CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE HOUSE OF THE LAVER IN THE TEMPLE SCROLL

Among the structures of the inner court of the Temple described in the Temple Scroll is the House of the Laver. This structure included space for the laver used for the priests’ lustrations and was fitted out with niches which functioned as lockers for the garments of the priests. This paper will provide an analysis of the scriptural exegesis which led the author of the scroll, or his source, to propose the design of this structure. It will also compare this data to that which can be gleaned from the descriptions of the Temple and its rituals in rabbinic sources.

Before entering this discussion, however, a word is in order about what has come to be called the ‘Temple Source’, that section of the Temple Scroll in which the architect proposes the structure and plan of the Jerusalem complex.1 This plan apparently was part of a written source available to the author of the Temple Scroll, who then imported the plan, with modifications, into his text. Included in this source were the structures of the inner court, including the House of the Laver, which we discuss here. This architectural plan probably dates to sometime between the third century B.C.E. and the Maccabean Revolt.

1. The Commandment to Build the House of the Laver

As with the other structures mentioned in the Temple Scroll, our text begins with an explicit commandment to build the House of the Laver and a specification of its dimensions (11QT 31:10–12):

(10) And you shall construct a building for the laver in the southeast,2 on all its sides, twenty-one square cubits.3

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2 At the southeast corner of the Temple.
(11) at a distance from the altar of fifty cubits. And the width of the wall shall be) three cubits, and its height,
(12) twenty <cu>bits. And make three gates for it on the east, on the north,
(13) and on the west. And the width of the gates shall be) four cubits, and their height seven.

This passage specifies the construction of a special building to house the laver. The laver was a large bronze wash basin used by the priests for washing their hands and feet. The structure, termed 'House of the Laver', further on in the Temple Scroll (33:5, 8–11), is to be located in the inner courtyard of the Temple, in the southeast, that is, opposite the southern wall of the Temple at its eastern end, fifty cubits west of the altar. The thickness of the walls of the House of the Laver was to be three cubits; its overall height was to be twenty cubits.

Before discussing any of the detailed aspects of its location and construction, we note that the commandment to build a laver (not a building but the actual basin) as well as its base (כן) is found in Exod 30:17–21, regarding the Tabernacle of the desert period. Exod 38:8 records that the laver and its base were indeed constructed. The preserved text from the Temple Scroll discusses only the building that was to house the laver; nowhere in the text do we find the mention of the laver itself. It is most probable that the laver itself is discussed in the lost top of column 32. It is also remotely possible that the laver is discussed in

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5 Angle brackets denote supralinear letters.
7 On the strange use of the feminine הַלַּכ, see Yadin, *Temple Scroll*, II, 136, but his suggestion of an Aramaism (לה) is most unlikely. Qimron, *The Temple Scroll*, 46 suggests that this might be an alternate spelling for לָכ.
8 Qimron’s reading, *The Temple Scroll*, 46, omits the conjunction “and”, but he admits that Yadin’s reading, followed here, is equally possible.
10 Yadin, *Temple Scroll*, II, 139 also restores this reading in 32:13.
12 One of the possibilities mentioned in Yadin, *Temple Scroll*, II, 137.