

Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings

Thesis submitted for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
by Avigdor (Victor) Hurowitz

Submitted to the Senate of the Hebrew University
on 25 March, 1983 (11 Nisan, 5743)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Part I</u> - Structural Analysis of Selected Extra-Biblical Building Accounts, and Comparison with I Kings 5:15-9:25	11
Chapter 1 - Building Stories in Sumerian Literature	11
Chapter 2 - Building Stories in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions	52
Chapter 3 - Building Stories in Neo-Babylonian Royal Inscriptions	65
Chapter 4 - The Differences between Neo-Babylonian and Assyrian Inscriptions	78
Chapter 5 - Building Stories in Mesopotamian Mythology	80
Chapter 6 - Building Stories in North-West Semitic Writings	85
Chapter 7 - The Building of the First Temple According to the Book of Kings	94
Conclusions	98
<u>Part II</u> - A Detailed Analysis of I Kings 5:15-9:26 in Light of Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings	99
Chapter 1 - Structural Markers	101
Chapter 2 - Building Temples upon Divine Command	123
Chapter 3 - Acquisition of Building Materials -The Literary and Practical Background of I Kings 5:16-26	158
Chapter 4 - The Descriptions of the Buildings and their Furnishings	222
Chapter 5 - The Dedication Ceremony	239
Chapter 6 - The Dedication Prayer	254
Chapter 7 - God's Reply to Solomon's Prayer - Blessings and Curses	265
<u>Conclusions</u>	275
<u>Bibliography and Abbreviations</u>	286
Sources Cited	286
Other Articles and Books	321
Abbreviations	366
<u>English Table of Contents</u>	i
<u>English Summary</u>	ii

Temple Building in the Bible in the Light of
Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings

Introduction - Numerous historical and religious works from all over the ancient Near East portray contemporary kings as the builders and maintainers of cities, palaces and temples. The Bible itself contains several lengthy passages relating to construction projects (Ex. 25-31, 35-40; Lev. 8-10; Num.7; II Sam 7; I Ki. 5-9; Ezra 1-6; Neh, 1-12; see also Ezek. 40-48; Haggai; Zech. 1-6; Ps. 132) and also refers to other such accounts which were contained in no-longer existing historical compositions.

Certain similarities and points of contact between several of the descriptions of building projects found in the Old Testament (especially in Kings) and those found in a small, random assortment of extra-biblical sources have occasionally been recognized by scholars (especially A.S. Kapelrud, J.A. Montgomery and M. Weinfeld). This recognition has been utilized to elucidate various aspects of the Biblical stories and even to clarify certain literary-critical problems arising therefrom.

Nevertheless, there has thus far been no systematic and detailed attempt to illuminate and analyze even a single Biblical building account on the basis of a comparison with an extensive corpus of extra-biblical material. On the contrary, two recent commentaries to the Book of Kings (Noth and Gray) have taken a step backward by ignoring rather than improving upon the use of the foreign evidence relevant to the scriptural account of building the Temple.

The present study is the first attempt at a comprehensive and systematic comparison between a major Biblical building account (I Ki 5-9) and a large number of similar stories gathered from Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic literature. It examines both the structural, stylistic and conceptual similarities and differences between the various building stories. In addition, crucial aspects of the Solomonic building project (and the account thereof) are illuminated by comparison not only to building accounts but also to documents

of various other genres and literary backgrounds. Comparison with extra-biblical writings of several types casts light on the subject matter of the scriptural description and enables a better evaluation of its literary form, central ideas and historical background and development.

Part I - A structural analysis of selected Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic building accounts and a comparison with I Kings 5:15-9:9.

Over twenty building stories were selected from the writings of Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine and analyzed as to their content and structure. Sumerian literature is represented by the Gudea Cylinders (building of Eninnu in Girsu), an Ur-Nammu hymn (building of Ekur in Nippur) and the Lugalannemundu pseudographic inscription (building of Enamzu in Adab). Assyrian writings, which provide the richest corpus of building stories, are represented by the "Bauberichte" from the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser I (Anu-Adad temple in Assur), Sargon II (Dur-Sarrukin), Sennacherib (the "Palace without a Rival" in Nineveh), Esarhaddon (the Ešarra in Ashur and the armory in Nineveh) and Ashurbanipal (Palace of the Crown Prince in Nineveh). Neo-Babylonian building stories are exemplified by those of Nabopolassar (Esagila and Egidridintulla in Babylon), Nebuchadnezzar (Etemenanki in Babylon) and Nabonidus (Ebabarra in Larsa and Sippar, Eḫulḫul in Harran). Mesopotamian myths provide the story of building Esagila and Babylon found in Enūma eliš. North-West Semitic writings offer the account of building Ba'al's palace in the Ugaritic Ba'al epic.

These stories deal with buildings of various types and each story is unique in that every one emphasizes certain aspects of the building project above other aspects. The differences between the stories and the unique character of each account undoubtedly reflect the individual interests of the various kings and their scribes. Yet despite the differences, all of the stories analyzed here share a common thematic structure consisting of five parts: (1) a decision to build a building with an expression of divine sanction; (2) preparations for the building

project, including drafting a labour force, acquisition or production of building materials (bricks, stone, wood), preparing the building site and laying the foundations; (3) a description of the edifice; (4) the dedication ceremonies; (5) a prayer by the king or a pronouncement of divine blessing for the king.

The Biblical account of building the Jerusalem Temple by Solomon follows the same thematic structure: (1) I Ki 5:17-19; (2) I Ki 5:20-32; (3) I Ki 6-7; (4) I Ki 8:1-11, 62-66; (5) I Ki 8:12-61.

Assyrian building stories contain an additional element not included in other extra-biblical accounts - conditional blessings and curses addressed to a future king who will find the building in ruins and be faced with restoring it. This element may lie behind the Divine blessings and curses in I Ki 9:1-9 (see chapter 7).

It may therefore be concluded that the Biblical account of building the Temple is structurally a quite typical Ancient Near Eastern building story.

Even while surveying the texts and pointing out a common pattern, attention is given as well to various other aspects of the individual stories - especially the Gudea Cylinders and the Ugaritic Baal Myth:

(a) The Gudea Cylinders - It has been proposed that there was an additional cylinder which preceded the extant two. On the basis of comparison with several other works of Sumerian literature, it may be suggested that if such a cylinder did in fact exist, it probably contained a hymn of praise to either the god Ningirsu, the temple Eninnu or the city of Lagaš. It may therefore be ignored in an analysis of the building story proper.

Cylinder A consists of four parts - each part being marked by different participants, locales and actions as well as by recurring formulae. A major theme in this cylinder is the uncertainty involved in carrying out the divine command. Dramatic tension is created by the paradox that the divine revelations which are meant to clarify the will of the gods also introduce new elements of doubt as to what their will is.

Cylinder B seems to be parallel in its overall structure to Cylinder A although no formulae can be detected which mark the divisions. The central act in the dedication ceremonies described in Cylinder B is the entry of Ningirsu and Bau into the new temple. Other aspects of the festivities such as performance around the turn of the new year, the marital union of the gods, the gifts to the gods, the appointment of divine personnel in the temple and the seven day celebration are aimed at assuring the divine blessing and a favourable destiny for the builder and his city.

(b) The Baal Myth - This story shows affinities in particular points to Mesopotamian literature while in other aspects it has western parallels. The use of bricks and lapis lazuli, El's comment that neither he nor Asherah will do physical labour, the necessity to get a building permit from the head of the pantheon, and the description of the dedication ceremony have roots in Mesopotamian writings. On the other hand, the employment of an artisan who is mentioned by name, the miraculous emergence of the building, and the refrain "Baal has no house like the gods etc" have their closest parallels in North-West Semitic writings (the Bible, Rabbinic sources and the Barrakab inscription).

Part II - A detailed analysis of I Ki 5:15-9:9 in light of extra-biblical sources.

Chapter 1 - Structural Markers -

- a) The introduction: The introduction to the building story (I Ki 5:17-19) is embedded in Solomon's message to Hiram. Even so, it contains themes found in the introductory paragraphs of numerous Mesopotamian building accounts: the history of the building with emphasis on the abandonment of the building by previous kings; the present king's own decision to build; the divine sanction given to the project; relief from adversaries.
- b) The date formulae: The custom of building a temple in the king's first year as well as extending a building project over a period of seven units of time (days, months, years) are known from various Biblical, Canaanite and Mesopotamian sources and may be indicated in the Book of Kings as well. However, the

date formulae themselves (I Ki 6:1, 37, 38; 7:1; 8:2) are unparalleled in Mesopotamian building stories. These stories usually confine themselves to a general statement that various building activities were performed on propitious dates. I Ki 6:1-2 bears very close resemblance to formulae known from Phoenician and Punic dedicatory and building inscriptions. The similarity extends over the entire formula and is not limited to the month names. I Ki 6 verses 37-38, for their part are closer to date formulae known from Mesopotamian chronicles. Vs. 1 is therefore not to be seen as a reflex of vss. 37-38 but as an independent statement.

c) Refrains: The refrains containing the words בנה, עשה (מלאכה) together with בלה, תמס, שלם, ללאכה have parallels in other Biblical building accounts. Numerous Akkadian building stories as well contain refrains using the equivalent terms (šipram) epešum, banû, rašāpu in conjunction with (šipram) šuklulu, quttû. Such formulae are not prevalent in extant North-West Semitic building accounts.

Chapter 2 - Building Temples on Divine Command.

a) Several passages mention that David desired to build a temple but that God, for some still unclear reason, rejected his initiative and appointed Solomon as temple builder in his stead (II Sam. 7, I Ki 5:17-19, 8:14-19). The requirement to receive divine license for a building project is alluded to in numerous Biblical and extra-biblical sources. This chapter presents and examines a large number of texts referring to divine involvement in the plan to build temples (and some other structures). The material gathered indicates that the deity may participate in the decision to build in several distinct ways: (1) The gods may initiate the project themselves. In such a case the decision may actually be reached during a meeting between the chief god in the pantheon and the god whose temple or city are to be built or restored. For destroyed cities and temples to be rebuilt, reconciliation with the patron god is required and predetermined periods of wrath must come to an end. A god who desires that his temple should be built or restored must convey his order to a king of his choice in one of several ways - through a dream,

a natural sign or a messenger or by "arousing" the selected builder. The king who believes that he has merited a divine communication must verify the divine command by standard divinatory methods; (2) The king himself may desire to build or restore a building. In order to do so, he must request and receive a sign of divine consent. This is again done by standard oracular methods; (3) The king may desire to build a temple and will seek the approval of the gods but the gods need not agree. In such a case the god will either send a negative answer or will not reply at all to the king's request. Should the king build a temple without having received the express permission of the gods, he could face disastrous consequences; (4) The gods were involved not only in the decision to build but also in determining the shape and size of the building as well as the construction timetable and the artisans. At times they would actively reveal the form of the structure to the king, and at times they were called upon to approve the king's own designs.

Each of the above mentioned modes of divine participation in decision making is known from one Biblical building story or another. In this respect, the various Biblical accounts are well rooted in common ancient Near Eastern (especially Mesopotamian) beliefs and practices. The tradition according to which God rejected David's plan to build a temple is an obvious example of the third mode of divine participation.

The material gathered here is significant unto itself and also has implications for various scholarly suggestions relating to the background and historicity of II Sam. 7 and the supposed original content of Solomon's dream at Gibeon (I Ki 3):

(a) Divine rejection of a royal plan to build a temple is an attested possibility in Mesopotamia and accords with Mesopotamian views about the relationship between god and king. Such a thing is unthinkable in Egypt. Therefore, if comparative material is adduced to illustrate the incident reported in II Sam, 7 and referred to in I Ki 5 and 8, it should be Mesopotamian rather than Egyptian.

(b) A letter from Mari indicates that a building project could in fact be thought to be rejected by the gods. That such a thing should actually happen in Israel is therefore within the realm

of possibility. On the other hand, several Mesopotamian sources referring to divine rejection of building projects reflect the desire of later kings to glorify themselves and explain why they succeeded in carrying out something not accomplished by preceding kings. It is, therefore, still possible to claim that the story of Nathan's rejection of David's building plan is a fabrication of the Solomonic or post Solomonic age aimed at explaining why Solomon rather than David had the privilege to build the temple.

(c) A dream revelation or a natural portent to the king are to be expected only in cases in which the gods themselves initiate the building project. Since building projects were frequently initiated by the king, a building story need not necessarily contain a dream report. The minimum requirement is an expression of divine approval for the conceived project. Such approval is mentioned in Solomon's message to Hiram and there is no need to introduce a dream into the present story by means of the conjecture that Solomon's dream at Gibeon originally was concerned with building the Temple. Although this suggestion cannot be shown to be impossible, it is, nonetheless, not necessitated.

Chapter 3 - The Acquisition of Building Materials (I Ki 5:16-32)

In this chapter, an attempt is made to properly identify the literary background of the description of the bargaining and trade agreement concluded between Hiram and Solomon. The well known practices of bringing trees from the Lebanon for use in royal building projects, and shipping building materials by way of water are also investigated and contrasted to the Biblical story.

a) Literary analysis - Classical literary criticism has identified certain Deuteronomistic expressions in the pericope ("a house for the name of the Lord, God", "The Lord my God has given me rest all about", vs. 18-19). Some scholars (most recently M. Noth) have suggested that the entire passage is Deuteronomistic. However, this view is to be rejected and Deuteronomistic activity is to be seen as confined to the typical expressions, themselves, and at most to the verses in which they are contained.

Form critics and comparativists have found in this passage elements characteristic of treaties and contracts. Only a

minority of scholars have alluded to the epistolaric nature of the passage, but even these scholars have adduced very little evidence to substantiate their view. However, a detailed comparative and form-critical analysis (done here for the first time) shows clearly that the words of Solomon and Hiram resemble most closely ancient trade letters and the passage is to be characterized above all as epistolary. The epistolary nature is evident in both language and content. The language and style contain the following features which on the one hand are well known from ancient letters but on the other hand are not typical of other literary genres such as treaties and contracts:

(1) use of first and second person; (2) the transitional marker וְעַתָּה; (3) an infinitive-absolute imperative עֲשֵׂה immediately after the transitional marker; (4) the expressions כְּשֶׁמַּע...דְּבַר?

כִּי אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ; אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ; שָׁמַע...אַתָּה אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח...אֵלַי; ...וַיִּשְׁמַח מְאֹד
אֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה אֵת כָּל חֲפֻצְךָ...וְאַתָּה תַעֲשֶׂה אֵת חֲפֻצִי

(5) Hiram's blessing (?). As to content, requests for building materials as well as instructions for shipping and delivery are frequent subjects of both domestic and international letters. The Biblical author has adapted the letters for use in a narrative context. Despite the reworking, the epistolaric nature remains clear.

(b) Content analysis - The account of Hiram's correspondence with Solomon is in some ways a story about two traders who bargain and eventually conclude an exchange agreement. The two kings make initial proposals by which they offer little in return for a lot. The outcome, described by the narrator (vs. 24-32), indicates that the two parties compromised on their opening offers. The bargaining over the price of building materials may be compared with the bargaining alluded to in the Egyptian letter of Wen-Amon and in the Sumerian heroic tale "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta". In all three stories, a potential purchaser of building materials starts off by offering no significant payment and demanding large quantities of merchandise while the seller demands a high price for his wares. By the end of the story, agreement is reached, to the satisfaction of both parties. The difference between the Biblical account and the

other two is in part literary. The Bible reports only the opening positions and the final outcome, while the other two tales detail all the intervening steps. Most importantly, the Old Testament resorts to the letter as a vehicle for its story.

(c) Acquiring building materials according to extra-biblical sources -

The major building materials in Mesopotamia were brick, imported wood and stone. Several Biblical passages indicate knowledge of the importance of brick and wood in Mesopotamia.

According to Mesopotamian building stories and royal inscriptions, wood was acquired in two ways - it was either sent to Mesopotamia by subject kings, or it was cut down by the Mesopotamian monarch himself in the course of a campaign to the forests and the sea in the west. A study of the passages which explicitly describe the acquisition of the wood points to a difference in the utilization of the wood acquired in these two ways. Whereas wood acquired in both ways was employed in temples as well as in royal palaces, timber cut down by the king himself seems to have been subject to "desacralization" by being used initially or primarily in temples. The wood remaining afterwards could then be used in palaces. The apparent requirement that wood cut down personally by the king be put to initial use in temples accords well with other religious aspects of royal campaigns to the west.

As in the Biblical account, building materials were frequently transported by water from their place of origin to the building site.

(d) Historical and literary implications - Both Biblical and extra-biblical building accounts report the acquisition of cedars for use in temples as well as the transportation of building materials over water. Had an ancient author wished to fabricate a story on the basis of common practice and literary convention, he probably would have claimed that Solomon received his building materials as tribute or as a gift (cf II Sam. 5:11-12). The fact that the Biblical author admits to the purchase of the materials and couches his story in epistolary form may indicate that he had access to actual letters between the kings. Note should also be made of the tension between the picture of a

dominant Solomon who receives emissaries (and tribute) from all the nations (I Ki 5:14) and the picture of Solomon who must bargain and even compromise with a neighboring monarch.

Chapter 4 - The Descriptions of the Buildings and their Furnishings-

Textual and exegetical difficulties notwithstanding, it is clear that the Biblical author tries to describe the temple and several of its major appurtenances in a precise, factual manner which will enable the reader to visualize them. This is in marked contrast to extra-biblical building stories which are intent on aggrandizing and glorifying the building and its builder, but which do little to help the reader know how the objects described actually looked. Particularly lacking from the extra-biblical portraits of buildings are precise measurements. Although the Biblical author follows the general pattern of building stories by describing the edifice, he has chosen a unique style in the description itself. The origin of this style is to be clarified.

It has been proposed that parts of the description stem from either "archival" records (Montgomery) or oral instructions given to the builders (Noth). Whereas both these suggestions are possible, their proponents have not substantiated them with real documents. In this chapter, various Mesopotamian documents which contain factual, detailed descriptions of buildings and furnishings are examined. An attempt is made to clarify the genre and Sitz im Leben of each document. Analogies are then drawn between them and the Biblical descriptions in order to suggest possibilities for the background of the latter. It is found that the description of the Temple (I Ki 6) has its closest and most likely counterpart in descriptions of building contained in written instructions to builders (Weidner, AFO 20, p. 116). The description of the appurtenances (I Ki 7:15-51) most closely resembles descriptions found in certain documents with apparently administrative backgrounds (Weidner, AFO 17, pp. 145-146; Kocher, AFO 18, pp. 300-313; Barnett, Iraq 12, pp. 40-42) and probably related to the dedication of the items described.

Chapter 5 - The Dedication Ceremony -

Mesopotamian building stories consistently and clearly distinguish between dedication ceremonies for temples and those for palaces and cities. The focus of temple dedication ceremonies is the entry of the god into his new house and his being seated therein (erēbu, wašābu, ramû). In palace and city dedication ceremonies, the god(s) is (are) invited to the new building as guest(s) of honour (qarû) and the ceremony is referred to as "commencement" (šurrû, tašrītu). This distinction reflects and stems from the different natures of the building vis-a-vis the gods.

The festival depicted in I Ki 8, in which the installation of God in the new temple (vs.1-11) is the central event, may be considered in its essence and aims a typical ancient Near-Eastern temple dedication ceremony. At the same time, the tripartite nature of the description (celebration for deity, vs.1-11; royal prayer, vs.12-61; mass celebration, vs.62-66) and various details in the description have parallels in several Mesopotamian descriptions of ceremonies of both types.

It is of possible historical importance that on the one hand, Neo-Babylonian building stories contain no detailed accounts of dedication ceremonies, while on the other hand, there are numerous points of contact between the Biblical account and several elaborate accounts of dedication ceremonies in Assyrian inscriptions.

Chapter 6 - The Dedication Prayer -

Solomon's blessings (I Ki 8:14-21, 54-61) and prayer (vs.22-53) marking the dedication of the Temple are Deuteronomistic compositions which expound that school's views concerning the cultic functions of the temple as well as its place in the ongoing relationships between God and His elect people and king.

To be sure, many of the ideas expressed in this oration are strictly Judaeian and cannot be expected to have roots in the literature and beliefs of neighboring peoples. Nonetheless, it is not a completely independent, ad hoc creation.

Several Mesopotamian building stories state explicitly that on the occasion of the dedication ceremony, the king prayed. In

addition, most building stories conclude with a prayer on behalf of the king and these prayers are usually written in the first person. One building prayer especially reminiscent of Solomon's prayer is found in the annals of Tiglath-Pileser I (ARI II para. 58). Both kings ask that their prayers be heard always and that they be granted a long and stable dynasty, and refer to victory in battle, plentiful reign, and recognition by foreign nations. The difference is that Tiglath-Pileser I makes his request as an expected remuneration for building the temple, while Solomon, knowing that God reaps no benefit from the temple, makes granting the requests contingent on the conditions of the covenant.

Solomon's dedicatory prayer can thus be described as a peculiar Deuteronomistic transformation of the building prayers (Schlussgebete) routinely attributed to ancient monarchs. The Deuteronomist has adapted a well known literary form as a vehicle for expressing his own new beliefs and programs.

Chapter 7 - God's Reply to Solomon - Blessings and Curses -

God's reply to Solomon's prayer (I Ki 9:1-9) is thoroughly Deuteronomistic in language and thought and has been categorized among the orations which mark historically significant events. However, a comparative study suggests that as far as its position in the building story and the basic contents (blessings and curses), this passage is to be related to the blessings and curses addressed to future kings which routinely conclude Assyrian building stories. Analogous reworkings of the blessing-curse section of royal inscriptions may be found in so-called "narû" compositions, in the Tukulti-Ninurta epic and in an Aššurbanipal prayer to Šamaš (ANET pp.386-387), and indicate the adaptation of an originally "monumental" topos to the needs of non-monumental literary compositions.

Conclusions

On the basis of the structural, linguistic and conceptual similarities between I Kings 5:16-9:25 and numerous extra-biblical building stories, the building story may be added to the list of common literary types shared by Israel and her neighbors (especially

Mesopotamia) such as covenants, law collections and wisdom instructions. The building story as a literary form probably originated in Mesopotamia as an element in the expression of royal ideology, and from Mesopotamia it spread to the west along with other elements of royal ideology.

Of all the Mesopotamian building accounts, the ones most resembling the Biblical story are those of certain Assyrian kings. The origin of the similarity may be explained in various ways but the one which appears most plausible is that a pre-Deuteronomistic version of the Biblical building story was composed under the influence of Assyrian literature and subsequently certain parts of the original story (the royal prayer, the concluding blessings and curses) were rewritten or totally replaced by the Deuteronomistic compiler of the Book of Kings.

Despite the over-all similarities between the Biblical account and Mesopotamian building stories, a detailed comparative examination of the Old Testament passage reveals affinities to other literary types as well (letters, instructions, administrative documents). In addition, connections with non-Mesopotamian literature and ideas are also noticed. It seems, therefore, that the author of the original building story chose his subject matter and order of presentation in accordance with Assyrian practice but, rather than writing a totally independent composition, he may have paraphrased, incorporated and have been stylistically influenced by available original documents written in conjunction with the various phases of the building project itself.