Chapter 3

THE LARGENESS OF FORT ANTONIA

We surveyed in the last chapter what eyewitnesses and historians from the 1st to the 4th centuries had to say about the City of Jerusalem and the Temple of God. The Jerusalem of Herod and Jesus had been utterly demolished, including its ramparts. I will later show eyewitness accounts that the Temple and its walls were so devastated that the terms to describe them show it had become "like Sodom," and eventually became a Roman farm with oxen plowing the empty space where the Temple once stood. As for the Haram esh-Sharif, it remained with all its walls intact, serving as headquarters for the Roman Tenth Legion. The outer walls looked much as they always appeared, even in the days of Herod and Jesus. It continued to house the Tenth Legion until 289 C.E. when the Legion transferred to Ailat on the Red Sea. A contingent of Moorish soldiers occupied the fort until the Diocletian rampage against Christians and the destruction of most churches in Palestine and the eastern Roman
Empire in 303 C.E. After that, the fortress entered a new phase under the reign of the Byzantine emperors. Before we look at the later history of Fort Antonia, it will profit us to review what the fort was like in the time of Herod and Jesus. We will discover a very different type of fortress than that imagined by scholars today who erroneously identified the Haram with the Temple site.

The first point we must realize is that Fort Antonia was much larger in size than most people imagine today. Because scholars mistakenly identified the large area of the Haram as the site of the Temple, they have been forced to invent a new location for Fort Antonia and drastically to diminish its size. They moved Fort Antonia to be located just outside the northwest corner of the Haram. They also reduced its size considerably from the dimensions described by Josephus. They usually place it over or around a rock pavement they found in the area. In this pavement are the chiseled remains of outlines of games played by Roman soldiers. It was once thought the existence of these Roman games in the pavement was proof that this was once a Roman Camp, and the Camp was Fort Antonia. True, these archaeological remains indicate that Roman soldiers were once familiar with the site, but it has now been shown by further archaeological investigation that this particular camp flourished in the second century in the time of Hadrian, not the earlier period of Herod and Pilate. This rocky area outside the northwest wall of the Haram was NOT the Fort Antonia in the time of Herod.

Let us look at the real Fort Antonia. The only ancient structure in Jerusalem today that can satisfy the early eyewitness accounts about Antonia is of course the Haram (with the Dome of the Rock now occupying its central area). The Haram had nothing to do with the site of the Temple. As I have been saying, the Temple was actually a third of a mile south of the Dome of the Rock, positioned over the Gihon Spring. I will show later that it was a biblical requirement that a natural spring had to be located within Temple precincts. There is no record ever showing there was a natural

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64 Encyclopaedia Judaica, article “Jerusalem, Roman Period.”
65 Mazar, The Mountain of the Lord, p.36.
spring in the region of the Haram. There were, however, many natural and manmade cisterns capable of supplying water to a legion of troops.

Let us now look at the eyewitness accounts of Josephus about the Fort Antonia that existed in his day. He tells us there was such spacious grounds inside Fort Antonia that it was like a city in size. It housed a legion of troops (that would number at least 5000 men and about 5000 support personnel who serviced the legion). This large division of troops could even perform military maneuvers within the enclosure and bivouac on those grounds in mock war training exercises. This means about ten thousand people were resident in or around any Roman fortress containing a legion of troops. Fort Antonia would have been no exception because of the military necessity of maintaining social and political discipline in the capital city of the Jews (who were often highly revolutionary and riotous in this period of time).

**Scholars Are Forced to Make Fort Antonia Small**

There is another designation of Fort Antonia used by Josephus that has given scholars the impression of “smallness” for the size of the fortress, even though he illustrated the encampment as a large military post capable of garrisoning a legion of troops. It is use of a word some scholars think denotes “smallness.” The word that makes them feel justified in considering Antonia to be limited in size. Why? Because Josephus called the fortress a “Tower.”

Using “Tower” to define the fortress can give a careless reader the impression that only a small and single “turret” is meant. The truth is, there was nothing small about Fort Antonia. Josephus stated the Tower of Antonia had walls 60 feet high (as high as a five-story building). These walls were buttressed with additional towers on its four corners another 75 feet high, except the tower on the southeast corner which was 105 feet high — from that tower one could look over all the courtyards of the Temple to the south.66

These dimensions of Fort Antonia by Josephus do not suggest “smallness.” To Josephus, and others living in the first century, the

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66 War V.2,8.
word “Tower” often signified a large military fortress with expansive dimensions. Attention should be given to “Strato’s Tower,” a fortress located on the Mediterranean coast where Herod finally built Caesarea. The dual name did not simply designate a fortress with a single turret. Josephus said it was “a town on the coast called Strato’s Tower.” Herod enlarged the town of “Strato’s Tower” by making a great harbor as large as that of Athens and furnishing it with numerous buildings in the Greek and Roman classical styles with a grand Temple to Caesar and to Rome. He renamed the town (now a city) by calling it Caesarea. A similar example of a smaller fortress becoming a larger one would be the “Tower of London” in England. This structure eventually became a large fortress with many buildings with other “towers” associated with it. In such a manner a “Tower” can become “many towers.”

Similarly, the “Tower of Antonia” was at first moderate in size but grew large as additions were attached. By Herod’s time it contained a legion of troops and was like a Roman city. Being an imperial fort, and Roman property after 6 C.E., Antonia was unlinked from the administration of the municipality of Jerusalem. The “Tower” became an official Roman fortress.

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67 War I.21.5.  
68 Antiquities XV.8.5.  
69 Even at Fort Antonia in the Jerusalem area, there was an underground passage from the Temple to Fort Antonia called “Strato’s Tower” (Antiquities XIII.11.2; War I.3.5). Herod built this underground passage as a safety feature to allow him ready access to the Temple at any time (or from the Temple to Fort Antonia). Josephus said:

“There was also an occult passage built for the king; it led from Antonia to the inner temple, at its eastern gate; over which he also erected for himself a tower, that he might have the opportunity of a subterraneous ascent to the temple, in order to guard against any sedition which might be made by the people against their kings” (Antiquities XV.11.7).

The text shows that “Strato’s Tower” in Jerusalem was this underground sector of the “Tower of Antonia” (Fort Antonia). Note that Josephus also said Herod’s building of the “Tower of Antonia” was “the innate grandeur of his genius” (War V.5.8) and his building of the large city of Caesarea at “Strato’s Tower” was also “the innate grandeur of his genius” (War I.21.5). The identical wording by Josephus appears to link the two “Towers” (the “Tower of Antonia” and “Strato’s Tower”) in an architectural similarity. This may be a reason why an underground sector of the “Tower of Antonia”
So, simply because the word "Tower" was used by Josephus to describe Fort Antonia, a person should not get the impression that the Fort was a small citadel that could garrison about a cohort of troops (about a tenth of a legion in size and not a full legion of men). It is interesting that Titus left the full complement of the Tenth Legion to supervise even a ruined Jerusalem after the war when there were no more Jewish people attending any feasts in their metropolis.

If Titus thought it prudent to station a whole legion of soldiers when there was hardly anyone to govern or supervise, what would have been the case before the war when Jewish crowds coming to Jerusalem were thousands upon thousands in number with many expressing revolutionary trends? The Romans always needed more than a single "cohort" to govern their affairs in Jerusalem. It would be silly to imagine any other thing.

Indeed, when one considers the military requirements Rome encountered in Jerusalem, it can easily be seen they should have had (judging in hindsight after the war) at least two or three Legions to supervise the capital city of the Jewish nation. One legion, plus the troops of King Agrippa and the other auxiliaries, were not enough to quell the uprising that led to the destruction of the City and the Temple.

Translators Erroneously Diminish the Size of Antonia

Translators of Josephus felt compelled to accept the small size of Fort Antonia and describe Josephus' full descriptions to the largeness of the fortress as being exaggerations. This is because they chose the wrong spot for the Temple. By making the Haram esh-Sharif the site of the Temple, scholars and translators have to locate their Fort Antonia at the northwest corner of the Haram. But such a small area could not hold a full legion of troops. In spite of this, most scholars have been assured (up to now) that this traditional area for Antonia at the northwest corner of the Haram is cor-

at Jerusalem became known as "Strato's Tower." Whatever the case, the use of the word "Tower" by Josephus, as it applies to these two fortresses, indicates that the forts were large and not a single turret.
rect. Because of this, they felt justified in interpreting Josephus to mean the number of troops at Fort Antonia was only a single “cohort,”\(^\text{70}\) not a “legion” of troops (Greek: *tagma*).

The translators resorted to rendering the Greek word *tagma* and its derivatives, which normally mean “legion,” as signifying a small “cohort.” This is wrong. Throughout the works of Josephus, the various legions of Rome (including the Fifth, Tenth, Twelfth and Fifteenth — the very legions fighting under Titus during the Roman/Jewish War) were each designated as a *tagma* (a full legion of troops).

There is no reason for modern translators to render the word *tagma* as “cohort” to represent the supposed small number of troops comprising the garrison at the traditional Fort Antonia. In fact, it is absurd. How could a small “cohort” of 500 to 600 troops govern and discipline tens (or even hundreds) of thousands of Jewish pilgrims who came to the festivals at Jerusalem each year? Even a legion of 5000 to 6000 troops would be on the low side for supervising such crowds that were often quite unruly.

When Jewish revolutionaries routed the Romans and took control of Antonia in 66 C.E., the Jewish authorities stationed 6000 men on the four colonnades surrounding the square of the Temple (apparently changing the guard three times a day).\(^\text{71}\) This was in order to discipline the festival crowds of the Jews. If the Jewish authorities had to deploy a whole legion of troops (with rotation of troops three times a day to maintain order), one can imagine that the Romans thought a similar procedure was prudent. It is absurd to think that a single cohort of 500 to 600 soldiers could govern multiple thousands of people in and around the Temple and the whole of Jerusalem.

These facts show that Fort Antonia needed more troops than a small “cohort.” When the apostle Paul was escorted to Caesarea

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\(^\text{70}\) See the translations of Williamson and the Loeb edition by Thackeray.

\(^\text{71}\) Ananus, the Jewish leader, “chose out of them by lot, six thousand armed men, and placed them as guards in the cloisters [the colonnades of the Temple]; so there was a succession of guards one after another, and everyone was forced to attend in his course” (*War* IV.3.12).
from Fort Antonia (called in the New Testament the “castle”), he was accompanied by 200 infantry, 70 cavalry and 200 spearmen, answering to about a “cohort” of troops.\textsuperscript{72} Note that the military commander of Antonia was able to spare that many troops for the protection of a single Roman citizen (the apostle Paul). But, if only a cohort of troops were normally garrisoned in the fortress (as some modern scholars are so bold as to imagine), the fortress would have been left with a mere 100 troops to supervise the whole of Jerusalem at the time of the festival of Pentecost then underway.\textsuperscript{73} Ridiculous.

But what do we find the scholars doing today? The translations of Williamson and Thackeray suggest only a “cohort” of troops garrisoned Fort Antonia (even during the festival periods of the Jews). In no way can this small number of troops jibe with ordinary military necessities or with what Josephus stated was the case in the original Greek. An entire legion of troops would have been on the low side for governing the whole City of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{74}

Further, note that Josephus stated it was customary for each Roman Camp to be spacious enough to contain even two legions if necessary. He said:

\textsuperscript{72} Acts 23:23.
\textsuperscript{73} Acts 20:16.
\textsuperscript{74} Just after the death of Herod there was an uprising that Quintilius Varus, governor of Syria, had to quell in Jerusalem and Judaea. After the war was over, he left a legion of troops to supervise the city (\textit{Antiquities} XVII.11,1). About 40 years later, governor Petronius brought half of the four legions that guarded the province of Syria to Judaea (Philo, \textit{Leg.} 207), but Josephus said in \textit{War} II.10.1 that Petronius had three legions at his disposal in Judaea. This means he had a legion of troops already in Judaea. They must have been at Fort Antonia. It is interesting that even after the Roman/Jewish War, Titus thought it prudent to leave the Tenth Legion in Jerusalem though there was no longer large numbers of Jews living in the city nor thousands of worshippers coming to the festivals, because there was no longer a Jewish Temple or a city. If it were necessary to maintain a legion of troops even after Jerusalem ceased to be a city, what would have been essential \textit{before the war} when Jerusalem was a highly active and vibrant capital city of the Jewish nation, harboring messianic expectations for a world domination by Jews? Having a legion of troops at Jerusalem to control the metropolis of the Jews \textit{before the war} would have been a minimum army needed for Roman security.
"Titus ordered a camp to be fortified for two legions that were to be together; but ordered another camp to be fortified, at three furlongs farther distance behind them, for the fifth legion."  

It was normal procedure for Roman Camps (and permanent fortresses — as Fort Antonia certainly was) to garrison a full legion of troops.\(^\text{76}\) It is time to abandon the absurd belief that the capital city of the Jewish nation (always in the first century bustling with revolutionary fever) could be effectively controlled by a single “cohort” of Roman troops numbering about 500 to 600 soldiers.

It bears repeating that when Titus left Jerusalem after the war, he thought it essential to leave the whole Tenth Legion. He did this when the Jews were no longer populous and were not going to Jerusalem for festivals each year. But without doubt, the situation would have been different before the war.

**Fort Antonia Dominated the Temple**

There is another reason to look at Fort Antonia as a very large fortress. The Loeb translation shows the fortress was so prominent that “Antonia dominated the Temple.”\(^\text{77}\) Remember that Josephus tells us Fort Antonia was so large that it was not only responsible for protecting the Temple, but was large enough to guard both the City, the Temple, and the fortress at Herod’s former palace.\(^\text{78}\) In fact, its physical dimensions were so huge that Fort Antonia obscured the view of the Temple from those approaching Jerusalem from the north.\(^\text{79}\)

Note the Whiston translation of Josephus’ description of the size of Antonia and how the fortress dominated the entire north side of the Temple Mount. Fort Antonia was much larger in size

\(^{75}\) *War* V.2.3.
\(^{76}\) Though Alexandria and all Egypt had a much larger population than Jerusalem, it was noted for its non-belligerent attitude to the Romans. King Agrippa said it still required two legions to supervise the region (*War* II.16.4). But with Jerusalem’s long history of resistance and antipathy towards Rome and its authority, at least a Roman legion was felt necessary.
\(^{77}\) *War* V.5.8.
\(^{78}\) *Ibid.*
\(^{79}\) *Ibid.*
than the Temple area itself, "That hill on which the tower of Antonia stood was the highest of these three, so did it adjoin to the new city [Bezetha], and was the only place that hindered the sight of the temple on the north." 80

When the accounts of Josephus are analyzed, it can be seen that Fort Antonia was so huge in size that it actually occupied the whole region north of the actual Temple Mount, not simply at the Temple’s northwest angle of its outer walls. On two occasions Josephus said that Fort Antonia occupied the north side of the Temple. He said: "This was a fortress [Antonia] adjoining the north side of the temple, which, as I said, was formerly called Baris, but afterwards took this new name under [Mark] Antony’s supremacy." 81

The other reference in Josephus also stated that Fort Antonia was located on the whole of the north side of the Temple.

"Now on the north side [of the temple] was built a citadel [Fort Antonia], whose walls were square, and strong, and of extraordinary firmness. This citadel was built by the kings of the Hasmonean race, who were also high priests before Herod, and they called it the Tower, in which were reposited the vestments of the high priest, which the high priest only put on at the time when he was to offer sacrifice." 82

These are the plain statements by Josephus, an eyewitness, that Fort Antonia was so large it occupied the whole north side of the Temple. It is time modern scholars begin to pay attention to what Josephus describes rather than blithely criticizing the Jewish historian of being guilty of rampant exaggerations. The problem is not Josephus. The present difficulty comes about because modern scholars have selected the wrong place for the former Temples.

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80 War V.5,8. Modern translators, to keep Fort Antonia small, and to make it fit the traditional spot at the northwest angle of the Haram esh-Sharif, usually construe the text of Josephus to mean that it was the hill on which Bezetha was built (not Antonia) that hid the Temple from the north.
81 War V.5,4 Loeb translation (italics mine).
82 Antiquities XV.11,4.
2 Workshop. 3 Granaries. 4 Quarters of immunes. 5 Shop. 6 Shop.
7 Baths. 8 Quarters of immunes. 9 Scholae (?) of the 1st cohort. 10 Quarters of immunes. 11 1st cohort’s barracks. 12 Shop. 13 Praetorium. 14 Barracks of a century. 15 Shop. 16 Quarters of immunes. 17 Shop. 18 Hospital.
19 Baths. 20 Barracks. 21 Officers’ quarters. 22 Auxiliary unit’s quarters.
23 Auxiliary unit’s quarters. 23 Auxiliary unit commander’s headquarters.
(Based on H. von Petrikovits, Die Innenbauten römischer Legionslager, 1975.)
The size of this permanent Roman Fort is just slightly smaller than the Haram esh-Sharif. They certainly resemble one another.
Josephus stated that the southeast ridge (which was the site of original Jerusalem where David build Mount Zion and Solomon constructed the Temple just the north on the Ophel mound) was crescent shaped. The bold outline shows that even on a modern map (1865) the crescent is easily seen. The square area in the center of the crescent is an outline of the Temple site of Herod and the dark circle is the area where there was a mountain called "Mount Zion" before it was cut down in the second century B.C.E.
These four lines are oriented from north (on the right side) to south (on the left side). They give an outline view of the depth of the Kedron Valley as it must have existed in David's time (the broken line), the second line is the present depth, the third line is the present outline of the top of the southeast ridge and the topmost line gives the present height of the southwest hill. The shaded area presents the two mountains (Mount Zion and the Ophel) that once were located on the southeast ridge before they were cut down to bedrock. The northern hill of the shaded area was the site of the Temples.
Note that all the temporary Roman camps surrounding Masada (all built in 73 C.E. just after the destruction of Jerusalem) are in a type of "square" or "trapezium" shape. Remember that Eleazar said the only thing left in Jerusalem was "Fort Antonia."

25. The siege of Masada. a) General view. In order to isolate the Jews who had fled to the citadel of Masada in AD 72 Flavius Silva built eight small forts and a linear defence. In addition the Romans had to construct an assault platform to reach the citadel. b) Detail of camp B. 1 Praetorian gate. 2 Principal gate (right) 3 Principal gate (left) 4 Porta decumana 5 Principia (to be preferred to praetorium). 6 Podium. 7 Auguratorium. 8 Schola (?). 9 Standards. 10 Hospital (?). 11 Officers' quarters. (Based on C. Hawkes, Antiquity III, 1929.)
21. A temporary camp (Polybius). In the middle of the second century BC (i.e. Republic) the Greek writer Polybius enthused over a temporary camp (VI, 27-42) consisting of ramparts with an open space (intervalum) alongside forming an almost perfect square; in the centre along with the living quarters was a forum, the general’s quarters (praetorium). Roads intersected at right angles.

The plates showing Roman military diagrams are from the book *The Imperial Roman Army* by Hippocrene Books.

22. A temporary camp (Pseudo-Hyginus). An anonymous treatise, wrongly attributed to Hyginus, in describing a temporary Roman camp at the beginning of the second century AD shows how it had evolved in the intervening period. The ground plan is now rectangular and is divided into four sectors.

38. Rapidum (Sour Djouab): town and camp. These six drawings show the rise and fall of a little town that grew up from a camp in Mauretania. 1. Construction of a cohort camp 135 X 127 m (440 X 415 ft) in 122. 2. In 167 a wall was built to protect the civilian settlement that had grown up around it. 3. At the height of the ‘crisis of the Empire’ in the middle of the third century the camp and sector D were abandoned. 4. Abandonment of sector C about 270. 5. Shortly after 270 the city was captured and destroyed, resulting in its total abandonment for several decades. 6. At the very end of the third century sector A was reoccupied. (J.-P. Laporte, *Bull. Soc. Antiq. France*, 1983, p. 264.)

Diagram 38 on the left page shows the development of a Roman town in North Africa built around a small permanent fortress. There are six stages showing the rise and decline of the fort and town. The bottom picture is a drawing of Jerusalem in 1844. Note that both towns grew up and around the two forts. The similarity is striking. The two plates above represent the normal style of fort in the 2nd century B.C.E. (21) and one 300 years later (22). The later one is very much like the Haram esh-Sharif which is Fort Antonia.
The four illustrations at the top show that the Romans tried to have the walls of their forts on top of surrounding embankments about 30 feet away from the precipices. Note that the Haram is also on top of the embankment and its walls do not reach down into the Kedron Valley (center of ravine is shown with bold line). The Temple, though, did have its eastern walls in the ravine bottom.
This map shows the route taken by the Bordeaux Pilgrim when he got to the Jerusalem area. He approached the city from the north and kept to the Kedron Valley until he reached the site of the Temple (the square bold area over the Gihon Spring). He then went southerly and then westward to the Upper City (Zion outside the walls). He then (for the first time went through a wall – Zion’s Gate) and went north to the circled area. To his right (east) he saw the walled Praetorium with its walls down in the Tyropoeon Valley (the three arrows point to the Haram esh-Sharif). To his left (west) he saw the Holy Sepulchre being built (single arrow pointing northwest). After visiting the Church he went east through the East Gate to the Mount of Olives and fully bypassing the Haram.
What Happened to Fort Antonia?

This large encampment of Fort Antonia, along with the auxiliary Praetorium at Herod’s former palace in the Upper City, were reckoned by the Romans to be Roman imperial property after 6 C.E. These two military camps were not accounted as part of the municipal City of Jerusalem that King Agrippa and the Jewish authorities controlled. So, when the Romans began their mopping-up operations after the war, the legions completely tore down all of Jerusalem, including the Temple and its exterior walls. The only structures left were the exterior walls of Fort Antonia (which were repaired to bring them back into pristine shape) and the fortress in the Upper City near the three towers. The rest of the city was so destroyed that Titus and Josephus admitted that if any persons stumbled onto it after the war and saw what remained of the Mother City of the Jewish nation, none would have believed there had once been a city in the area. All they would have seen was a major Roman Camp with its auxiliary in the former Upper City. Such persons would have no doubt wondered why those two camps were built to guard such an empty and desolate area. Indeed, Titus finally saw no need to retain the western wall and the three towers in the Upper City. He allowed them to be torn down. He left only Fort Antonia to house the Tenth Legion.

This is the reason the Haram esh-Sharif with its four walls intact continued to exist in the area of Jerusalem for the succeeding centuries, and even to modern times. This outpost of the Roman army stood as a singular monument of the Jerusalem that existed in the time of Herod and Jesus. Until the building of Aelia after 135 C.E., this Roman fort was an oasis in the midst of utter ruins.

This desolation left in the area is precisely what Jesus prophesied would happen to the Temple and the City of Jerusalem. All remaining buildings were those that were Roman military camps. These were the triumphant monuments of Rome left amidst the total ruins of Jewish Jerusalem. And true to what Jesus prophesied, there was not a stone left on one another of the original Jerusalem or of Herod’s Temple. All that can be seen today are the walls around the Haram esh-Sharif — the remains of Fort Antonia.