

Baroque Visions of the Temple of Jerusalem

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The ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem has excited interest among artists, architects, and scholars for many centuries. There has been a steady stream of attempts to reconstruct its appearance, despite an overwhelming lack of physical evidence. Before 1800, the vast majority of the restorers had never visited the actual site of the temple; had they journeyed to Jerusalem, they would have found little of any use. The buildings were razed to the ground in the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.; since the seventh century, the platform that housed the Jewish temple has been occupied by an ensemble of Islamic structures which includes the Dome of the Rock and the El-Aqsa Mosque. As no graphic representations of the temple survive from the period before its destruction, the restorers have had to rely on textual evidence from the Hebrew Bible, the histories of Flavius Josephus, and a smattering of other sources. Yet these limitations have never restrained the imaginations of those who would restore the Temple of Jerusalem.

The Temple of Jerusalem was in fact two successive structures which stood on the same site.¹ The original structure, the Temple of Solomon, was begun in 960 B.C., the fourth year of Solomon's reign, and destroyed in 586 B.C. This structure is best known from parallel descriptions in the First Book of Kings (Ch. 6–7) and the Second Book of Chronicles (Ch. 3–4). It consisted of the temple building proper, set with-

in two courtyards. While the texts provide detailed descriptions of the temple building and its interior spaces, the courtyards of the temple are barely mentioned. There is a passing reference to "the inner court" (I Kings 6:36), which implies the existence of an outer court; another passage (II Chronicles 4:9) refers to "the court of the priests" and "the great court." Neither text gives any indication of their shape or size.

The construction of the Second Temple was undertaken as early as 537 B.C., and completed by 515 B.C. Very little is known about the temple at this stage; much more is known of the extensive improvements built under Herod the Great, beginning about 20 B.C. Josephus describes Herod's Temple in both of his major histories, *Wars of the Jews* and *Antiquities of the Jews*. Josephus indicates that Herod enlarged the temple building and surrounded it by four courtyards, each ringed by several colonnades. Although the Second Temple was considerably larger and more magnificent than the Temple of Solomon, it is the earlier structure that has always received the lion's share of attention.

In the midst of this archaeological and textual profusion another text stands somewhat apart. Chapters 40–43 of the Book of Ezekiel contain a lengthy description of the temple, which was imparted to the prophet in a vision. Ezekiel states that in the year 572 B.C. he was transported to Jerusalem, where

a man "whose appearance was like the appearance of brass" (Ezekiel 40:3), measuring instruments in hand, proceeded to give him a guided tour of the temple. Ezekiel is shown a temple which seemingly resembles the Temple of Solomon as described in I Kings and II Chronicles; it consists of a temple building set within two courtyards. Unlike these two texts, Ezekiel's account devotes much space to describing the extensive courtyards. Ezekiel gives precise dimensions for the plan of every part of the complex, but he gives no information on heights or elevations. The resulting image is one of a temple which is rigorously regular and symmetrical in plan.

It has never been conclusively determined which version of the historical Temple of Jerusalem (if any) Ezekiel's vision represents. One view holds that Ezekiel's vision depicts the Temple of Solomon as it appeared on the eve of its destruction in 586 B.C. Ezekiel is believed to have been a priest in the temple until he was exiled in 597 B.C.; therefore he would have been familiar with its appearance. According to this view, the temple building had not changed since the days of Solomon, but the extensive apparatus of symmetrical courtyards was the work of later kings of Judah.

Other views hold that Ezekiel's vision describes the earliest state of the Second Temple. In this case, Ezekiel could be preparing a blueprint for rebuilding the

temple. A school of modern Biblical critics, which posits the existence of a Pseudo-Ezekiel who wrote many parts of the prophet's book (including the chapters describing the temple) after the Jews returned from exile, has adopted a variation of this view. According to their thesis, the Pseudo-Ezekiel would naturally have described the rebuilt temple as it existed at that time.²

Others believe that the Temple of Ezekiel does not correspond to any historical version of the Temple of Jerusalem; Ezekiel's temple would be what he says it is: a prophetic vision. When considered within the chronological order of Ezekiel's many visions, his vision of the temple could not be connected to any of the real structures. In the text, Ezekiel's temple vision occurs immediately after his prophecy of the "War of Gog and Magog," a war fought against the restored kingdom of Israel "in the end of days." These are code words for the period which will precede the Messianic redemption (for Jews) or the Second Coming of Christ (for Christians). Most Jewish interpreters hold that Ezekiel describes the form of the "Third Temple" of the future, followed by a description of the ritual to be practiced there.³ Christian interpretations have also focused on the visionary nature of the description.⁴

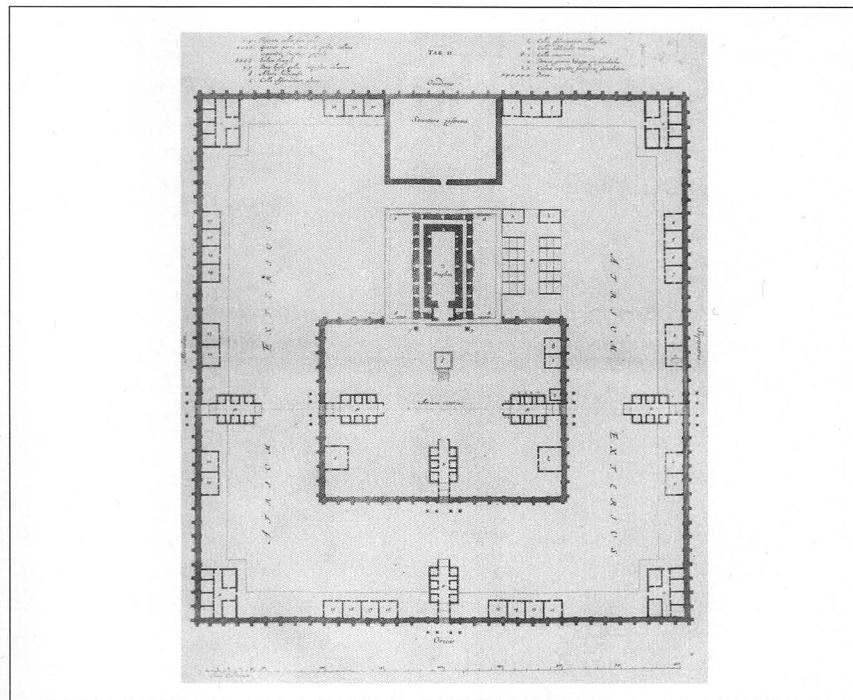
Perhaps this is the reason why Ezekiel's description was rarely used in attempts to reconstruct the Temple of Jerusalem made before 1600.⁵ Shortly thereafter

his text became very prominent, due to the efforts of a Spanish Jesuit, Juan Bautista Villalpando. Together with Hieronimo Prado he published an exhaustive three-volume commentary on the Book of Ezekiel. Villalpando wrote the second volume (1604) himself; it is devoted exclusively to Ezekiel's description of the temple.⁶ Villalpando provided a more vivid and detailed presentation of the temple than any attempted earlier, and he had it sumptuously illustrated. Villalpando's version of Ezekiel's vision was conceived wholly within the formal language of Renaissance architecture; in certain respects it resembles the Escorial, the most notable Renaissance monument in Spain.⁷ The decision to represent the temple in the architectural style of the day was not unusual; this had been done before. It was the unprecedented claims he made for his reconstruction which made Villalpando's project remarkable.

The most astonishing of Villalpando's claims was his declaration that Ezekiel's description represented the temple as it had always existed in an unchanging form from Solomon to Herod; he flatly rejected the historical record, which included the inconvenient fact that Herod had enlarged the temple. Villalpando also asserted that the temple had been designed by God, and he contended that on this occasion God had invented the Classical Greek orders of architecture. To this end Villalpando devised a special "Temple order" that combined the Corinthian capital with

the Doric entablature. His only evidence for this came from his questionable interpretation of a passage in Josephus, who stated that the eastern gate of the Second Temple was sheathed in Corinthian bronze (Wars 5.201). Villalpando's assertion that the temple's form was constant through ten centuries allowed him to interpolate other details taken from Josephus, presumably when Ezekiel neglected to mention them.

Villalpando also played fast and loose with Ezekiel's text. Where Ezekiel describes two concentric square courtyards adjacent to the temple building, Villalpando drew a grid of nine identical square courtyards. This decision was based on Ezekiel 46:21: "Then he [Ezekiel's guide] brought me forth into the outer court, and caused me to pass by the four corners of the court; and behold, in every corner of the court there was a court." But Villalpando simply ignored the modest dimensions of these corner courts, given in the very next verse, and blew them up to a size that suited his designs. To this gridiron plan he added a further concentric courtyard ringed with a triple colonnade. This last feature is the Court of the Gentiles as described by Josephus (Wars 5.190); Ezekiel does not mention it. Although Ezekiel indicates no columns, Villalpando garnished the temple with over 1500 of them.⁸ Ezekiel does state that the outer court is lined by thirty chambers "upon the pavement" (40:17); Villalpando moved

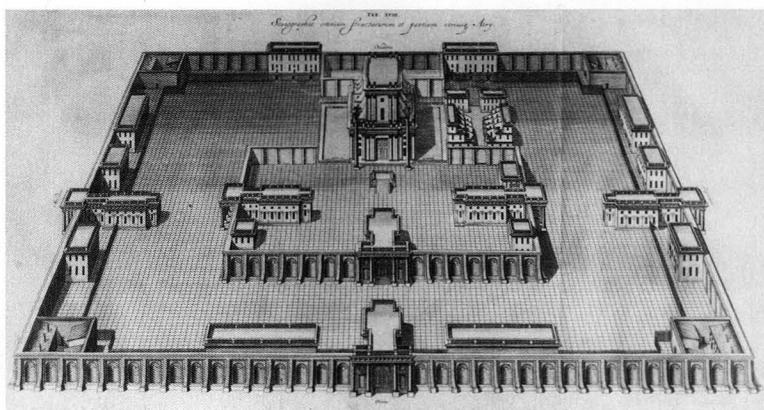


Johannes Coccejus, Temple of Ezekiel, 1669, Plan

these chambers to the upper floors and provided many more than thirty. To top it all off, Villalpando placed the temple on a stupendous platform whose retaining walls are lined with enormous flared buttresses.

Villalpando's reconstruction was accepted and imitated by many; Fischer von Erlach gave it his imprimatur by placing it at the head of his pioneering history of architecture.⁹ Nonetheless, others who used Ezekiel as their basic text found Villalpando's work riddled with errors. One who did so was a

German-born theologian at the University of Leiden named Koch, who published under the Latinized name of Johannes Coccejus. In 1669 he published his own commentary on Ezekiel with nineteen plates depicting a temple pruned of Villalpando's interpolations.¹⁰ Coccejus restored the temple with two large courts, one inside the other, and four smaller courts in the corners, all of which conform to Ezekiel's dimensions. Coccejus removed Villalpando's triple colonnades, and he replaced them with the thirty chambers that Ezekiel prescribes.



Johannes Coccejus, *Temple of Ezekiel*, 1669, View

Coccejus even included the one asymmetrical element in Ezekiel's text, a dormitory block for the priests.

But Coccejus found nothing wrong with the Renaissance style employed by Villalpando. He adopted Villalpando's flared buttresses, although they are reduced to diminutive decorative features. The temple building has a typical Baroque church facade based on Vignola's Gesù. While Coccejus preferred pilasters to free-standing columns, he did reestablish the two monumental columns named Jachin and

Boaz, which Villalpando had omitted. These columns figure prominently in the descriptions of Solomon's Temple in I Kings and II Chronicles; although they are not mentioned explicitly in Ezekiel's text, they do correspond to the two pillars he describes in front of the porch of the temple building (Ezekiel 40:49).

Other Ezekiel scholars concurred with Coccejus's restoration in plan, while they abandoned the apparatus of Classical architecture in their elevations. Two French clerics, Bernard

Lamy and Augustin Calmet, made important contributions in this sense.¹¹ Calmet's project, published in 1722, is part of a reasoned attempt to integrate Ezekiel's temple with accepted notions of Biblical history. He explained that Ezekiel's text could best be used to supplement the parts missing from the texts of I Kings and II Chronicles; that is, the courtyards. He admitted that this was valid only for the Temple of Solomon; he refused to apply Ezekiel's description to the Second Temple in any way.¹² Furthermore Calmet rejected as anachronistic any attempt to clothe the temple in ancient or Renaissance architectural styles:

He [Villalpando] included several embellishments which are not expressed in the holy text, but which should be there according to the rules of architecture, which he supposed could not have been unknown to Solomon: as if architectural taste was the same among all peoples and in all centuries, and as if Solomon, long before the first architects of Greece, was obliged to follow the rules which they formulated afterwards.¹³

Calmet's elevations are severe indeed, but he could not refrain from inserting long rows of columns as a lining around each court.

Calmet's project was among the last of its kind; after the middle of the eighteenth century, restorers of the Temple of Jerusalem abandoned Ezekiel's de-

scription with alacrity. Nineteenth-century scholars repeatedly declared Ezekiel's text to be "useless" for serious archaeological reconstructions.¹⁴ The standard monograph of the period is that of Count Melchior de Vogüé, *Le Temple de Jérusalem* (1864). He dismissed Villalpando's work as "an immense collection full of vast erudition, but a total loss." Nor did those who corrected Villalpando merit much praise:

The profound erudition of men like Calmet and Lamy, very accurate for discussing texts or recovering descriptions of sacred objects, despite obscurities, left them powerless when the time came to give form to their conclusions and exchange the pen for the drawing pencil; following the tastes of the time and the fashionable styles, they gave the Temple of Solomon the exterior appearance of the palace of Versailles or that of Saint-Thomas d'Aquin [a Parisian church, facade built 1769-1770].¹⁵

In light of the sweeping condemnations which have relegated these efforts to reconstruct Ezekiel's temple to the dustbin of history, one wonders what motivated their creation in the first place. Scholarly curiosity, stimulated by piety, is one answer, but one thinks it is insufficient to explain the phenomenon of two centuries of restorations which privileged this text above all others. It seems that Ezekiel's description satisfied the goals of another agenda, one with grander ambitions than simply supply-

ing views of another ancient monument. It seems that Ezekiel provided a solution to a persistent problem that disturbed the philosophical underpinnings of Renaissance and post-Renaissance architecture.

For the architects and scholars of this time, it was an article of faith that the Classicizing architectural style of the Renaissance and the Baroque was the best available, for it was based on the models of architectural perfection provided by ancient Greece and Rome. But the temples of Greece and Rome were pagan temples; the Temple of Jerusalem was the only monument of antiquity which held a tenuous link to the Christian faith. If the Temple of Jerusalem could be imagined as the equal or better of other ancient temples, then this would provide additional justification for the Classical assumptions underlying the architecture of the Renaissance.

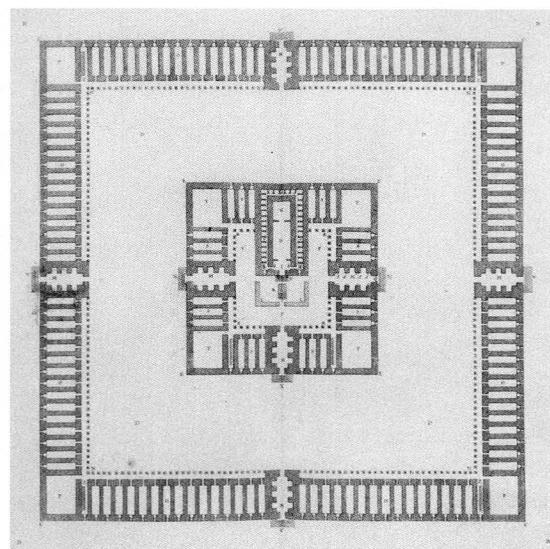
If it could be demonstrated that the temple was built in a Classical style earlier than any other famous monuments of antiquity, so much the better. This message seems to be implicit in Villalpando's work; it was restated in a historical work of Isaac Newton's, *The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended* (1728). Here the renowned scientist published three plates showing plans of the temple, "principally taken from Ezekiel's vision thereof."¹⁶ Newton's notion that the temple held a pivotal position in the course of architectural his-

tory is confirmed by a letter of one of his friends, William Stukeley:

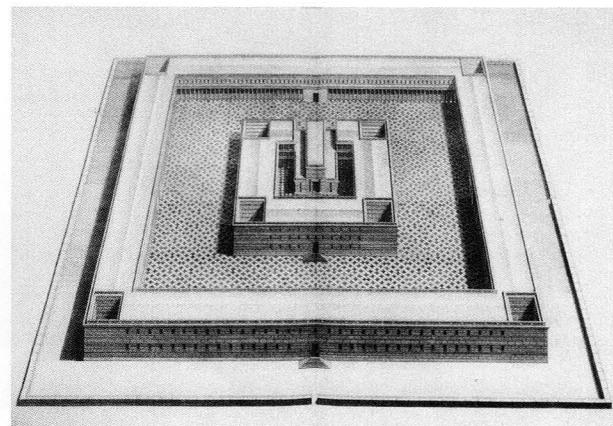
I discoursed with Newton this Christmas the twelvemonth about Solomon's Temple, having studyd that affair. I find he had formerly drawn it out & considered it... He says it was older than any other great temple, that Sesostris from this model built his temple in Egypt,... & that from thence the Greeks borrowed their architecture, as they had their religious rites.¹⁷

Such outlandish claims as these were difficult to sustain; the Temple of Solomon's reputation for great beauty was more secure. The Second Temple inherited much of that reputation; Josephus called it "the most marvelous edifice we have ever seen or heard of" (Wars 6.267), while the sages of the Talmud exclaimed, "He who has not seen the Temple of Herod has never seen a beautiful building."¹⁸ But those who returned to the texts with a critical eye found the temple inferior to what they knew of ancient Roman architecture. Voltaire considered the Temple of Solomon a "barbaric edifice," one whose proportions "would have surprised Michelangelo or Bramante." Nor could he admire the Second Temple: "This temple was very holy, without a doubt; but a sanctuary of 20 cubits in length was not built by a Vitruvius."¹⁹

Without Ezekiel's account to supplement and ornament the other texts, the



Augustin Calmet, *Temple of Ezekiel*, 1722. View



Augustin Calmet, *Temple of Ezekiel*, 1722. View

temple could easily appear disappointingly plain. When Claude Perrault made a particularly severe reconstruction project, based on the Talmudic tractate Middot, he was criticized by a reviewer in these terms: "For us, this illustration resembles a prison more than a temple as magnificent as was the Temple of Jerusalem...All descriptions which give an idea of this temple which is not in accord with its beauty and its magnificence must be false."²⁰

Ezekiel's description did not have these drawbacks. With Ezekiel in hand, the temple could be reconstructed as a mag-

nificent edifice. Ezekiel provided the essential requirement, an orderly and symmetrical plan, while passing over the elevations in silence. Thus the plan was fixed; the architectural style was left to the imaginations of the restorers. By ignoring any evidence that Ezekiel's description might be ahistorical, restorers from Villalpando to Newton were able to recreate the Temple of Jerusalem as they preferred to imagine it. No other textual source offered the restorers a vision so generous in scale, so unencumbered by inconvenient details. No other textual source offered them the freedom to reevaluate the temple's position in his-

tory. Fischer von Erlach could place it alongside the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World; Isaac Newton could propose it as the forerunner of the greatest temples of antiquity. Because Ezekiel's text was consonant with Baroque ideals of splendor, the temptation to substitute Ezekiel's vision for historical fact was too powerful to resist.

Long after it was rejected as a legitimate source for the historical Temple of Jerusalem, Ezekiel's description continued to generate interest. Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez included it in their monumental history of an-

cient art (1887) as a substitute for the actual Temple of Solomon. To justify their actions, Perrot and Chipiez argued that Ezekiel's vision was the ancient Hebrew culture's "most beautiful work of art, perhaps the only one it ever produced. If this is so, should anyone be surprised that we have yielded to the temptation to undertake the restoration?"²¹ Should the reader be surprised that scholars of the Baroque did the same?

Notes

1. The most thorough study is T. Busink, *Der Tempel von Jerusalem*, 2 vols., Leiden, 1970–1980. See also H. Rosenau, *Vision of the Temple*, London, 1979.
2. The existence of a Pseudo-Ezekiel was suggested in G. Hölscher, *Hesekiel. Der Dichter und das Buch*, Giessen, 1924. The consequences of this development for the temple description were first explored in K. Möhlenbrink, *Der Tempel Salomos*, Stuttgart, 1932, 31–34.
3. See for example Ezekiel, ed. S. Fisch, London, 1960, 265.
4. One particular verse, Ezekiel 44:2, which refers to a "shut gate," is traditionally viewed as a prophecy of the Virgin Birth. See F. Hartt, *History of Italian Renaissance Art*, 3rd ed., New York, 1987, 67.
5. C. Krinsky, "Representations of the Temple of Jerusalem Before 1500," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXIII, 1970, 2 n.5.
6. H. Prado and J. B. Villalpando, *In Ezechielem Explanationes et Apparatus Urbis ac Templi*

- Hierosolymitani*, 3 vols., Rome, 1596–1608. For reproductions of the plates and discussions of Villalpando's ideas, see H. Rosenau, *Vision of the Temple*, 94ff., and especially W. Herrmann, "Unknown Designs for the 'Temple of Jerusalem' by Claude Perrault," *Essays in the History of Architecture Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, London, 1967, 143–158.
7. G. Kubler, *Building the Escorial*, Princeton, 1982, 43, states that Villalpando's reconstruction "shows the influence of the Escorial designs in many ways," but adds that there is a wide gulf separating them nonetheless.
8. This estimate is from W. Herrmann, "Unknown Designs," 143.
9. J. B. Fischer von Erlach, *Entwurf einer historischen Architectur*, Vienna, 1721, 10–15.
10. J. Coccejus, *Commentarium in Prophetiam Ezechielis*, Amsterdam, 1669; reprinted in vol. III of Coccejus's *Opera omnia*, 8 vols., Amsterdam, 1673–1675.
11. Their works are B. Lamy, *Apparatus Biblicus*, Lyon, 1696 (French translation, *Introduction à*

- l'écriture sainte*, Lyon, 1697); idem., *De Tabernaculo foederis, de Sancta civitate Jerusalem, et de templo ejus*, Paris, 1720; and A. Calmet, *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, 2 vols., Paris, 1722.
12. A. Calmet, *Dictionnaire*, II, 406.
13. A. Calmet, *Dictionnaire*, 4th ed., 4 vols., Paris, 1845–1846, IV, 691. This passage first appeared in the second edition of 1730.
14. See A. L. Hirt, *Der Tempel Salomons*, Berlin, 1809, 19; and L. de Saulcy, *Histoire de l'art judaïque*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1864, 163.
15. M. de Vogüé, *Le Temple de Jérusalem*, Paris, 1864, v.
16. Isaac Newton, *The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended*, London, 1728, 343.
17. William Stukeley to Dr. Richard Mead, 22 July 1727. Cited in F. Manuel, *Isaac Newton, Historian*, Cambridge, Mass., 1963, 265 n.4.
18. Baba Bathra 4a. *The Babylonian Talmud*, 34 vols., London, 1935–1948, pt. 4, III, 12.
19. Voltaire, *La philosophie de l'histoire*, ed. J. H. Brumfitt, Geneva, 1969 (original ed. Amsterdam, 1765), 206–208.

20. W. Goeree, *La république des Hébreux*, 3 vols., Amsterdam, 1705, III, preface. Cited in W. Herrmann, "Unknown Designs," 153 n. 73.
21. G. Perrot and C. Chipiez, *Histoire de l'art dans l'antiquité*, 10 vols., Paris, 1882–1914, IV (1887), 242.

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