TEMPLE SPECIFICATIONS: A DISPUTE IN LOGICAL ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN THE MT AND THE LXX

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The specifications for Solomon's temple, as presented by the MT and the LXX, raise a number of thorny problems 1). In the first place the MT (3 Reigns vi 2) and the LXX (3 Reigns vi 6) disagree over the basic dimensions:

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<thead>
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<th>Length (in cubits)</th>
<th>Breadth (in cubits)</th>
<th>Height (in cubits)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
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Then the MT gives the overall height of the temple as 30 cubits and the height of the Holy of Holies as 20 cubits, but leaves unexplained how the difference of 10 cubits is to be accounted for. Was there an upper room between the ceiling of the Holiest and the roof of the temple? Or was there a 10 cubit high loft running the whole length of the temple over both the Holiest and the Holy Place? Or was the floor of the Holiest 10 cubits higher than the floor of the Holy Place? The MT of the 3 Reigns does not tell us. The MT of 1 Chron. xxviii 11 and of 2 Chron. iii 9, however, speaks of מִשְׁרְפָּן, upper rooms, and the plural seems to suggest that there was a loft, divided into several rooms, running the whole length of the temple. The LXX on these two occasions uses the term ὑπερφόνον, which agrees exactly with the MT, except that in 2 Chron. iii 9 the LXX uses the word in the singular. That there was a loft running the whole length of the temple is likewise the view of the Talmud 2).


2) See, e.g., Middoth VI (Mishnah 5); Pesahim 86a.
More recent scholars, however, have disagreed with this view and suggested several alternatives. One alternative is that the Holiest differed in height from the Holy Place because it stood over the holy Rock, and its base was accordingly higher than the floor of the rest of the temple. Another suggests that the Holiest may have had a separate roof, 10 cubits lower than the roof of the Holy Place. A third view argues that Solomon's temple will have followed the pattern of other ancient Near-Eastern temples in having the floor of the Holiest built up to a higher level than the floor of the Holy Place. A fourth explanation makes use of the theory that the temple was built on top of an artificially constructed platform or podium, 5 cubits high. It argues that in actual fact there was no difference internally between the height of the Holiest and that of the Holy Place—both were 20 cubits high; but that measured externally the overall height of the temple would include the additional 5 cubits of the platform, thus giving a total height of 25 cubits. It is then pointed out that 25 cubits is in fact the figure which the LXX (vi 6) gives for the height of the temple, and the conclusion is reached that the LXX's figure is true and original and the MT's figure is mistaken and secondary.

But attractive as this last theory is, it does not fit the facts, for the LXX of 3 Reigns vi 15-17, as we shall presently see (p. 164), appears to describe a loft 5 cubits high in the temple, its height being additional to the 20 cubits of the Holiest and Holy Place. And if this is so, the 25 cubits which the LXX names as the height of the temple, is composed not of 20 cubits temple plus 5 cubits podium, but of 20 cubits temple and 5 cubits loft.

Then there is a further complication. While the LXX agrees with the MT of Chronicles and with the implications of the MT of Reigns that there was a loft in the temple, the verse which in the LXX begins the description of the loft (VI 15 καὶ ἡκοδόμησεν τοὺς ἐνδέχεσθεν διολοῦ τοῦ ὄλου πάντες ἐν τῷ κέρα τῷ χῶρος κύτων) has as its counterpart in the MT (vi 10) a verse which is not describing a loft at all. The verse runs: χώρον ἐν τῷ κέρα τῷ χῶρος κύτων; and there is great dispute as to what the χώρον was. Some say it was a side-wing, others hold that it was a podium or platform. But whatever it was, it certainly was not a loft. So here the LXX differs from the MT in a major point of interpretation.

Now since any one of these theories and interpretations is in itself quite plausible, there is a strong temptation to pick on isolated