The Two 600-Foot Aerial Bridges Connecting the Temple in the City of David to Fort Antonia (the Alleged Temple Mount)

The story of Titus’s siege, as told by Josephus, provides many descriptions which expose the real identity of the alleged temple mount as that of the Roman camp, Fort Antonia. Titus conceived and enacted a plan to capture the Roman camp first, then the temple, through it. The siege of the temple cannot be understood without also understanding the temple and Fort Antonia were “joined” together by two bridges or aerial roadways a “stade” (600 feet) in length. Martin (2000) discovered part of the reason the existence of these two features had disappeared, when he came upon the following passage in Josephus regarding the siege of Titus:

Now, it so happened that this fight was for the most part a stationary one, wherein the soldiers went on and came back in a short time, and suddenly; for there was no long space of ground for either of their flights or pursuits.

(War, VI, 2, 144, Whiston version)

Whiston had translated “stadaian,” meaning a stade or 600 feet as “no long space of ground,” without any note regarding the actual wording in the text. Two later translators at least made note of the correct length of the roadways. Thackeray (the Loeb edition by Harvard) translated it as “a narrow space,” but did append a note saying the manuscript said “furlong.” Cornfeld also translates it as “a narrow space [of a furlong].” All three translations show a preference for ”a narrow space,” according to the temple mount myth, ignoring the actual length of the space. Hence, without reading the right translation or not reading at all, the modern creators of the Antonia models and all mapmakers have failed to realize “this fight,” as referred to in the above passage, was stationary, because it took place on one of the 600-foot aerial bridges, which each probably had a width of only 45 feet (the width measurement is not given),
like the cloisters in the temple (Martin, 2000). However, earlier writers such as Sanday and Waterhouse and Lewin took note of these aerial passages, perhaps because they read Josephus in the original Greek.

Lewin (1863), the author of *The Siege of Jerusalem by Titus*, included the two aerial roadways in his plan of the temple and Fort Antonia:

As the sacred edifice was the heart of Jerusalem, from which all its pulsations issued, Herod’s object was to place it under military control, and this was effected by means of two connecting cloisters or colonnades parallel to each other. One of them ran from the south-west corner of Antonia to the north-west corner of the temple. The other parallel cloister started from south-east corner of Antonia, and ran to a point in the northern cloister of the temple, about 475 feet from the western end, and 125 feet from the eastern end. Thus the troops quartered in the fortress had free access along the two parallel colonnades to the cloisters of the temple, either along the flat roofs, or along the galleries below. (p. 65)

Lewin’s placement of the aerial roadway starting from the southwest corner of Antonia is derived from the description by Josephus below. Of additional note, the description also includes the detail that Antonia was built around a high rock, just as is the alleged temple mount today:

Now as to the tower of Antonia, it was situated at the corner of two passages of the court of the temple; on that of the west, and that of the north; it was erected upon a rock of fifty cubits in height, and was on a great precipice; it was the work
of King Herod, wherein he demonstrated his natural magnanimity. (War V, 5, 238)

Lewin’s placement of the second aerial roadway is based on Antiquities V, 5, 192, which says: “the entire compass of the temple was six furlongs, including the tower of Antonia.” He is a temple mount traditionalist, so his configuration of the temple and Fort Antonia is placed atop the alleged temple mount.

Fig. 1. Lewin’s Inclusion of the Aerial Passages (“Connecting Cloisters”)

Fig. 1. Lewin is a temple mount traditionalist, but places both Antonia and the temple on the alleged temple mount platform. His illustration of the two aerial passages is not in keeping with the 600-foot length in the text, but at least he is acknowledging their existence. He places the aerial bridges 475 feet apart and 125 feet from the end of the temple’s outer court, showing he is
using Josephus’s 600-foot measurement for the temple foundations and the description in *Antiquities* V, 5, 192: “the entire compass of the temple was six furlongs, including the tower of Antonia.”

Fig. 2. Sanday and Waterhouse Model of the Aerial Passages

Fig. 2. The model includes the two aerial passages from Fort Antonia to the temple mount. However, the temple is not a 600-foot square as described in Josephus and the two bridges do not measure 600 feet each. It is hard to know how this model would fit Jerusalem topography.
Fig. 3. Martin’s version of the two 600-foot aerial passages places them next to each other and shows why the two bridges were needed. His version does not attempt, as does Lewin’s, to account for the description of Josephus, which measures the temple as a rectangle of six furlongs, including Fort Antonia (Antiquities V, 5, 192).

The current most popular models of Fort Antonia place it directly north and slightly west of the alleged temple mount, flush against its north wall, on a rock plateau measuring 394 feet by 147 feet, where the Omariyya Boy’s School stands today. There has been no archaeological proof whatsoever that a castle-like camp of “several cities’ size” (according to Josephus) was ever standing there, but the size, shape, and location of the alleged temple mount exactly correspond to that of typical Roman camps of the period. Using Martin’s model, the reader will be able to reasonably apply the siege descriptions as given in Josephus. However, the reader must imagine a very small (comparatively) edifice at the far northwest corner of the alleged temple mount, in order to apply the descriptions from the temple mount myth point of view. This will result in several absurdities, as will be seen.
Fig. 4. A reconstruction of the Roman military site in Gwynedd shows a raised platform, walls, a Praetorium in the center, major streets, a square configuration, and largeness. Fort Antonia (the alleged temple mount) looked very similar to this when the Tenth Legion occupied it, with the Praetorium near or at the Dome of the Rock site in the center.

Many descriptions of the west aerial bridge give more details about it. We know that the Roman soldiers entered onto the aerial roadway from the corner of Fort Antonia and entered onto the roofs of the west and north cloisters at the northwest corner of the temple. At this corner there was an access down to the outer courts below, as noted in *War V*, 5, 243, which says: “But at the corner where it joined to the two passages of the temple, it had passages down to them both….” (Thackeray translates “passages” as “stairs.”). Three descriptions in Josephus indicate the Romans stood on top of the cloisters. One of these mentions the viewpoint from Agrippa’s new dining room, which allowed him to see into the inner courts of the temple. When the irate Jews discovered it, they blocked the view “from the western portico of the outer Temple, *where the Romans used to post their guards for the sake of supervising the Temple*” (*Antiquities* XX, 8,
Another description regards a vulgar incident which took place under the procurator Cumanus:

…for when the multitude were come together to Jerusalem, to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and a Roman cohort stood over the passages of the temple, for they always were armed, and kept guard at the festivals, to prevent any rebellion which the multitude thus gathered together might make, one of the soldiers pulled back his garment, and bending down after an indecent manner, turned his breech to the Jews, and spoke such words as you might expect upon such a posture….Upon which Cumanus afraid lest all the people should make an assault upon him…sent for more armed men, who, when they came in great numbers into the passages, the Jews were in a very great dismay; and being beaten out of the temple, they ran into the city; ….” (War, II, 12, 224, 226; italics mine

A third description is chronicled in War VI, 1, 81-91:

…one Julian, a centurion…seeing the Romans giving ground, and in a sad condition (for he stood by Titus at the tower of Antonia,) leaped out, and of himself put the Jews to flight, when they were already conquerors, and made them retire as far as the corner of the inner court of the temple… however, ….as he had shoes full of thick and sharp nails as had everyone of the other soldiers, so when he ran on the pavement of the temple, he slipped, and fell down upon his back…whereupon those Romans that were in the tower of Antonia set up a great shout, as they were in fear for the man…[and] Caesar was deeply affected on account of this man…he was desirous himself to come
to his assistance, but the place would not give him leave…then did the Jews
catch up his dead body, and put the Romans to flight again, and shut them up
in the tower of Antonia.

It appears that Julian had descended via the stairs from the roof cloisters to the outer court of the
temple, where he made his fateful slip on the pavement.

Under Florus, an incident involving Jewish insurgents describes Florus’s failed attempt to
take possession of the temple, which involves the two aerial bridges:

But for the rebellious, they were afraid lest Florus should come again, and get
possession of the temple, through Antonia; so they got immediately upon those
passages of the temple that joined to Antonia, and cut them down. This cooled
the avarice of Florus; for whereas he was eager to obtain the treasures of God [in
the temple], and on that account was desirous of getting into Antonia, as soon
as the passages were broken down, he left off his attempt. (War II, 15, 330;
italics mine)

As the act of the Jews in cutting off the two aerial passages aggravated the Romans, the Jews in
fear appealed to Agrippa, promising they would not in the future fight against the Romans, but
only against Florus. To which Agrippa replied that what they had already done sufficed as
declaring war against the Romans:

…for you have not paid the tribute which is due to Caesar and you have cut off the
passages [of the temple] from joining to the tower of Antonia. You will therefore
prevent any occasion of revolt if you will but join these together again and if you
will but pay your tribute. (Josephus, War II, 16, 403-404; italics mine)
After the Romans had taken possession of Fort Antonia, the first battles take place on the western aerial bridge. Similar to the previous passage given, some of them mention how difficult the fighting was in the arena of the narrow bridges:

So a terrible battle was fought at the entrance of the temple, while the Romans were forcing their way, in order to get possession of that temple, and the Jews were driving them back to the tower of Antonia….Now during this struggle the positions of the men were undistinguished on both sides, and they fought at random, the men being intermixed with one another, and confounded, by reason of the narrowness of the place….still, there was no room for flight, nor for pursuit, but disorderly revolutions and retreats….for those that came behind forced those before them to go on, without leaving any space between the armies….So it was at present thought sufficient by the Romans to take possession of the tower of Antonia. (War VI, 1, 74-80; italics mine)

The “entrance to the temple” in this passage likely refers to the whole bridge.

Another passage expresses Titus’s frustration with the narrow bridges: “He could not indeed bring all his army against them, the place was so narrow; but choosing thirty soldiers of the most valiant out of every hundred, …he gave orders that they should attack the guards of the temple” (War VI, 2, 131; italics mine).

After Titus’s soldiers had created a large breach in the northern wall of Fort Antonia, in order to admit his armies, they accessed the 600-foot plaza between the temple and Fort Antonia and started building banks. (This is one of the events which becomes absurd when applied to the temple mount myth configuration.) As the banks of Titus grew higher at the temple’s walls, the Jews became desperate. Josephus chronicles the demise of the two 600-foot aerial roadways:
In the meantime, the Jews were so distressed by the fights they had been in, as the war advanced higher and higher, and creeping up to the holy house itself, that they, as it were, cut off those limbs of their body which were infected, in order to prevent the sickness’s spreading further; for they set the northwest passage which was joined to the tower of Antonia, on fire, and after that broke off about twenty cubits of that passage, and thereby made a beginning in burning the sanctuary; two days after which…the Romans set fire to the passage that joined the other, when the fire went fifteen cubits farther. The Jews, in like manner, cut off its roof; nor did they entirely leave off what they were about until the tower of Antonia was parted from the temple, even when it was in their power to have stopped the fire; nay, they lay still while the temple was first set on fire, and deemed this spreading of the fire to be for their own advantage. (War VI, 2, 164-167)

Martin’s model of the two passages being both at the western end of the lower court outside the temple is based on the line in this passage which says: “… the Romans set fire to the passage that joined the other, when the fire went fifteen cubits farther.” He thus sees the two roadways as being connected to each other and going out and coming in from the same area of Fort Antonia. This description, however, is at odds with the rectangle described by Josephus, which is accommodated by Lewis’s placement of the two passages at closer to one stade’s distance from each other. Lewis interprets the “connection” being spoken of in this passage as the “connection” to the temple, not to the other roadway. I agree with this interpretation.

With regard to what the destruction of the two aerial passages meant for the Jews, Josephus gives the following explanation:
For the Jews, by demolishing the tower of Antonia, had made their temple foursquare, while at the same time they had it written in their sacred oracles, "That then should their city be taken, as well as their holy house, when once their temple should become foursquare. (War VI, 5, 311).

This description is tied to Josephus’s description of the temple as a six-furlong rectangle including Fort Antonia and the “demolishing” of Fort Antonia actually applies only to the two aerial bridges. However, Lewin (1863) further illuminates the dissolution of the aerial roadways causing the foursquare debacle:

The two connecting cloisters that incorporated Antonia with the courts of the Temple were regarded as parts of the sacred edifice and had hitherto been spared both by Romans and Jews. At the same time, these corridors offered facilities for mutual assaults and particularly the western parallel had been employed by the Romans as a ready approach against the enemy. The Jews therefore resolved on its destruction, and on the 19th of July they cut off thirty feet of the parallel at its junction to the northern cloister of the Temple then set fire to the rest of it. The work of destruction once begun by the Jews, was soon followed up by the Romans, who two days after, on the 21st of July, set fire to the eastern parallel, and, as the flames advanced southward, the Jews, to save the northern cloister of the Temple, were obliged to sever that parallel also from the courts of the Temple by cutting away the point of junction. This greatly dispirited the Jews, for an old prophecy ran: When square the walls, the temple falls. And now, this had come to pass. The Temple had comprised not only the outer court, a regular square of 600 feet, but also Antonia, which was united to the Temple by the connecting
parallels, and so gave it an irregular configuration; but now that the parallels were broken away, the Temple was seen to stand an isolated square, and the morbid imaginations of the beholders already pictured the holy fabric enveloped in flames. (pp. 70-71)

The modern traditionalists maintain stolid silence about the descriptions of these two roadways, due to the tyranny of the popular models based on the temple mount myth. Acknowledging these descriptions would put the location of Fort Antonia one stade north of the alleged temple mount, well into the area of Bezetha (the New City), where they would be obliged to search anew for some fragment of its existence there. Meanwhile, the traditionalists’ “Ophel” is part of the physical reality of the 600-foot wide plaza beneath the aerial roadways, sometimes considered the lower temple, which provided sufficient space for Titus’s army to mount an attack against the northern wall of the temple. The east city gate opened onto this plaza and people not going to the temple could cross over it to gain access to the suburbs and the western hill, passing under the aerial roadways, which would have also provided protection from the hot sun and inclement weather. The plaza offered several areas for public entrance into Fort Antonia, including the Double Gates, the Triple Gates, and the gate at Robinson’s Arch. These gates and those on the western side were the only which provided access to the Herodian enclosure’s plaza. There was no northern gate and the only eastern gate entered into the underground Solomon’s Stables.

References
