew inscription, as yet unexplained. One may reasonably suppose that this arch-stone belonged to the apse, which was built adjacent to the rear, eastern wall of the Hall of Columns.

As far as the history of the Royal Stoa is concerned, one may assume that it constituted the most important part of the Herodian construction project undertaken during the first eight years, a phase which included the walls and stoas. (According to *Wars*, I, 40, construction began in Herod's fifteenth year, i.e. 19 B.C.E., and according to *Antiquities*, XV, 380, in his eighteenth year).

We must bear in mind that according to the Gospel of John (2:20), the construction work in the enclosed Temple area continued for 46 years, until the time of the Procurator Pontius Pilate (26–36 C.E.). Actually, construction work of great scope was accomplished during this period, involving the repair of the physical plant, with restorations and additions. This activity was necessitated primarily by the severe damage done to the stoas through fire and devastation, caused by the soldiers of Sabinus during the time of Archelaus (*Wars* II, 49).

Presumably, the construction was executed under the supervision of Gamaliel the Elder (Paul's teacher, according to Acts 22:3). With reference to Gamaliel, it is stated: **היה עומד על הבנין** (a Geniza fragment reads: **על הבנים**) **בהר הבית** (= Gamaliel] used to supervise the *builders*." (Yerushalmi, *Shabbat*, Ch. 16). S. Lieberman explains this passage as follows:

משמע שהיה רבן גמליאל משגיח על מלאכת הבנאים ... בהר הבית. ולפי דרכנו למדנו שבנייני המקדש היו נתונים לפיקוחו של הנשיא בזמן רבן גמליאל הזקן. This informs us that Rabban Gamaliel used to supervise the work of the *builders*. From this statement, as we understand it, we learn that the temple buildings were under the supervision of the Patriarch during the time of Gamaliel the Elder.¹

¹ S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-fshutah*, Part III, *Order Mo'ed* (New York, 1962), p. 204 (Hebrew).

In turn, this correlates with the received tradition that forty years prior to the destruction of the Temple (ca. 30 C.E.), the seat of the Sanhedrin was located in the "stores" (Hebrew: *ḥānuyyôṭ*) within the Temple area:

גלתה סנהדרין מלשכת הגזית לחניות ומחניות לירושלים...

"The Sanhedrin moved from the bureau of hewn stone to the stores, and from the stores to Jerusalem..." (Bavli, *Shabbat*, 15a; *Rosh Hashanah*, 31a; *ʿAbodah Zarah*, 8b; and so forth).

Although the precise sense of the term *ḥānuyyôṭ* is not sufficiently clear (it is a *hapax legomenon* in Jer. 37:16), it appears to derive from Aramaic *ḥānûṭā*, and refers to the basilica hall in the Royal Stoa, which served communal needs, including commerce involved in sacred donations and sacrifices. For the housing of the Sanhedrin, the apse was constructed at the rear wall of the basilica, and it was accommodated for the sessions of the Sanhedrin. Possibly, it was separated from the Hall of Columns by a partition. In any event, it is clear that Herod's architects built the Royal Stoa on the model of the Roman basilicas, which served important communal and commercial functions in relation to the Forum; and it was where the seat of the Sanhedrin was located.

The earliest known example is the Basilica Porcia of Cato (184 B.C.E.), near the Forum Romanum in Rome. In the course of time, the basilica became commonplace in the Roman Empire, and was the plan widely diffused in the eastern provinces. What distinguished the communal basilica, in general, was the hall with four rows of columns, along the length of the hall, with lighting in its upper portion, and a rectangular, or semi-circular platform adjacent to its rear wall, opposite the entrance wall. As an example of a Royal Stoa one may cite the square, enclosed area in Cyrene, surrounded by stoas on all four sides. One of these stoas was a basilica, with an apse adjacent to its rear wall, opposite the entrance. This type of enclosed area, with a basilica, became common in the centers of the Eastern Empire, such as Antioch and Palmyra. As Sjöqvist quite reasonably supposes, its origin is to be found in the Kaisareion of Alexandria, built in the time of Julius Caesar

(48 B.C.E.), and which was intended to serve as an official center for the imperial cult.²

On this basis we assume that the Royal Stoa in Jerusalem was erected by Herod as an integral part of the enclosed Temple area, on the model of the basilicas in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire.

One ascended to the stoa from the markets of the city, located in the Tyropoeon valley to the west, on a monumental staircase, leading up to the Temple Mount. The stoa served primarily for commerce in cultic provisions for the Temple. It is significant, moreover, that the term *hānuyyōl* was one of the designations for the basilica, where the Sanhedrin was relocated, subsequent to the restoration work accomplished under the supervision of Rabban Gamaliel the Elder. It is probable that the Sanhedrin was housed in the apse, constructed on the eastern side of the Hall of Columns.

In the light of what has been discussed, one should inquire if it was not in this very place in the Temple that the confrontation between Jesus and the purveyors of pigeons, recorded in the known episode from the Gospels, took place. (Pigeons were required for sacrifices offered by women after childbirth, and by those suffering from flux, according to Lev. 12 :8, 15:14.) The same would hold true for Jesus' confrontation with the money changers, who exchanged coins bearing the image of Caesar for Jerusalemite coins. Jesus sought to expel such merchants from the Temple area.

This proposal, occasionally suggested with reservations by Dalman, accords well with the previous discussion about the function of the Royal Stoa. Moreover, one should mention the fragment of a vessel, inscribed in Hebrew letters with the word קרבן, "offering," and showing, underneath the inscription, two

² See E. Sjöqvist, "Kaisareion, a Study in Architectural Iconography," *Opuscula Romana* (Sweden, 1954), I, 86 ff.; J. S. Ward Perkins and M. A. Ballance, "The Caesareum at Cyrene and the Basilica at Cremma," *Papers of the British School at Rome* (London, 1958), XXVI, pp. 137 ff.; G. Foerster, *Art and Archaeology in Palestine, The Jewish People in the First Century* (Amsterdam, 1976), II, 980.

inverted figures of pigeons. This fragment was found in the heaps of debris on the paved Herodian street, south of the southern wall of the Temple Mount. Actually, it must have come originally from the Hall of Columns in the Royal Stoa.³

In conclusion, I should raise the possibility that those who built the great synagogues in the diaspora centers, knew well the design of the Royal Stoa on the Temple Mount, and that they constructed the communal installations to resemble it. Religious buildings were in the form of the basilica, with its hall of columns, including a semi-circular apse, which was for the elders of the community. There was also the small, anterior courtyard, apparently resembling the one that stood in the Royal Stoa, between the gate at its western end, and the entrance in the narrow western wall of the Hall of Columns. An instructive example is the synagogue discovered at Sardis (Sepharad), in Anatolia.⁴ I am indebted to Dr. Lee Levine who reminded me what is said about the great synagogue in Alexandria, in the Tosefta (*Sukkah*, 4b):

אמר רבי יהודה: כל שלא ראה בדפלוסטון של אלכסנדריא של מצרים לא ראה כבוד לישראל מימיו. כמן בסלקי גדולה היתה, סטיו לפנים מסטיו, שבעים ואחת קתדראות של זהב היו שם כנגד שבעים ואחד וקן.

Rabbi Judah said: Whoever has not gazed at the 'double stoa' [Greek: διπλόστον] of Alexandria in Egypt, has never in his entire life seen glory reflected on Israel! It was like a large basilica, a stoa within a stoa; with 71 golden seats, corresponding to the 71 elders.⁵

Therefore, many divergent and complex problems are bound up with the Royal Stoa in the southern part of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. One hopes that additional investigations of this area

³ See B. Mazar, 10–8 עמ' א, תשכ"ט חפירות ארכיאולוגיות בירושלים העתיקה, and B. Mazar, *The Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem* (1969), I, 15–16.

⁴ See A. Seager, "The Synagogue of Sardis" [Hebrew], *Qadmoniot* (Jerusalem, 1974), VII, Nos. 3–4, pp. 123 ff.; Andrew R. Seager, "The Building History of the Sardis Synagogue," *American Journal of Archaeology*, 76 (1972), 425 ff.

⁵ See S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-fshutah*, Part IV, *Order Mo'ed* (New York, 1962), pp. 273, 889–891.

with comprehensive examination of the relevant literary materials, and the numerous structural fragments uncovered in the heaps of debris outside the retaining walls, will provide further elucidation, and new solutions with respect to the Royal Stoa.