

A Biblical Parallel to a Sumerian Temple Hymn? Ezekiel 40–48 and Gudea

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Ezekiel's remarkably detailed vision of the future temple as described in chapters 40–48 is unique in Biblical literature.¹ However, it bears undeniable resemblance to the ancient Near Eastern genre of Sumerian temple hymns, and to one example in particular.² This example, commonly referred to as the Gudea Cylinders, was written at about 2125 B.C.E. to commemorate the building of a temple to the god Ningirsu by Gudea, king of Lagash.³ It recounts a vision received by Gudea in a dream, in which he is shown the plan and dimensions of the temple he is to build. While in fundamental ways these texts are quite different, this paper will focus on the common features of theme, structure, and detail shared by these two documents.

We will focus first on the major themes which are common to Ezekiel and Gudea, addressing especially the association of the temple with abundance, and particularly with water as a symbol of fertility associated with the temple. We will also address a second theme in common, the concern with gradations of purification and consecration.

Ezekiel's vision of the restored temple is the culmination of his prophetic mission, which spanned more than twenty years during the sixth century B.C.E.⁴ The burden of his message in most of his book is the inevitability of the destruction of Jerusalem, the death of most of Judah's inhabitants, and the scattering of the pitiful remainder.⁵ But from the time God tells Ezekiel to watch for a refugee bearing the news of Jerusalem's downfall, Ezekiel begins to prophesy against Israel's enemies.⁶ While his message can never be described as comforting, Ezekiel does convey hope

1. A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Anaheim, California, November 1989.

2. The genre of Sumerian temple hymns is attested by the survival of tablets bearing several such works, as well as by examples from the related genre of lamentations over the destruction of temples. See T. Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once . . .* (New Haven, 1986), 363, suggesting a pattern for such hymns exhibited in the Gudea Cylinders. Cf. *ibid.*, 375ff., for examples of hymns to temples as well as laments for temples. For a recent discussion of city laments as a biblical and ancient Near Eastern genre, based on the genre analysis of Alastair Fowler, cf. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Rome, 1993).

3. Jacobsen, *Harps*, 386. See also S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* (Philadelphia, 1944), for his discussion on dating.

4. For Ezekiel's dates, cf. W. Zimmerli, *Ezechiel, BKAT 13/1* (Neukirchen, 1969), 12–23 and P. C. Craigie, *Ezekiel* (Philadelphia, 1983), 3–4.

5. See Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago, 1960), 436.

6. Cf. Ezek. 24:25–27ff. All biblical references are to the book of Ezekiel, unless otherwise noted.

as he begins at this point to sketch the outlines of an Israel restored to her land with a new heart and a new spirit for the honor of her God (37:22, 26–28, 32).

Ezekiel's final chapters, dazzling in their graphic description of the divine majesty re-establishing residence in the magnificent re-sanctified precincts of a rebuilt temple, conclude with an unmistakable allusion to fertility and abundance (47:9–12).

In notably parallel circumstances, Gudea's temple-building occurs toward the end of the seventy- or eighty-year domination of Sumer by a people known as the Gutians.⁷ The Gutian invasion, described in the Sumerian lament, "The Curse of Agade,"⁸ resulted in dire famine for Sumer, with "misery, want, death and desolation thus threatening to overwhelm practically all 'mankind fashioned by Enlil'."⁹

After these decades of oppression, the Sumerian people experience a renewal. Gudea builds a temple at the direction of the storm god Ningirsu.¹⁰ The temple's construction and consecration represent the presence of the god's blessings of abundance among the people,¹¹ and may indeed have the same "redemptive" implications as Ezekiel's visionary temple, that of a people rebuilt at long last after devastation by an invader and many years of foreign oppression.¹²

For Gudea, the temple is a sign of the divine presence, bringing with it abundance.¹³ Ningirsu promises:¹⁴

7. S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago, 1963), 66.

8. For text, translation, and commentary on this work, see J. S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore, 1983), esp. 57–61, text 4.

9. Kramer, *Sumerians*, 64. For discussion of possible Akkadian influence on Ezekiel's Gog/Magog prophecies preceding this temple vision, including allusions to the Gutian destruction of Agade, see M. Astour, "Ezekiel's Prophecy of Gog and the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin," *JBL* 95 (1976), 573ff.

10. Jacobsen, *Harps*, 387: "The god Ningirsu was the power in, and to, the yearly spring rains and the rise of the rivers in flood, on which pasturage and irrigation agriculture—and with them the economic survival of man—depended."

11. T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven, 1976), 15: "The efforts to achieve and insure divine presence took the form of building temples."

12. In discussing Ezekiel 40–48 and the image of Ezekiel as lawgiver, Moshe Greenberg compares Ezekiel to Moses and the Babylonian exile to slavery in Egypt. In "The Design and Themes of Ezekiel's Program of Restoration," *Interpretation* 38 (1984), 183, he comments that, "analogy of situation produced similar prophetic roles." Similarly Astour, "Prophecy," 579 and M. Haran, "The Law-Code of Ezekiel 40–48 and its Relation to the Priestly School," *HUCA* 50 (1979), 54, n. 16. This comment may illuminate the parallels between the Hebrew and Sumerian passages under discussion.

13. The words for temple in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hebrew are the common words for "house" in each language: É = *bîtum* = *bayit*. As we shall see, the idea implied by these words—that of the indwelling presence of the god resident in an edifice—is embodied in both narratives in the investiture of each divinity into the newly built sanctuary dedicated to that god's worship.

14. Throughout this paper, the English translation is Jacobsen's in *Harps*, in consultation with Prof. Åke Sjöberg of the Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary and Prof. Tikva Frymer-Kensky of the University of Chicago. Instances where the translation varies from Jacobsen's are so noted. Sumerian readings are from Richard E. Averbeck, "A Preliminary Study of Ritual and Structure in the Cylinders of Gudea," volume 1 (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Dropsie College, 1987). For the convenience of the reader, citations are by cylinder designation, column, and line, as well as by page number in Jacobsen's volume. Whenever quotations from the Gudea cylinders appear, the following conventions have been followed: translator's restorations are enclosed in square brackets; translator's clarifications appear in parentheses; ellipses in parentheses fill in for untranslated words or phrases. Ellipses not in brackets represent lines or words left out of the illustrations selected for this paper.

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- A 11: 1 ému é-sag-kal-kur-kur-ra
 2 á-zi-da-lagaša^{ki}
 3 anzu₂^{mušen} an šár-ra šeg₁₂gi₄-gi₄
 4 é-ninnu é-nam-lugal-mu
 5 sipa-zi gù-dé-a
 6 u₄ šu-zi ma-ši-tù-m-da
 7 an-šè šeg_x-e gù ba-dé
 8 an-ta h́é-gál ha-mu-ra-ta-du
 9 un-e h́é-gál-la šu h́é-a-da-peš-e
 10 é-gá uš ki gar-ra-bi-da
 11 h́é-gál h́é-da-du

When to my house, the house honored in all lands,
 the right arm of Lagash,
 the thunderbird roaring on the horizon—
 Eninnu, my kingly house,
 O able shepherd Gudea,
 you put effectively the hand for me,
 I shall call up a rain,¹⁵
 that from above it bring for you abundance;
 and the people may spread hands with you on the abundance.
 May with the laying of the foundations of my house abundance come!¹⁶

It is interesting that in both texts at least part of the promised abundance takes the metaphoric form of being showered from above. In fact, an important parallel between the two works is the repetition of all types of water images, many associated with fertility, and some—notably thunderstorms and water flowing from the earth—also associated with the appearance of the divinity.

In the Sumerian hymn, water images abound. The overflow of the river signals to Gudea that the god wants something of him.¹⁷ Gudea floats down the river in a barge, seeking the clarifying oracle and stopping at different stages on the way to appease the tutelary gods with bread and libations of clear water.¹⁸ The clan (area) of the goddess Nanshe, another divinity invoked in Gudea's dream, is described as "superabundant waters spreading abundance," i₇-maḥ a-diri h́é-gál-bi pàr-pàr.¹⁹ Repeatedly, the heart of a god is referred to as a flood, or as a river overflowing.²⁰ And the god Ningirsu, himself the personification of the thundercloud and the overflowing river, is invoked with unmistakable references to waters of fertility.²¹

In the final chapters of Ezekiel, YHWH, too, partakes of this image of divine abundance associated with water, though to be sure the associations are attenuated and not always clear-cut. For example, in Ezekiel's second vision of theophany, the sound of God's voice is compared to the sound of "the voice of mighty waters," וקולו

15. Jacobsen translates the Sumerian seg_x, usually translated "rain," as "humid winds," *Harps*, 388–89.

16. Jacobsen, *Harps*, 401–2.

17. A1:5–6; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 388–89.

18. A2:8ff.; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 390–92. On the practice of confirming a dream through oracle or divination, see W. L. Moran, "New Evidence from Mari on the History of Prophecy," *Biblica* 50 (1969), 2–3.

19. A14:20; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 405.

20. A:8:23; A9:2; A:9:20; A10:2–4; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 398–400.

21. A8:16; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 398 with n. 42.

כקול מים רבים (43:2). Ezekiel compares this theophany to his first experience many years before, both specifically located by the river Chebar.²²

But by far the most dramatic water image in the book of Ezekiel is manifestly associated with fertility and abundance: that of the river issuing from beneath the visionary temple in 47:1–12. Moshe Greenberg remarks that Ezekiel's celestial architect leads Ezekiel from the modest origin of the spring and measures its growth into "an unfordable river after a 4,000-cubit flow through a desert!"²³ Greenberg is impressed with the connection between this flow of water and miraculous abundance, and notes:

This vision specifically connects Temple and fertility and singles out for transformation the most barren tract of land—the wilderness of Judah—and the body of water most inhospitable to life, the Dead Sea, a dramatic exhibition of God's beneficent presence in the temple.²⁴

Raphael Patai is also impressed by this association between the temple and fertility, and he was the first to make this particular connection between Ezekiel's vision and Gudea's temple.²⁵

Both Gudea and Ezekiel are deeply concerned with purification.²⁶ All those who are "impure"²⁷ are banished from Gudea's city, and the king consecrates the city and the ground on which he will build his temple with fire and with incense.²⁸ In a sense,

22. Cf. 43:3, 1:1.

23. Greenberg, "Design and Themes," 199.

24. For rabbinic legends connecting the waters issuing from the Temple with fertility and health, see Patai, *Man and Temple*, esp. 55–69 and 85–89. For a discussion of the connections among water, abundance, the biblical Temple tradition, and Northwest Semitic traditions, cf. J. D. Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40–48* (Harvard, 1986), esp. 11–14 and 27–29. See also idem, *Sinai & Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco, 1985), 113.

25. Patai, *Man and Temple*, 86–87: "The waters that issued forth from the Temple had the wonderful property of bestowing fertility and health. . . . Water issuing forth from the Temple is a mythical picture already known from the new Sumerian period: On the cylinder inscription B of Gudea, which describes the sacred marriage between Ningirsu and Bau, we read that after its consummation water streams forth from a basin that is placed next to the couch of the gods, and brings henceforth abundance like the Tigris and the Euphrates."

26. A:13:12–13; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 404.

27. Sumerian *uzug* [A13:14], "impure," is equated with Akkadian *musukku*; cf. CAD 10:2 (Chicago, 1977), 239a–b.

28. A13:24–14:6; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 404–5. Although the text is difficult, a case can be made that Gudea is concerned not merely with material purification, but with moral and ethical behavior as well. As the building work begins:

A12: 25 . . . inim-du₁₁-ga bí-gi₄

26 nir-da é-ba im-ma-an-gi₄ . . .

A13: 3 ama-a dumu-da gù nu-ma-da-dé

4 dumu-ù ama-ni-ra ka-dù-a

5 nu-ma-na-du₁₁ . . .

10 ensi₂-é-ninnu-dù-ra

11 gù-dé-a-ar inim-gar-bi lú-ù nu-ma-ni-gar

. . . (Harsh) words from all mouths he barred,
barred from that house all offense. . . .

No mother with her child had words,
no child spoke to its mother
saucily. . . .

Before the ruler building the Eninnu,

Gudea, no man let ominously words fall (Jacobsen, *Harps*, 403–4).

for Ezekiel, the people will have already been purified by an ordeal by fire in the destruction and exile. Nevertheless, purification and gradations of holiness are still a major concern of Ezekiel's, never more apparent than in this vision of the Temple rebuilt.

According to Greenberg, the very design of Ezekiel's visionary Temple reflects the prophet's focus upon sanctity. Greenberg comments that:²⁹

The Temple proper expresses gradation of holiness by the successively narrowing entrances to its inner parts. Along the border between the two courts rooms and zones are appointed for activities which if not properly contained might violate the grades of holiness.

'God's blessing follows closely upon the consecration of the temple. Once the temple is completed and the degrees of holiness are appropriately defined and contained in their designated locations within the visionary edifice, the full abundance which seems contingent on proper sanctification bursts forth in the form of the spring of water emerging from the south side of the altar.³⁰

Gudea's god also makes abundance contingent upon the completion of the temple, and the Sumerians enjoy gradually increasing abundance as the temple construction progresses. For Gudea's people, abundance begins from the moment the foundation of the temple is laid;³¹ and, of course, when the temple is completed, abundance rains down and is also raised from the earth in the form of grain.³²

It is possible to view the gradually increasing abundance which follows the progress of building Gudea's temple as an expression of the same idea in a different metaphor as the abundance which follows the carefully designated degrees of holiness embodied in the design of Ezekiel's visionary temple. The divine command in both instances is for an edifice which expresses in its design (in Ezekiel's case) or in its process of construction (in Gudea's case) the idea of progressive sanctification. Upon the achievement of the final sanctification in both cases, the divine blessing of abundance pours forth in the form of fertilizing water.

In addition to these two major themes of, first, associating temple with both water and abundance, and, second, preoccupation with degrees of sanctity, the structural

See also *ibid.*, 404, n. 5. For discussion of the non-Hebrew idea of the relationship of moral behavior with the well-being of a nation, see M. Weinfeld, "Ancient Near East Patterns in Prophetic Literature," *VT* 27 (1977), 193–95. Cf. also Greenberg, "Design and Themes," 194, for the ancient idea that any "pollutions" anywhere in the land pollute the sanctuary as well.

29. Greenberg, "Design and Themes," 192–93.

30. Patai also notes the relationship between water and the concept of purification which is such a dominant idea in these chapters of Ezekiel. Cf. Patai, *Hammayim*, 17 and 21.

31. A11:1–16; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 401–2.

32. B19:11–13; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 441:

B19: 11 agrig-zi-ama-^dnanše-ra
 12 muš nu-t[úm] é [h^é-]gál [mu-na]-ta[-è]
 13 ki še-gu-[nu] mu-na-mú-mú

For mother Nanshe's able steward
 did the house without a cease
 have [ab]undance
 [come to him from heaven]
 have earth grow for him mottled barley.

pattern of the temple vision in Ezekiel shares much in common with the structure of the Gudea hymn.³³

Let us first summarize the common structural pattern, and then we will examine specific details. The common structural pattern consists of seven points:

- 1) annunciation to the seer in a vision or a dream of the divine desire to have a temple built;³⁴
- 2) a precise blueprint received in an altered state of consciousness at the hand of a divine "architectural assistant";
- 3) concern throughout with purification, consecration, and ritual/cultic renewal;
- 4) installation of the divine majesty into the completed edifice;
- 5) assignment of specific duties to designated temple personnel;
- 6) ultimate consecration of the temple for service to the divinity; followed, finally, by
- 7) the divine blessing in the form of abundance expressed in water imagery.

The idea of a cosmogonic pattern for temple archetypes is recurrent in the critical literature of comparative mythology,³⁵ and has been seen in biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature as well.³⁶

Several of the points outlined in the scholarly literature as they relate to flood narratives or to edifice construction in Mesopotamian and Biblical literature apply as well to the accounts we have been considering in Ezekiel and Gudea, specifically, the associations among temple, water, and abundance; the divine request for a temple as conveyed to a king or priest; the requirement for cultic purification; and the celebration of a recurring annual ritual of re-consecration.³⁷

33. The structure of the Gudea hymn is discussed by V. Hurowitz in *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (Sheffield, 1992), 33–57, esp. 54–57.

34. On dreams as a means of communication from the deity, cf. P. D. Miller, "Eridu, Dunnu and Babel: A Study in Comparative Mythology," *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985), 230f. For discussion of confirmatory impact of double dreams/double visions, see Weinfeld, "Patterns," 185–87, and 186, n. 46; the Bible itself affirms this function, cf. Gen. 41:32. The classic work on dreams as revelation is still A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Philadelphia, 1956); see also M. Lichtenstein, "Dream-Theophany and the E Document," *JANES* 1 (1969), 45–54, esp. 50–51. For discussion of future temple vision in doublet relation to vision of profaned temple in Ezekiel 8–11, see Haran, "Law-Code," 51ff. and Greenberg, "Design and Themes," 190. Contrast Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2, 977–79.

35. Cf. Patai, *Man and Temple*, and the various cultural anthropologists such as the monumental works of Frazer and Lévi-Strauss.

36. Cf. Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (Freiberg, 1991), 219–30; Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Harvard, 1972); Michael A. Fishbane, "The Sacred Center: The Symbolic Structure of the Bible," in M. Fishbane and P. Flohr, eds., *Texts and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum N. Glatzer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday by his Students* (Brill, 1975), 6–27; idem, *Text and Texture, Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (Schocken, 1979), 111–20; S. W. Holloway, "What Ship Goes There: The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near East Temple Ideology," *ZAW* 103 (1991), 328–55; Levenson, *Theology*; S. Talmon, "The 'Navel of the Earth' and the Comparative Method," in idem, *Literary Studies in the Hebrew Bible: Form and Content, Collected Studies* (Magnes, 1993), 50–75.

37. See Holloway, "What Ship," 329–38, in which he outlines six points of correspondence among temple archetypes in the ancient Near East. Although his study focuses on the construction and function of the arks of the biblical and Mesopotamian flood narratives and of Solomon's temple, the points he outlines are equally applicable to the temples of Ezekiel and Gudea.

Taken together with other scholarly studies on temple models of the ancient Near East reflected in Hebrew scripture,³⁸ the correspondences among so many sacred constructions from so many different, though related, cultures in the ancient Near East suggest an implicit, if not explicit, paradigm for the structure and function of "Temple" that was operative over a long period and at many levels. The several biblical accounts that correspond to this hypothetical model may be adduced as evidence that Hebrew scribes and prophets were familiar with this genre and incorporated it into their writings.

Before proceeding to consideration of our third task, the examination of parallels in the details of the two texts, it is worthwhile noting that the structure and details of Gudea's building program also bear great resemblance to other temple construction accounts in the Bible, specifically Solomon's activity described in 1 Kgs. 5:1–9:9 and Hezekiah's reconstruction and repair of the temple outlined in 2 Chronicles 29–31.

While a deeper analysis must wait, a summary of the parallels might be illuminating for the reader of the present paper. Parallels between Gudea's and Solomon's account include:³⁹ taxing the people; costly imports; divine word requiring obedience; detailed description of opulent furnishings; consecration; installation of divine majesty into temple; speech by ruler at consecration imploring divine bounty; specification of ruler's offering; feast of seven days; and divine exhortation to moral and ethical behavior by ruler and subjects. Correspondences with Hezekiah's briefer account include: description of repair and reconstruction; consecration; observance of seven day festival; purification of temple and moral rededication of people; specification of tithes/taxes; promise of fertility and prosperity.

Parallels in sequence and structure of the patterns in temple accounts in the Bible and the Sumerian hymn suggest that the temple-hymn consists of predictable elements in traditional sequence. Vladimir Propp's work on the morphological analysis of traditional texts suggests that such a shared sequence may define a literary genre,⁴⁰ serving to designate a category of narrative defined by a common structural pattern featuring specific, recognizable elements in a predictable sequence.⁴¹

Daniel Bodi terms the borrowing of a theme or motif "literary emulation,"⁴² and suggests that an author would adapt the borrowed formula, theme, structure, or motif to suit his own objectives. It is possible that we have such an adaptation of the ancient Near Eastern temple-hymn pattern in these chapters of Ezekiel.

38. See especially, Hurowitz, *Exalted House*, part II, chaps. 8–13, where he discusses the common structure of biblical and Mesopotamian temple accounts, including introduction, date formulae, divine command, acquisition of building materials, description of building and furnishings, dedication ceremony (including installation of divinity into the new temple), dedication prayer, and divine response. Cf. Corrine L. Patton, "Ezekiel's Blueprint for the Temple of Jerusalem (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1991) for a discussion of the ideological importance of elements in the temple building itself, esp. 109–11, 187–90. Patton extends the discussion to the Qumran Temple Scroll.

39. Cf. Hurowitz, *Exalted House*, 55–57 for the structural pattern in Gudea, and Part II, for a detailed examination of this pattern in 1 Kings.

40. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (University of Texas, 1968), 10–12.

41. Propp, *Morphology*, 22.

42. Bodi, *Ezekiel/Erra*, 319–20.

Besides the striking parallels of theme and structure that we have just seen, many of the salient details in Ezekiel echo or evoke the Gudean hymn.

To begin, Ezekiel is a priest/seer who is selected by YHWH to be his prophet and to experience this vision of the temple renewed.⁴³ At least one scholar has suggested that Gudea is a king/priest/seer⁴⁴ who receives in a dream the call of a god to build his temple, and seeks clarification in additional dreams and oracles.⁴⁵ Both divine demands for temple construction begin with a clear-cut call to attention, the prophet's in 40:4, and the king's as follows: *ensi₂ lú-geštu₃-dagal-kam geštu₃ ì-gá-gá*, "and the ruler, as a man of great perception, was lending ear."⁴⁶

In each case, theophany, the appearance of the god, heralds the beginning of mission.⁴⁷ While upon first inspection the form of each revelation of divinity is unique to each account, upon closer inquiry the details do resonate in harmony.

Gudea's god appears as a giant man sporting the wings of a thunderbird, his lower parts the floodstorm, with lions on either side of him.⁴⁸

Ezekiel's theophany upon the completion of the visionary temple is a repetition of his revelation in chapter one,⁴⁹ and includes images evocative of Gudea's god Ningirsu. The four winged creatures in Ezekiel's vision have the figure of a man, and one of the four faces of each creature is that of a lion. Ezekiel's theophany also consists of many thunderstorm elements (1:4–28). He comments that the noise of the creatures' wings is like rushing waters; he describes a huge cloud, a stormy whirlwind, flashing lightning; finally, "as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about," *כמראה הקשת* (1:28a). Ezekiel's theophany is surrounded by a rainbow!

Ezekiel's divinity appears the first time, and probably also the second, in a chariot covered with eyes, and "the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone," *כמראה אבן ספיר דמות כסא*, accompanies him (1:26a). Blue lapidary work seems important in both visions: one of the first offerings Gudea is advised to present to the god Ningirsu is a beautifully adorned war chariot, of lapis lazuli.⁵⁰

Both Gudea and Ezekiel see in their visions a man who is in charge of the plans of their respective temples. Gudea's divine assistant is Ninuruda, literally, "Lord of Copper," while Ezekiel's "architect" is described as *כמראה נחשת* (40:3), translated variously as of the appearance of copper or brass.⁵¹ Both architectural assistants make

43. Cf. Ezek. 1:3, and Haran, "Law-Code," 45.

44. Cf. Miller, "Eridu," 230–31, for definition of *ensi* as "seer," and precedents for the dual role of king and seer.

45. Cf. Jacobsen, *Harps*, 386–87.

46. A1 12 Jacobsen, *Harps*, 389. Jacobsen comments (*Harps*, 389, n. 7): "Gudea, sensing that something is demanded of him, prepares to have an oracular dream to enlighten him and brings the needed sacrificial animals for the rite."

47. Cf. Ezek. 1:1; Gudea A1:1–10, A4:14–20; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 389.

48. A4:14–21; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 392–93. See also *ibid.*, 387.

49. Ezekiel refers his readers to the details of that first theophany when he says (43:3): "And the vision was like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar," which is described in Ezek. 1:4–28.

50. A6:14–21 and B:16:15–16; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 395–96.

51. See Jacobsen, *Harps*, 395, n. 29, and Greenberg, "Design and Themes," 190.

the temple plans explicit. Though from the words of the god in Gudea's dream one would be hard-put to construct a temple, Gudea apparently understands expressly what is required, for he proceeds to build, and describe his construction, with energy and precision. In Ezekiel's case, the temple is also built, even if only in the prophet's imagination, since the divine assistant is measuring the visionary temple with great precision.⁵²

In both cases the divinity arrives to view the completed edifice, and takes up residence. This installation is followed, in Ezekiel's case, by the prescription of a consecration festival lasting seven days (43:2–3), and in Gudea's account, by the actual celebration of a consecration festival lasting seven days.⁵³ In taking up residence, both divinities proceed to organize the households of their temples, specifying which temple personnel are to perform which duties. In Ezekiel's vision, the priests and Levites are to perform the honors (44:1–46:24),⁵⁴ and in Gudea's account, minor deities are appointed by Ningirsu.⁵⁵ While the roles of the temple personnel in Ezekiel are primarily concerned with sanctity,⁵⁶ and those in Ningirsu's temple seem primarily concerned with keeping the god well fed, housed, and clothed, the centrality of animal sacrifice in both temple cults dictates the specification in both accounts of the "laws" of storage and handling of animal and other food offerings, disposition of kitchen and butchering procedures, and specification of sacrificial rites.⁵⁷

Besides the functions of the temple officiants, the ruler's role is also defined in these passages in each account. The ruler's bounty and obligation to set an example are present in both Ezekiel and Gudea texts. In both, libations and animal sacrifices are named, as well as moral and ethical injunctions. For example, as the temple is dedicated, Gudea again forbids harsh words and harsh treatment of subordinate by master or mistress, and, heeding divine will, appears to make reforms that last beyond the seven days of dedication.⁵⁸

B18: 2 eme-nì-ḥul da ga₁₄ ba-da-kúr
 3 nì-ne-ru é-ba im-ma-an g[i₄]
 4 nì-g[i-gi-na]-^d[nanše]-^dnin-[gír-su]-k[a-šè]
 5 èn [im-]ma-[ši-tar] . . .
 10 u₄ nì-si-[sá-ma]ḥ mu-na-a[b]-è
 11 nì-ne-ru ì-^dutu gú-bé giri₃ bí-ús

From the tongue (of) evil
 he changed the (evil) words,
 sent banditry packing home,
 hee[ded]

52. Greenberg, "Design and Themes," 184, suggests that in chapters 40–48 Ezekiel is witnessing the measurement of an already-built complex.

53. B:5:1–15, B17:12–21; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 429, 440. See also Haran, "Law-Code," 68, n. 40, and Greenberg, "Design and Themes," 197, n. 34.

54. For discussion on priestly role in Ezekiel and "P," see Haran, "Law-Code," 59–63, and idem, *Temples*, 58–71, as well as Kaufmann, *Religion*, 443–44.

55. B6:7–12:25, Jacobsen, *Harps*, 430–36.

56. For discussion of "law" as the word of God in these chapters, see Haran, "Law-Code," 48ff.

57. Cf. Ezek. 45:13–25; B:28:1–24, Jacobsen, *Harps*, 423–24.

58. B12:18–B13:1–11, Jacobsen, *Harps*, 440.

[Nanshe's] and Ningirsu's ord[nances]
 . . . A grand period of equity had dawned for him,
 and he set foot on the neck
 of evil ones and malcontents.

In Ezekiel, too, the ruler is enjoined by God to remove violence and spoil, to execute judgment and justice, and to have just weights and measures (45:9–10).

The consecration of a new name is also part of each text. The closing words of Ezekiel's book are, "and the name of the city from that day shall be 'YHWH is there,'" *וְשֵׁם הָעִיר מִיּוֹם ה' שָׁמָּה* (48:35b).⁵⁹ The name for Ningirsu's temple is determined before building begins, "House Ninnu, the flashing thunderbird."⁶⁰ And, as one would expect, the final sections of each text contain the promise of divine bounty.⁶¹

There are unquestionably fundamental differences between these two texts: the theological constructs of monotheism versus pantheism; the utopian/metaphysical vision of the future versus actionable/concrete plans for the present; cultural values, including the roles of priest and king, and relationships between worshiper and divinity, between individuals and community, and among individuals themselves.

But different though the tones, functions, and genres of these two texts are, certainly the parallels of theme, structure and detail between the final chapters of Ezekiel and the Gudea cylinders are too numerous and specific to be merely coincidental.

Ezekiel was taken in captivity to Babylon in about 597,⁶² and as a member of the priestly class he was probably literate. Some scholars speculate that he had at least some contact with the surrounding religious culture.⁶³ Michael Astour concludes his hypothesis of Babylonian influences on Ezekiel's God/Magog prophecy which precedes this temple vision:⁶⁴

There is little wonder that Ezekiel had access to Babylonian literature or some of its works. He spent at least a quarter of a century in the heartland of Babylonia, was politically extremely pro-Babylonian, was receptive to foreign myths, and knew about the Babylonian practice of haruspicy (Ezek. 21:26 [RSV 21:21]). He could hardly have failed to learn the official language of the country and to absorb some of its ancient culture.

The Sumerian tradition was kept alive by Assyrian and Babylonian scribes for many centuries after Sumerian ceased to be a living language, and Sumer a living culture. The Akkadians also assimilated many Sumerian cultural values.⁶⁵

The literature of temple hymns and temple laments must have been of compelling interest to Ezekiel on a number of counts: his priestly status; the predicted

59. See also 22:5, where Jerusalem is referred to as "polluted of name," and Greenberg, "Design and Themes," 202.

60. A11:1–8; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 401. See also *ibid.*, 387, and *idem*, *Treasures*, 16–17 for discussion of importance of temple names.

61. Cf. Ezek. 47:1–12; B22:20–B23:4; Jacobsen, *Harps*, 443.

62. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 1, 14.

63. Bodi, *Ezekiel/Erra*, 35–51 surveys this scholarship. See also S. Garfinkel, "Studies in Akkadian Influences in the Book of Ezekiel" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1983), esp. chap. 1.

64. Astour, "Gog/Magog," 579; see also 571ff.

65. Kramer, *Sumerians*, 166; see also *idem*, *Mythology*, vii, 21, 28–29.

destruction of his own beloved temple; and the longing for redemption he is for so long enjoined by God from expressing.⁶⁶

The question arises whether Ezekiel and his school were consciously familiar with the genre and pattern of the Sumerian temple hymn, purposely incorporating it into the body of his prophetic writings with the intention of evoking and transforming a long-established tradition, or whether the spiritual and literary environment of the ancient Near East exercised an unconscious influence on the Book of Ezekiel.⁶⁷ We may never know the answers to these questions for certain, but the literary evidence, coded in the texts themselves, speaks in the absence of biographical evidence.

The overt poetic message of the Gudea cylinders is one of praise: for the god, for the ruler, and for the temple, the result of their collaboration. Although the text presents many problems, the surface tone appears to be fundamentally reassuring and self-laudatory. The deeper message, however, coded in the lengthy and detailed repetition of actions completed perfectly, and in the detailed enumeration of the elements participating in the ensuing perfect harmony, is of a profound anxiety for all to be well, and of a dreadful fear that it will not be.

The prophetic message of Ezekiel is also complex and multifaceted. The book is replete with divine admonition, the Hebrew difficult, the tone deeply disturbing. Anxiety pervades every level of the prophet's message. The closing chapters, however, using a literary style that, like Gudea's, features copiously detailed descriptions and prescriptions, set a boundary and condition upon the anxiety. It is as though the authors of both texts hope against hope that if all proceeds as revealed, if every cubit is measured, if every molded brick is perfect, then the divinity will be mollified, disaster will be averted, and abundance and blessing will flow from the cosmic center.

66. Cf. M. Greenberg, "On Ezekiel's Dumbness," *JBL* (1958), 101-5.

67. Unconscious influences may have been iconographic. See, e.g., Menahem Haran, ed., *Ezekiel, Encyclopedia of the World of the Tanakh* (Revivim Press, 1982), 19 [in Hebrew]; and O. Keel, "Iconography and the Bible," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 3:358-74.