

Chapter 3: The Structure of the Azarah

The main courtyard of the Beis Hamikdash, the Azarah, was 135 amos wide and 187 amos long¹. It is called Azarah from the word Azar (עזר), help, since from there Hashem sends his help to the world, as it says in Tehillim² “He will send his help from the holy place”³.

This courtyard has a higher degree of holiness, corresponding to the camp of the Shechinah in the desert⁴, and only completely pure people can come in. Even if someone already immersed themselves, and it is the next day, if they had a tumah that made them have to bring Korbanos, they may not come into the Azarah until the Korbanos are brought.⁵

The walls of the Azarah were five amos thick, and reached the same height as the walls of the Har Habayis and the Ezras Nashim. They were made out of a repeating pattern of three rows of stone, and then a row of wood⁶. This row receded a little into the wall, and was covered over with plaster, to make it less flammable.⁷ Running along the inside of the wall of the Azarah, around midway up, was a portico; a roof supported by pillars⁸. This was used to provide shelter from the sun and rain⁹, as well as to store things under¹⁰. It was made out of stone, as protruding wood was not allowed in the Azarah¹¹. These pillars were partly made of marble¹², and partly made of gems and pearls, as there was not enough marble to make them all completely of marble.¹³



The Wall of the Azarah

1 Middos 5:1

2 20:3

3 Tosfos Yom Tov Middos 2:6, see also Radak Divrey Hayamim II 4:9, Aruch עזרה, who say it is called Azarah because there we pray and get answered.

4 Zevachim 116b

5 Keilim 1:8

6 Melachim I 6:36

7 Rosh Hashanah 4a

8 Tamid 1:3

9 Tiferes Yisrael Beis Hamikdash diagram #18

10 Mefarsh Tamid 28a

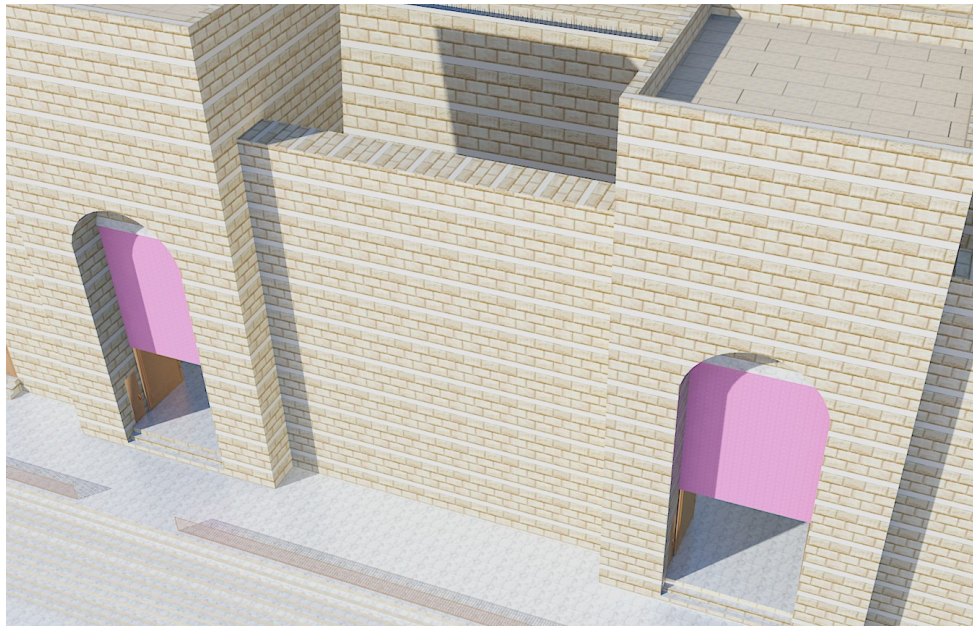
11 Gemara Tamid 28b

12 Mefarsh to Divrey Hayamim I 29:2

13 Esther Rabba 2:7

The walls of the Azarah tapered slowly as they rose upwards. This was done to ensure that the afternoon Korban Tamid not be brought early, as now the eastern side of the Azarah walls would only fall into the shade, signaling that it was the afternoon, a half hour after midday¹⁴. Based on this, we can calculate that it tapered at an angle of 8.67 degrees from the vertical. If this taper would start at the bottom of the wall, however, than the wall would not have been able to rise to their full height. Therefore, it seems that the wall only started tapering midway up their height, as anyways the bottom part would be in the shadows because of the portico.¹⁵

There were thirteen gates in the Azarah, seven major ones and six minor ones¹⁶. The major gates were each twenty amos tall and ten amos wide¹⁷, while the minor gates were smaller¹⁸. All the gates had locks with keys for them, and were locked every night¹⁹. The actual doors were located at the



Gates of the Azarah: outer side

were located at the outer edge of the doorway²⁰, with the thickness of the doorway having the same degree of holiness as the Azarah, besides for the Eastern gate, where the gates were located at the inner edge, and it was not sanctified. This was done so that when the Metzora had to bring his korbanos when he became pure, he could stick his thumb into the Azarah to get some of the blood placed on it²¹. These doors were made out of a special valuable kind of copper.²² The seven major gates also had curtains

14 Yoma 28b with Tosfos Yeshanim

15 The Original Second Temple, pp 197-205

16 There are two opinions in Mishnayos of how much gates there, Middos 1:4 says there were seven gates, while in Middos 2:6, Abba Yose Ben Chanan says there were 13. Tosfos (Kesubos 106a ד"ה שבעה כנגד ז' שערים) explains that everyone agrees there were 13 doors, six of which were smaller doors and seven of which were larger, the argument is if the small ones are counted as gates. (For the practical differences if they are counted as gates or not, see Likutey Sichos, vol. 18, pp 214.)

17 Middos 2:3

18 Tosfos Kesubos 106a

19 Middos 1:8-9 with Mefarshim

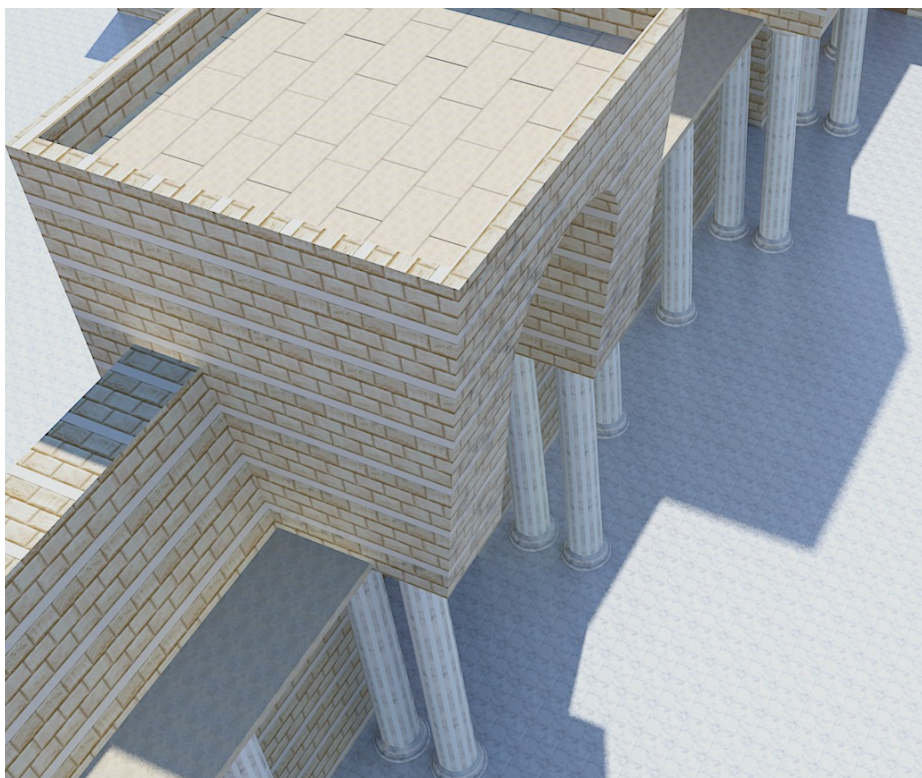
20 Ezras Kohanim Middos 1:3 ד"ה להר הבית

21 Pesachim 85b

22 Tavnit Heichal 2:47, see Ezras Kohanim, Middos 2:3 ד"ה שנחשתן מזהיב

hanging in front of them, to screen off the Azarah, for privacy²³.

The major gates of the Azarah had a sort of gatehouse by them. In front of the actual gate, this building stuck out, and there were small side chambers on either side of the gate, but once you entered the Azarah, there was no side chambers, rather there were four pillars, two on each side, which supported the building on top of them. In total, this whole structure was double the width of the gate, and the same long, and it was forty amos tall, rising higher than the wall²⁴.



Gate of the Azarah: inner side

We will now go through the location and names of the different gates. It should be noted that most of the names are what they were called in the second Beis Hamikdash, and it is possible that they had different names in the first Beis Hamikdash, as we see clearly by some of them.

The southern wall of the Azarah had four gates, three major and one minor²⁵. The three major gates, (as well as the three major gates in the north, which were directly opposite the southern gates,) were laid out at equal intervals along the wall, with the easternmost gate being right by the Mizbeach²⁶.

²³ Kesubos 106a

²⁴ This is based of Josephus's (wars 5:5:3) description of the gates in the second Beis Hamikdash, although his words aren't so clear, this is how it seems to explain them, without making huge changes in the traditional understanding of the structure of the Beis Hamikdash.

²⁵ Middos 1:4, which only counts the major gates, says there were three gates; while in Middos 2:6, where it counts the smaller gates, the Mishnah mentions four.

²⁶ Tavis Heichal 2:47 from Josephus (*Antiquities* 15:11:5), as explained by Ezras Kohanim, Middos 1:4 ד"ה שלשה בצפון, and *ושלשה בדרום*, this can also be learned from Rashi (Yechezkel 8:5) who writes that one of the gates in the north was opposite the Mizbeach, which only comes out if all three major gates are laid out at equal intervals along the wall, since otherwise the easternmost gate would be to the west of the Mizbeach.



The Southern Wall of the Azarah

The minor gate was called Sha'ar Ha'elyon, the upper gate, and it was located close to the western end of the southern wall.²⁷ It was called this because the Har Habayis and Beis Hamikdash rose from east to west, and this gate is at the western edge, so it is the highest²⁸. (Even though the all the gates of the Azarah were at the same level, the western one is considered the “highest” because in general, the west was higher.²⁹)

The westernmost major gate was called Sha'ar Hadelek, the firewood gate. It was called this because they used to bring in the firewood for the Mizbeach through this gate³⁰.

The next gate (towards the east) was called Sha'ar Habechoros, the gate of the firstborns³¹. It was called this because through this gate they would bring in the Bechor, the firstborn animal, which had to be given to the Kohen, who would then offer it as a Korban and eat it. However, unlike other Korbanos eaten solely by a Kohen, which are Kodshei Kodoshim, a higher level of sanctity, and can only be slaughtered in the north of the Azarah, the Bechor is considered Kodoshim Kalim, a lower level of sanctity, and may be slaughtered anywhere in the Azarah, even in the south, therefor the gate for it was in the south. Although all Kodoshim Kalim were brought through this gate, it was named Sha'ar Habechoros to publicize that it is Kodoshim Kalim.³²

The easternmost gate in the southern wall is the Sha'ar Hamayim, the water gate.

²⁷ Middos 2:6

²⁸ Ravyah, quoted by Tosfos Yom Tov, Middos 2:6, Bartenura Shekalim 6:3

²⁹ Maharam Kazis, Middos 2:6

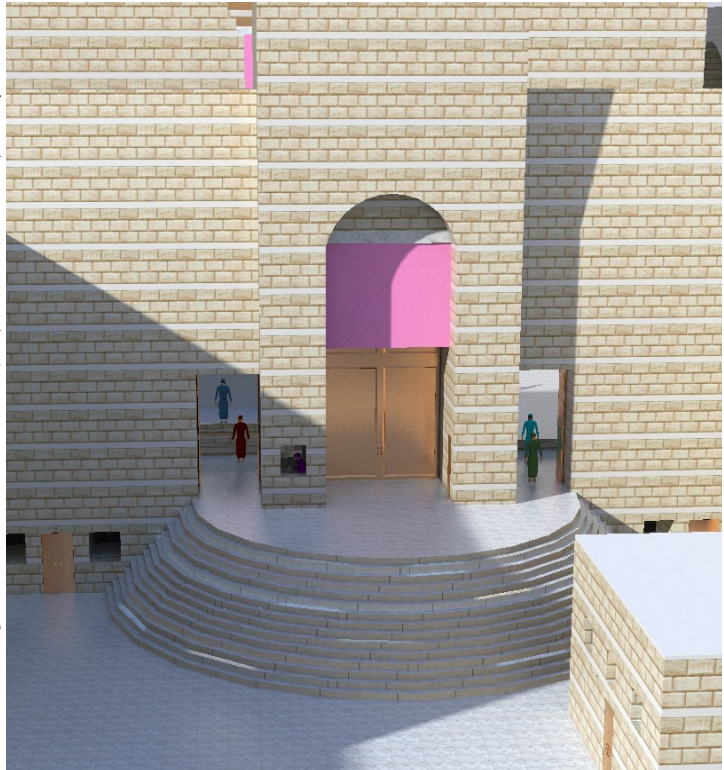
³⁰ Middos 1:4 with Rosh and Bartenura

³¹ In other versions, it is called Sha'ar Hakorban, the gate of the sacrifice, and one of the reasons for this is that Avraham brought Yitzchak to the Akeidah through the place where this gate would later be built. (see Rosh, Middos 1:4)

³² Tiferes Yisrael Middos 1:4 Yachin #33

It was called the water gate because they would bring in the water for the Nissuch Hamayim on sukkos through this gate³³, as this gate was located right by the foot of the ramp of the Mizbeach³⁴. On top of this gate was a mikveh³⁵, and next to it was the Beis Avtinah, where they would make the Ketores³⁶. We will talk about them later, when we go through the different Lishkos in the Azarah.

In the Eastern wall of the Azarah there was one major gate, located in the center of the wall, directly opposite the gate of the Heichal³⁷. On either side of this major gate were small wicket gates³⁸, which were used for exiting. (The major gate was directly opposite the *Kodesh* and *Kodesh Hakodoshim*, and people exiting through this gate would have to turn their backs directly to it, however the smaller gates were more to the north and south, and so were not directly opposite the *Kodesh* and *Kodesh Hakodoshim*.³⁹) There were also Lishkos near this gate, which we will discuss later.



The eastern gate

In the second Beis Hamikdash, this gate was named Nikanor after the man who donated the doors⁴⁰, but in the first Beis Hamikdash it had seven different names. They are the following:

- Sha'ar Sur⁴¹, the turning away gate, as the tamei people had to go away from it⁴².
- Sha'ar Yesod⁴³, the foundation gate, as there they would found the Halachah, as Lishkas Hagazis, where the Sanhedrin sat and judge, was near it.

33 Middos 1:4, 2:6

34 Tiferes Yisrael Middos 1:4 Yachin #34

35 Yoma 31a

36 Yerushalmi Yoma 1:5

37 Ezras Kohanim Middos 1:4 ד"ה ואחד במזרח

38 Middos 1:4, 2:6

39 Tiferes Yisrael Middos 2:6 Yachin #83

40 Rosh Middos 1:4

41 Melachim II 11:6

42 Although most tamei people can not even enter the *cheil*, that is a decree of the *Chachamim*, according to the torah someone who is tamei from a corpse can go up until the actual Azarah.

43 Divrey Hayamim II 23:5

- Sha'ar Hacharsis⁴⁴, the sun gate, as it was aligned with the rising of the sun, facing directly east.
- Sha'ar Ha'ison⁴⁵, the gate of coming, as this was the main gate for coming into the Azarah.
- Sha'ar Hatavech⁴⁶, the middle gate, as it is sandwiched in between the gate of the Ezras Nashim and the gate of the Heichal.
- Sha'ar Hachadash⁴⁷, the new gate, as there the Chachamim renewed the Halachah, and made new takanos. (For example, even though a Tevul Yom cannot enter the Ezras Nashim, if he is a Metzarah and has to bring his Korbanos that day, and it is Erev Pesach, so that if he does not purify himself by bringing them he cannot bring the Korban Pesach, he may enter the ezras Nashim and bring his korbanos from this gate⁴⁸.)
- Sha'ar Ha'elyon⁴⁹, the upper gate, as it is higher than the Ezras Nashim.⁵⁰

The northern wall of the Azarah had four gates, three major and one minor⁵¹. The major gates were laid out at equal intervals along the wall⁵². The first gate, starting in the west⁵³, was a major gate, called Sha'ar Hanitzotz, the gate of the spark⁵⁴. It was called this after the small fire that burned there, to relight the fire on the Mizbeach if it went out. Since this was a small fire, as opposed to the Beis Hamoked where there was a larger fire, it is called a spark.⁵⁵ In the first Beis Hamikdash, it was called Sha'ar Binyamin Ha'elyon, the upper gate of Binyamin, as it was located in the west, and faced Binyamin's portion of Eretz Yisrael⁵⁶. In front of this gate was a structure, called the Beis Hanitzotz, the house of the spark⁵⁷, which we will discuss later.

Eleven years before the destruction of the First Beis Hamikdash, King Nevuchadnezzar of Bavel exiled the king Yechoniah, and appointed Tzidkiyahu as king instead⁵⁸. Before Yechoniah left, he went to the Beis Hamikdash to take leave, and he then exited the Azarah through this gate, as Bavel is towards the north of

44 Yirmiyahu 19:2

45 Yechezkel 40:15

46 Yirmiyahu 39:3

47 Yirmiyahu 26:10

48 Zevachim 32b

49 Divrey Hayamim II 23:20

50 Yerushalmi Eiruvim 5:1, with Korban Ha'eidah

51 Middos 1:4, which only counts the major gates, says there were three gates; while in Middos 2:6, where it counts the smaller gates, the Mishnah mentions four.

52 See above, note 26

53 Rambam's drawing of Beis Hamikdash, Tiferes Yisrael Middos 2:6 Yachin #80

54 Middos 1:5

55 Be'er Sheva on Tamid 25b

56 Yirmiyahu 20:2

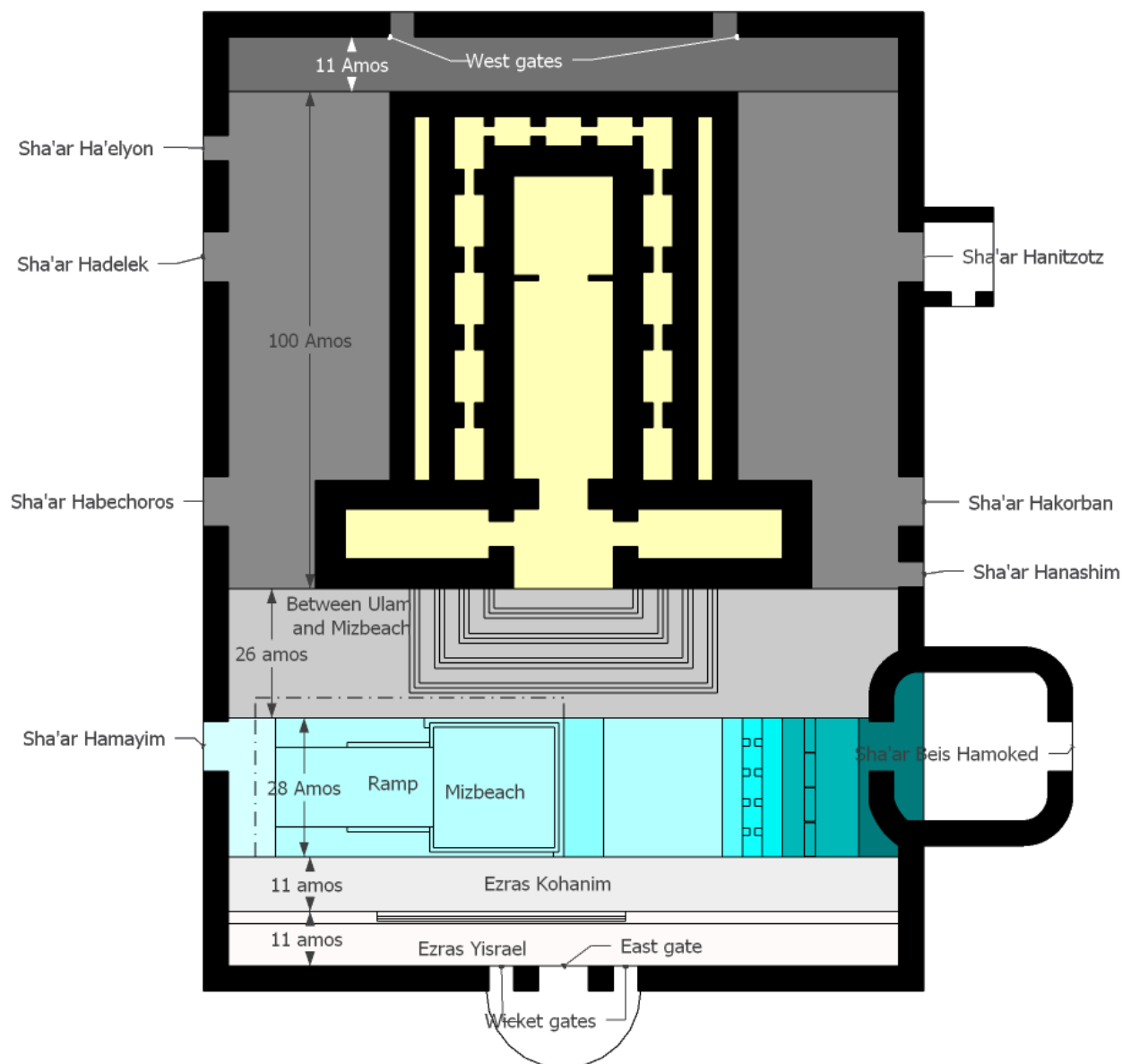
57 Middos 1:5

58 Melachim II 24:11-18

Eretz Yisrael⁵⁹. Therefore, this gate was later also called Sha'ar Yechoniah, the gate of Yechoniah⁶⁰.

The next gate was also a major gate, and it was called Sha'ar Hakorban, the gate of the sacrifice⁶¹. Through this gate the Kodshei Kodoshim, which must be slaughtered in the north of the Azarah, would be brought in⁶².

The next gate was a minor gate, and was called Sha'ar Hanashim, the women's gate⁶³. If a woman would want to stand by when her Korban was being offered, she would stand by this gate⁶⁴.



59 Ezras Kohanim, Middos 2:6 ד"ה שער יכניה

60 Middos 2:6 with Rosh

61 Middos 1:5, 2:6

62 Bartenura on Middos 1:5

63 Middos 2:6

64 Ezras Kohanim Middos 2:6 ד"ה שער הנשים

The easternmost gate in the northern side was called Sha'ar Hashir, the gate of the song⁶⁵, as well as Sha'ar Beis Hamoked, the gate of the Beis Hamoked⁶⁶. It was called the gate of the song since they used to bring in the musical instruments through it⁶⁷. In the first Beis Hamikdash, it was called the Sha'ar Hamizbeach, the gate of the Mizbeach, as it was located directly opposite the Mizbeach⁶⁸.

In the western wall of the Azarah there were two minor gates, which did not have any name⁶⁹ or specific function⁷⁰. They were not located directly behind the Kodesh Hakodoshim, rather towards the side, so that someone exiting through them would not turn his back to the Kodesh Hakodoshim⁷¹.

As mentioned, from east to west the Azarah was 187 amos long. This is divided into various parts. The easternmost part was the Ezras Yisrael, the court of the Israelites, and it was 11 Amos wide⁷². This was the area for the regular Yidden to go into. After this was another 11 amah wide strip called the Ezras Kohanim, the priestly courtyard, where the Kohanim could go⁷³. A regular Yisrael could not enter it except for the purpose of bringing a Korban, such as to do s'micha (leaning on the animal before sacrificing it), or to slaughter it (which does not necessarily have to be done by a Kohen), or to do the tenufa (waving of certain parts of the animal)⁷⁴.

Towards the end of the Ezras Yisrael, before the Ezras Kohanim, there was a step, one amah tall, to divide them, making the Ezras Kohanim an amah higher than the Ezras Yisrael. On top of this step was placed the Duchan, the platform where the Levi'im would stand on and sing and play their instruments during the offering of the Korbanos. The Duchan had three steps leading up to it in the east, each one half an amah tall and deep, like all the other steps in the Beis Hamikdash⁷⁵. (Although it



The Duchan

65 Middos 2:6

66 Middos 1:5, Tiferes Yisrael Middos 2:6 Yachin #78

67 Ravyah, quoted by Tosfos Yom Tov, Middos 2:6, Rosh Middos 2:6

68 Yechezkel 8:5 with Rashi, see above, note 26

69 Middos 2:6

70 Tosfos Yom Tov, Shekalim 6:3

71 Ravyah, quoted by Tosfos Yom Tov, Middos 2:6

72 Middos 2:6, 5:1

73 Middos 2:6, 5:1

74 Keilim 1:8

75 Middos 2:6; with Rashi, Yoma 16a

was on top of the step, the Duchan was located in the 11 amos of the Ezras Yisrael, as the step was located two amos before the edge of the Ezras Yisrael.⁷⁶) The Duchan did not stretch across the whole Azarah, but was only in the area in front of the Mizbeach⁷⁷.



. *The Eastern Part of the Azarah*

After the Ezras Kohanim was the Mizbeach, which took up twenty-eight amos. After this was the space between the Ulam and the Mizbeach, which was twenty-six amos⁷⁸. This space had a higher level of holiness, and Kohanim who had a *mum*, or long hair, were not able to go here⁷⁹. The Heichal building was 100 amos long, and the area behind it was eleven amos. All together, this adds up to 187 amos⁸⁰.

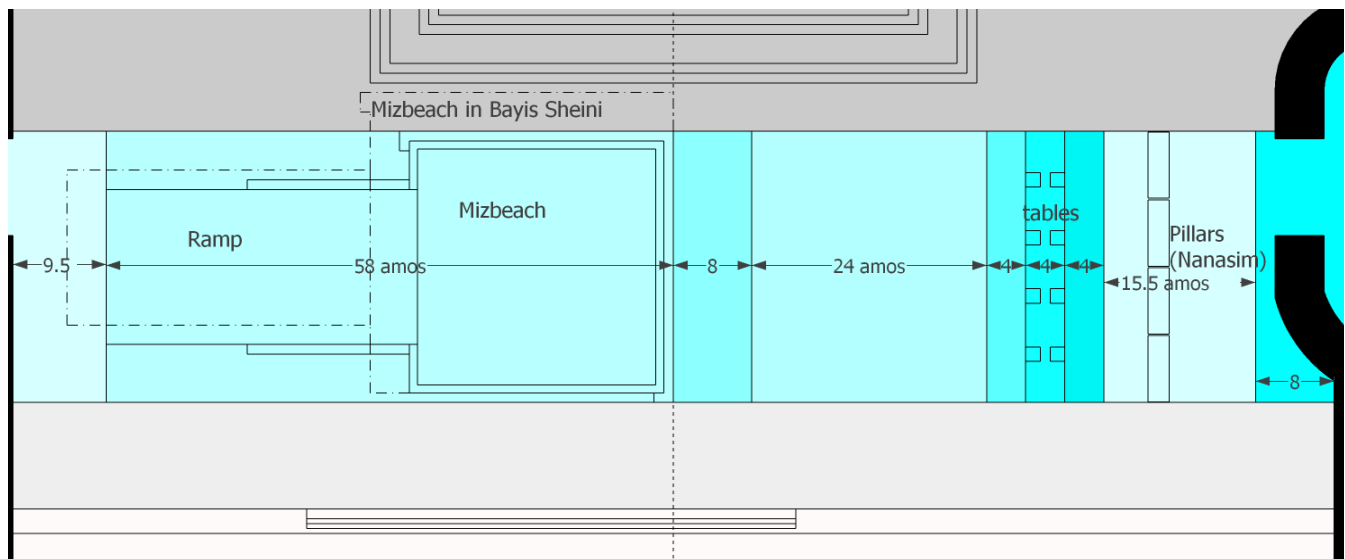
76 This is what it seems from Rashi Yoma 16a, and other places, see note of R' Avraham Sofer on Biur Maharam Kazis on Middos, 2:6 note 5.

77 See Ezras Kohanim, Middos 2:6 ד"ה והדוכן נתון עליה ב, bringing Chanukas Habayis (Chafetz) 23 and the picture in the Gemara. It would seem that Rashi also holds like this, as he says the Duchan did not affect the overall height of the Azarah, as opposed to most other Mefarshim who say the Ezras Kohanim was 2.5 amos higher than the Ezras Yisrael, with the three steps of the Duchan also leading up to the Ezras Kohanim. Since Rashi says the Duchan did not affect the height of the Ezras Kohanim, it would seem that he holds that the Duchan was only by part of the width of the Azarah. (see also Tosfos Yesheinim, Yoma 16a.)

78 Middos 5:1, there it says the Mizbeach was thirty-two and the space between the Ulam and the Mizbeach was 22, however that is talking about Bayis Sheini, where the Mizbeach was four amos smaller (Middos 3:1).

79 Keilim 1:9, there is an argument amongst Rishonim if the 28 amah strip containing the Mizbeach is also included in this, or not, see Mishneh Lamelech and Har Hamoriah to Hilchos Bi'as Hamikdash 6:1.

80 Middos 5:1



Division of the width of the Azarah

Widthwise, the Azarah was 135 amos wide. The Mizbeach and the ramp took up fifty-eight⁸¹ amos, and was located nine-and-a half amos away from the southern wall of the Azarah. To the north of the Mizbeach, there was an eight amah space, and then a twenty four amah space⁸². Next to this there was four amos of empty space, and then there was eight tables, set up in two rows, each one being one-and-a-half amah wide, with an amah wide space between them, making them take up a total of four amos⁸³. There was then another four amos of empty space, and then was the Beis Hamitbachayim, where there were eight pillars for skinning and cutting up the Korbanos. Between the Beis Hamitbachayim and the northern wall of the Azarah there was a space of eight amos⁸⁴.

As mentioned earlier, Kodshei Kodoshim can only be slaughtered in the north part of the Azarah. This area is a square going from the east wall of the Azarah to the east wall of the Ulam, and from the edge of the Mizbeach, which is exactly at the midpoint of the Azarah, to the northern Azarah wall⁸⁵.

81 As mentioned, this is only in Bayis Rishon, in Bayis Sheini they expanded the Mizbeach four amos to the west and south, so the ramp and Mizbeach would have taken up sixty-two amos, and there would be a 4.5 amah space between the foot of the ramp and the Azarah wall.

82 In the Second Beis Hamikdash, Yochanan Kohen Gadol made rings in this twenty-four amah space to hold the animals in place while slaughtering them (Gemara Sotah 48b, Bartenura to Middos 3:5, Mishnah Middos 5:2). It would make sense that this was the primary area of slaughtering in the First Beis Hamikdash even before this, which is why he placed the rings here.

83 Rashi Yoma 17a, as explained by Maharam Kazis, Middos 5:2

84 Middos 5:2. The Mishnah does not say how much space was between the ramp and the wall, as well as the width of the space for the pillars or the tables, it lists the all other measurements, and then says that the remaining amos was taken up by the space of the pillars and the space between the ramp and the wall. Rashi (Yoma 16a-17b) holds that you should also take some of the space for the area of the tables. Rashi brings a few different ways how to divide this space, some where the amos are divided up (more or less) equally, and then another one to explain our Mishnah like Rabbi Eliezer Ben Yaakov, who hold that the Mizbeach was totally in the southern part of the Azarah (Yoma 37a). Since the Halachah is always like Rabbi Eliezer Ben Yaakov (Gittin 67a with Rashi), that is the explanation I have brought here. It should be noted that the Rambam has another explanation for this Mishnah, where the tables do not take up a separate space, but are part of the eight amah space between the rings and the pillars.

85 Rambam Hilchos Beis Habechirah 5:16. There is actually an argument in the Gemara (Yoma 36a) if it has to be directly

The Beis Hamitbachayim (butchering place) was located near the northern wall of the Azarah. In it there were eight short pillars, with four wooden blocks on top of them; one block on each two pillars, going from one to the other. On these wooden blocks they placed hooks, to hang the Korbanos on while skinning and cutting them. There were three rows of hooks, the top one for large animals (like cows), the middle one for middle-sized animals (like rams) and the bottom one for small animals (like lambs)⁸⁶. Each hook was three tefachim long, with two tefachim being sunk inside the wood and the last tefach protruding⁸⁷.



The Beis Hamitbachayim

After the Korban was cut up, it would be washed on the eight tables nearby⁸⁸. These tables were made of silver⁸⁹, and were each one-and-a-half amos by one-and-a-half amos, and one amah tall⁹⁰.

When Shlomo built the Beis Hamikdash, he planted different types of golden trees, which would give off golden “fruit” in the appropriate season, and when the wind would blow the fruits would fall. And through selling these golden “fruits”, there

to the north of the Mizbeach, based on the simple meaning of the Passuk (Vayikra 1:11) that it should be slaughtered on “the northern side of the Mizbeach”, or if even slightly to the east and west is also considered “the side of the Mizbeach”. The Rambam rules like Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, that any place until the eastern wall of the Ulam is considered “the northern side of the Mizbeach”, as the Mizbeach is still visible from there. However, everyone agrees that the space on the northern side of the Heichal is not considered “the side of the Mizbeach”, as the Mizbeach cannot be seen from there.

86 Middos 3:5 with Rabeinu Shemaya

87 Piskey Tosafos Middos #17

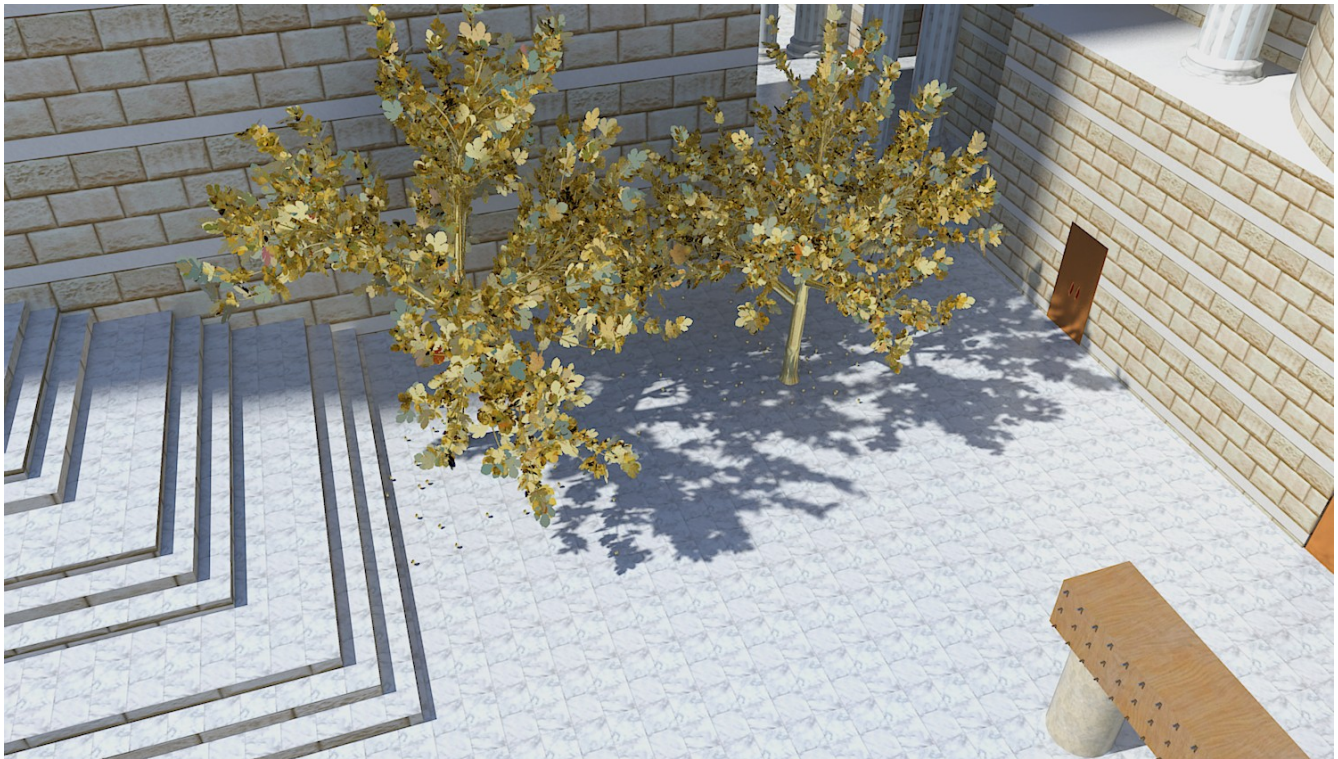
88 Shekalim 6:4

89 Divrei Hayamim I 28:16 with Mefaresh.

90 Rashi Yoma 16b, based on Yechezkel 40:42

was a source of income for the Kohanim. When the gentiles came into the Beis Hamikdash, this stopped, but when Moshiach comes Hashem will make it come back⁹¹.

Not just this, but when the Aron was brought into the Beis Hamikdash, all the wood became alive and starting giving off fruit in the proper time, which the Kohanim would sell and make a good living off. When Menasheh set up an idol in the Mikdash, this stopped⁹².



Golden Trees

(The exact location of these miraculous trees are not specified: I have placed them near the Ulam, as in the Second Beis Hamikdash there was a golden vine in there⁹³, but this is just a guess.)

91 Yoma 39b

92 Midrash Tanchuma Terumah 11

93 Middos 3:8