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Ezekiel's Temple in Babylonian Context[1]

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Abstract

Comparison between Ezekiel's visionary temple and Neo-Babylonian temples shows similar organization of space and personnel. These formal similarities stem from a similar root purpose: maintaining strict standards of sanctity.

Keywords

Ezekiel – Neo-Babylonian – Biblical temples

The purpose of this article is to bring evidence from Babylonian sources to bear on two aspects of Ezekiel's visionary temple: the description of space and the internal hierarchy among the priests. Both of these features are unique to Ezekiel's temple, which immediately raises the question of how these innovations are to be understood. We suggest that Neo-Babylonian temples provide a meaningful background against which to interpret Ezekiel's vision. Comparing Ezekiel's temple with its Babylonian counterparts reveals a shared concern with maintaining standards of sanctity.

1 We dedicate this article to the memory of Victor (Avigdor) Hurowitz, a master of the comparative method in biblical studies, who encouraged us to pursue our present research. We thank Kathleen Abraham for her assistance and the anonymous *VT* referees for their useful comments. We also thank Ariel Kopilovitz, who was a research assistant during the early stages of this project. Abbreviations follow P. H. Alexander, et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Peabody, Mass., 1999), §8.4 (pp. 89-152). Translations of biblical texts follow NJPS.

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Our comparative study responds to a recent article by Margaret S. Odell, who brings Neo-Babylonian architectural evidence to bear on a revisionary interpretation of Ezekiel's temple.[2] Odell builds on Corinne Castel's survey of Neo-Babylonian temple architecture[3] that suggests, according to Odell, "that the mixture of sacred and profane activities within temple precincts indicates a degree of fluidity at odds with prevailing modern assumptions about the dichotomy between sacred and profane space."[4] Thus, Odell concludes, "Ezekiel's temple vision revolves around themes of access and sanctification, not separation and restriction."[5]

Review of the Neo-Babylonian evidence points away from Odell's main conclusion. We may begin with Odell's stated basis in Castel's study: Castel herself observes that, even though a "mixture" of activities occurred in temples, this did not undermine a basic architectural trend toward separation. According to Castel the most sacred parts of temples were, in fact, isolated.[6] More fundamentally, situating Ezekiel's temple in a Neo-Babylonian context cannot rely on architecture alone. Numerous studies of Neo-Babylonian temples based on ancient archival records and other texts have appeared since the publication of Castel's valuable article.[7] These studies put a rich fund of data at our disposal, and allow for much more thorough comparative observations. Consideration of the architecture together with the broader range of textual materials supports identifying a trend toward separation and restriction, rather than access and sanctification, in Ezekiel's temple and its Neo-Babylonian counterparts.[8]

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2 M. S. Odell, "'The Wall is No More:' Temple Reform in Ezekiel 43:7-9," in M. J. Boda and J. Novotny (eds.), *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible* (Münster, 2010), pp. 339-355. For earlier comparative studies, see pp. 339-340.

3 C. Castel, "Temples à l'époque néo-babylonienne: une même conception de l'espace sacré," *RA* 85 (1991), pp. 169-187.

4 Odell, "The Wall is No More," pp. 343-344.

5 Odell, "The Wall is No More," p. 354.

6 Castel, "Temples à l'époque néo-babylonienne," pp. 170-171.

7 For an overview of these records and the relevant studies, see, in addition to the literature cited below, M. Jursa, *Neo-Babylonian Legal and Administrative Documents: Typology, Contents and Archives* (Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record 1; Münster, 2005).

8 Since our purpose is specifically to address Odell's comparative arguments, we shall not take up the details of her rereading of 43:7-9 as a call for abandonment of child sacrifice (Odell, "The Wall is No More," pp. 344-354). We remain convinced by the long-held consensus on these verses, found, for example in the following commentaries: W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapter 25-48*, trans. J. D. Martin (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), pp. 408-409; 415-418; 421; D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich., 1998), pp. 580-586; R. Kasher, *Ezekiel: Introduction and Commentary* (*Mikra Leyisra'el*; Tel-Aviv, 2004), Vol. 2, pp. 827-828 (Hebrew).

I Imagining Ezekiel's Temple: Methodological Observations

Near the beginning of her study, Odell endorses the position of scholars who "have increasingly drawn attention to the extent to which Ezekiel's temple exists as a verbal and imaginative construction that takes shape (or is 'built') only in readers' imaginations through the act of reading."[9] Because Ezekiel's temple is imagined, rather than materially real, Odell sees limited value in reading Ezekiel 40-48 in light of texts that describe royal construction of actual temples. While Odell's limitation is itself debatable,[10] it also overlooks the much broader range of Mesopotamian texts that describe temples. If, as modern readers, all we can do is imagine Ezekiel's temple, then we must bring all relevant evidence to bear on our own constructions, however imaginary these may be.

Moreover, an ancient audience (including the prophet) must have imagined its constructions along the lines of the temples with which it was most familiar. Therefore, seeking a Neo-Babylonian background for Ezekiel's temple makes sense because it is in Neo-Babylonian Mesopotamia that the prophet is said to have experienced his visions and where his audience is said to have lived.[11] Thus, if we are to speak of any external cultural reference points for what the prophet saw and what his audience would have understood, the most natural ones would be in Mesopotamia. Indeed, even Jacob Milgrom, who argues for parallels between Ezekiel's temple and the Greek Temple of Apollo at Delphi, acknowledges more proximate similarities to the Mesopotamian ziggurat.[12]

To be sure, Ezekiel's visionary temple belongs to his broader "program of restoration." This program draws on ancient Israelite traditions, which can be

9 Odell, "The Wall is No More," p. 341.

10 After all, Ezekiel presents what appears to be a building plan. See J. D. Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48* (HSM 10; Atlanta, 1976), pp. 45-46.

11 It is for this reason that we restrict our comparisons to temples from the Neo-Babylonian period. Limiting our investigation in this manner is not meant to suggest that Ezekiel's vision is informed by innovations that appear during the Neo-Babylonian period. The available evidence indicates that Mesopotamian temple architecture was remarkably conservative, so it is hard to identify specifically Neo-Babylonian features. As Castel concludes "Il n'y a pas de temple néo-babylonien . . . il est plus juste de parler des temples à l'époque néo-babylonienne que des temples néo-babyloniens à proprement parler" ("Temples à l'époque néo-babylonienne," p. 179).

12 J. Milgrom, "The Unique Features of Ezekiel's Sanctuary," in N. S. Fox, D. A. Glatt-Gilad, and M. J. Williams (eds.), *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay* (Winona Lake, Ind., 2009), pp. 300-301.

understood without reference to contemporary Mesopotamia.[13] Nevertheless, Ezekiel describes the temple itself in ways that diverge from descriptions of temples elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. These divergences, could, of course, be the product of the prophet's imagination (or, if we prefer, divine inspiration); we can never know exactly how Ezekiel arrived at his vision.[14] In pointing to the similarities between Neo-Babylonian temples and the description in the Book of Ezekiel, we propose that the former serve as a context for, rather than influence upon, the latter. Even if we can never know Ezekiel's sources, we can say that Neo-Babylonian temples offer us a meaningful context in which to situate some of the unique features of Ezekiel's description of the temple.

Our inquiry benefits from two recent scholarly trends, one in biblical studies and the other in Assyriology. In biblical studies, current scholarship has reaffirmed that Ezekiel fits squarely in a Babylonian cultural context.[15] Thus, to cite just one important example, Ezekiel uses even the basic Hebrew religious term *kebôd YHWH* in a manner that owes more to Babylonian (and particularly later Babylonian) *melammu* than to other biblical usages.[16] Assyriology, for its part, has seen studies that organize and mine the textual wealth of Neo-Babylonian archives, most of which belonged or pertained to temples, to construct detailed portraits of these remarkably well-documented religious institutions. The temples' written records complement the available architectural data, so that we can know not only about the temples' physical structures,

13 Levenson, *Ezekiel 40-48*; M. Greenberg, "The Design and Themes of Ezekiel's Program of Restoration," *Interpretation* (Richmond) 38 (1984), pp. 181-208; J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago, 1987), pp. 47-73. We thank Simeon Chavel for referring us to Smith.

14 It is even possible that Ezekiel's vision preserves memories of the Jerusalem temple itself. For examples of the use of information from Ezekiel to reconstruct the Solomonic temple, see V. Hurowitz, "Tenth Century BCE to 586 BCE: The House of the Lord (Beyt YHWH)," in O. Grabar and B. Z. Kedar (eds.), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade* (Jerusalem, 2009), pp. 20-22. Our investigation does not take a stand on the validity of this method. Instead, we focus on how Ezekiel's description stands out by emphasizing certain features in the temple, and interpret these differences against a Neo-Babylonian background.

15 For recent statements on this subject, see A. Winitzer, "Assyriology and Jewish Studies in Tel Aviv: Ezekiel Among the Babylonian *literati*," forthcoming in U. Gabbay and S. Secunda (eds.), *Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon: Scholarly Conversations between Jews, Iranians and Babylonians: Proceedings from the Conference Held at The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, May 23-25, 2011* (Tübingen), with additional references in notes 12, 13 and 23. We are grateful to Abraham Winitzer for sharing a pre-publication version of his work.

16 S. Z. Aster, *The Unbeatable Light*: Melammu *and Its Biblical Parallels* (AOAT 384; Münster, 2012), pp. 301-315.

whose remains were excavated in the previous centuries, but also about the day-to-day workings within them.[17]

For information about Neo-Babylonian temples, we will draw on three categories of available evidence: archeological remains, records of temple administration and descriptions of the temples in topographical texts.[18] These different sources of information allow us to draw different types of connections between the biblical and the extra-biblical materials. As a result, what these connections imply about their origins is different, too. Therefore, methodological thoroughness requires us to consider not only the parallels themselves, but also how they emerged. Specifically, we must consider how familiar Ezekiel and his audience would have to have been with Neo-Babylonian civilization for the parallels we identify to have been significant.

Based on the nature of the extra-biblical materials and the kinds of parallels they present with Ezekiel's description of his temple, we can separate the first two categories of evidence—the results of archeological investigations and studies of administrative records—from the third—the topographical texts. Parallels between the Neo-Babylonian temples and Ezekiel's temple based on archeology and administrative records are contextually significant, without implying that Ezekiel borrowed anything directly from his cultural milieu. Instead, these first two categories of evidence allow us to reconstruct the temples with which Ezekiel and his audience would have been familiar, simply because of where the Judean exiles went about their daily lives. Temples, by their sheer size and splendor dominated the Neo-Babylonian urban landscape.[19] While Ezekiel and his audience probably did not have access to the temple's administrative records themselves, what these records

17 The archeological data are conveniently surveyed and catalogued in E. Heinrich, *Die Tempel und Heiligtümer im Alten Mesopotamien: Typologie, Morphologie und Geschichte* (Denkmäler Antiker Architektur 14; Berlin, 1982), pp. 283-335, and illustrated in plates 378-426. The available Neo-Babylonian materials allow for particularly close correlation between archeology and the written texts. For examples, see A. R. George, "Babylon Revisited: Archaeology and Philology in Harness," *Antiquity* 67 (1993), pp. 734-746; idem., "The Bricks of E-sagil, *Iraq* 57 (1995), pp. 173-197, as well as the extensive commentaries to the metrological texts collected in George's monograph *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (OLA 40; Leuven, 1992), together with W. Allinger-Csollich, "Birs Nimrud II: 'Tieftempl'-'Hochtempel': Vergleichende Studien Borsippa-Babylon," *BaghM* 29 (1998), pp. 95-330 (especially the controversy with A. R. George's conclusions on pp. 211-252).

18 We borrow the label "topographical texts" from George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts.*

19 Heinrich, *Die Tempel und Heiligtümer*, pp. 284-285 (with city plan of Babylon on plate 382); C. Waerzeggers, *The Ezida Temple of Borsippa: Priesthood, Cult, Archives* (Achaemenid History 15; Leiden, 2010), pp. 14-15.

tell us about the temple organization complements Ezekiel's vision, and thus helps contextualize it.

Topographical texts, on the other hand, offer a closer parallel to the description of the temple at the end of the Book of Ezekiel.[20] These texts, many of which date to the Neo-Babylonian period, describe or list features of Babylonian temples. Some even provide measurements.[21] They are valuable not only as sources of information about the temples, but also as evidence for ancient conventions of temple description and, more generally, as a window into native perceptions of the temples. In terms of Ezekiel, these texts' focus on measurement and emphasis on certain architectural features overlap with the record of the prophet's vision. Moreover, just like Ezekiel's description anticipates rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, some of the Babylonian texts were probably composed in preparation for reconstructing temples, too.[22] As with the archeological and administrative evidence, however, the nature of these parallels is too general to suggest direct influence. It would be wrong to say that Ezekiel read these texts and organized his temple description by imitating them. Instead, these texts indicate that Ezekiel shares their priorities of perception. How this shared perception came to be must remain an open question. Still, this shared perception is valuable when we seek to contextualize Ezekiel's temple.

II Walls, Gates and Courtyards

The Book of Ezekiel's description of the visionary temple focuses heavily on the areas surrounding the temple. All told, Ezekiel devotes sixty-three verses to the walls, courtyards and gates as opposed to only twenty-six verses to his

20 M. J. Geller raises the possibility of interpreting Ezekiel in light of the Babylonian topographical texts, and even that Babylonian topographical texts could have influenced the prophet, only to reject these comparisons as "unlikely to yield any positive results" (review of A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, *AfO* 42/43 [1995/1996], pp. 249-250 n. 1). Geller bases his rejection on the grounds that the Babylonian texts describe real places, while Ezekiel depicts a "theoretical and visionary" temple. For a more nuanced view than Geller's, albeit without comparison to the Babylonian materials, see Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration*, pp. 45-46. Babylonian evidence provides useful context for either a theoretical or a practical plan. However, as we will suggest in our conclusions, the connections between Ezekiel's temple and real temples in Babylonia point to the practical side of the prophet's vision.

21 George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, Nos. 13-14 (pp. 109-129); Nos. 36-37 (pp. 215-221).

22 George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, pp. 215, 220-221.

description of the temple building itself.[23] Because the prophet's tour of the temple progresses from the outside inwards, the outside features are the first aspects described. Thus, the temple's surroundings, rather than the temple, take priority of placement within the description, in addition to comprising most of that description.[24] The very beginning of the tour illustrates this point, as well: the first thing Ezekiel sees is the wall that encloses the entire temple area (40:5). The prophet's description of the temple buildings also ends with the measurements of this perimeter wall (42:15-20), which leaves a lasting impression.[25] And, while the rest of the temple is described as a two-dimensional blueprint, only this outer wall is assigned a height, as if to further underscore its prominence.[26]

This wall, by its very existence, distinguishes Ezekiel's visionary temple from other temples described in the Hebrew Bible. The closest analogue is the Tabernacle's five-cubit high enclosure constructed of linen hung on posts, with entrance through an opening behind a screen on the east side (Exod. 27:9-16; 38:9-20). The wall in Ezekiel is not much higher, at six cubits, than the Tabernacle's outer enclosure. Nevertheless, it is considerably more massive, at six cubits wide, as opposed to the Tabernacle's enclosure, which was basically only as thick as the fine linen that formed it. Moreover, instead of the Tabernacle's one simple, screened entrance, there are three entrances, each through an elevated, multi-chambered gatehouse that extends fifty cubits into the temple complex (40:6-38). Of all the biblical temple descriptions, only Ezekiel's uses the phrase *ʾulām haššaʿar* to describe the vestibule within these gates as a noteworthy space.[27]

One could, of course, attribute these differences to the structural differences between the portable Tabernacle and the permanent temple. Here, comparison with the description of Solomon's temple is instructive. That description devotes only one verse to "the inner enclosure of three courses of hewn stones

23 We count the following verses as referring to gates and courtyards: 40:5-47 (43 verses); 42:1-3, 7-12, 15-20 (15 verses); 46:20-24 (5 verses). We count the following verses as describing the temple building itself: 40:48-49 (2 verses); 41:1-21 (21 verses); 42:4-6 (3 verses). The description in chapter 42 is particularly difficult, so the precise number of verses may vary. Overall, however, the statistical impression remains. See Greenberg, "Design and Themes," p. 193.

24 Compare the inward-outward arrangement in Exodus 25-27 and the apparently random arrangement in 1 Kgs 6-7. See Greenberg, "Design and Themes," p. 184.

25 See Kasher, *Ezekiel*, Vol. 2, p. 821 (Hebrew).

26 Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, p. 516.

27 40:7, 8, 9, 15. The same term applies to vestibules in the inner gates, too: 40:39, 40; 44:3; 46:2, 8.

and one course of cedar beams" (1 Kgs 6:36), which apparently refers to a wall that defined the limits of the sacred precinct. There is no description of gates or other ways of entering the space beyond this wall, even though there must have been some means of access.[28]

In addition to its size and much fuller description, Ezekiel's outer wall is also functionally distinct from the outer enclosure structures of both the Tabernacle and Solomon's temple. Ezekiel's wall plays a role beyond that of marking the temple's outer perimeter and defining the sacred precinct for those (like the prophet) approaching from the outside. For Ezekiel, the wall and its gates form part of a larger outer court complex that includes thirty chambers along the outer court's rim (40:17-18) and four "unroofed enclosures" in each corner of the outer court (46:21-24). According to biblical narratives that take place in the pre-exilic temple, similar chambers (*lĕšākôt*) existed there, too, even though they are not mentioned in the formal description in the Book of Kings.[29] Only Ezekiel includes these chambers as part of the plan.

The emphasis on walls, gates and courtyards continues beyond this outer complex of chambers and chambered gates. Ezekiel's sacred precinct is divided into two courtyards, one outer (40:17) and one inner (40:19).[30] The outer courtyard is mostly empty, but includes chambers for the consumption of sacrificial offerings and for storing priestly vestments (42:1-14). The inner courtyard, defined primarily by vestibules along its perimeter, is accessed by large gates, eight steps up from the outer courtyard, in line with the three great outer gates (40:23-44).[31] On the western end of this courtyard lies the temple itself, which has a thick wall (*qîr*) on three sides that separates it from the courtyards (41:5-15). The temple divides into three sections: a portico (40:48-49), a great hall (41:1-2), and the holy of holies (41:3-4) at the westernmost end. Chambered gates, each six cubits long, separate these sections, with the space between the portico and the great hall wider (10 cubits; 41:2) than the entrance between the great hall and the holy of holies (7 cubits; 41:3).

28 Hurowitz, "Tenth Century," p. 20.

29 2 Kgs 23:11; Jer 35:2, 4; 36:10. See Hurowitz, "Tenth Century," pp. 21-22. According to 2 Chr 31:11, Hezekiah is responsible for constructing chambers in the pre-exilic temple. These chambers are to be distinguished from the "side chambers" (*ṣĕlāʿôt*) that surround the temple itself both in 1 Kgs 6:5-8 and Ezek 41:5-9.

30 See Greenberg, "Design and Themes," p. 202.

31 The north inner gate contains additional chambers and cultic tables (40:35-44).

The physical approach from the portico to the holy of holies through a series of gates provides a useful point of departure for comparative investigation.[32] In her reconstruction of the cultic world of the Ezida temple at Borsippa based on archival texts, Caroline Waerzeggers describes a similar path that a priest would have to follow:

> First, in order to gain access to the inner precinct, he would enter a main gate of the temple (*bābu rabû*). After crossing a number of rooms, he would reach the private area of Nabû through the *bāb nērebi ša Nabû*, "the entrance gate of Nabû," which was situated right next to Nabû's sanctuary. Before reaching the cult statue itself, the priest finally cross[ed] the gate of the cella, the *bāb papāhi*.[33]

The precise locations of these three gates are not known, so it is impossible to correlate the textual evidence directly with the archeological remains.[34] In terms of the present inquiry, therefore, Waerzeggers's description may not correspond exactly to anything that Ezekiel describes. Nevertheless, the gradual approaches to the inner sancta are a mark of general similarity between a Babylonian temple, in this case the Ezida at Borsippa, and Ezekiel's visionary temple.

The three-part architectural plan of Ezekiel's temple itself resembles the plan of Solomon's temple, with its forecourt, large anteroom and smaller inner sanctum. Thus, both Ezekiel's temple and Solomon's partake of a common Near Eastern architectural vocabulary of temple building, attested most famously in Northern Syrian temples at 'Ain Dara and Tell Tayinat.[35] Here, it is worth noting that, even though the overall plans of the Neo-Babylonian

32 This general similarity is correctly observed by Odell, "The Wall is No More," p. 354. As already noted, we disagree with Odell's interpretation of this arrangement based on the assertion, attributed to Castel, that the courtyards in Neo-Babylonian temples "play a fundamental role in providing access to the temple" (Odell, "The Wall is No More," p. 354). This assertion is correct, as far as it goes; the courtyards did, indeed, provide access (as all courtyards do). The main point, however, observed even by Castel ("Temples à l'époque néo-babylonienne," p. 170), but ignored by Odell, is that the most sacred areas were, in fact, isolated, so that the courtyards provided only limited access. Similarly, the presence of "entrances and exits" in the general list of temple features in 43:11 has little bearing on the main motive of limited access (*contra* Odell, "The Wall is No More," p. 343).

33 Waerzeggers, *Ezida*, p. 13.

34 Waerzeggers, *Ezida*, p. 13 n. 64.

35 See Hurowitz, "Tenth Century," p. 25. Also see V. Hurowitz, "Solomon's Temple in Context," *BAR* 37 no. 2 (March/April 2011) pp. 46-58.

temples are different, the biblical temples do bring to mind the "ante-cella/cella" arrangement of space which is a common feature of the main sanctuaries within Neo-Babylonian temples. In order to reach the cella, location of the deity's statue and the most sacred part of the temple, one had to first pass through an ante-cella.[36] The plans of the Ezida at Borsippa and the larger temple of the "double temple" at Hursagkalama provide an even closer spatial analogue to the Israelite descriptions. These temples have two rooms, rather than just one, leading to the cella, analogous to Ezekiel's great hall and portico leading to the holy of holies.[37]

Apart from the arrangement of the temple, the situation of Ezekiel's temple within a warren of chambers and courtyards resembles, in general, the layout of Neo-Babylonian temples. In both the biblical description and the material remains from Mesopotamian, the courtyards are the widest spaces.[38] The placement of chambers around the periphery of the courtyards is a feature attested in Babylonian temples, as well. In Babylonian temples, some of these outer chambers were themselves areas of cultic activity devoted to deities other than the main one to whom the temple was dedicated.[39] Some topographical texts specifically list, and even measure, these various cultic areas.[40] In addition to these spaces (which would be out of place in Ezekiel's monotheistic vision), however, textual and archeological records attest to workshops and storerooms within the temple precinct.[41] These areas correspond most closely to the *lĕšākôt* that Ezekiel describes.

The prominent (and prominently described) wall that surrounds Ezekiel's entire temple complex finds its analogue in the outer wall that also surrounds

36 Castel, "Temples à l'époque néo-babylonienne," pp. 171-172.

37 Ezida: Heinrich, *Die Tempel und Heiligtümer*, p. 292; pl. 397 (rooms A_1, A_2 and A_3). Hursagkalama: Heinrich, *Die Tempel und Heiligtümer*, p. 283; pl. 380 (rooms 7, 4, and 1).

38 Castel, "Temples à l'époque néo-babylonienne," pp. 170-171; Waerzeggers, *Ezida*, p. 11.

39 For this phenomenon, in general, and the difficulties of identifying these areas within archeological remains, see, for example, George, "Bricks of E-Sagil," pp. 174-175; Allinger-Csollich, "Birs Nimrud II," p. 212; P.-A. Beaulieu, *The Pantheon of Uruk During the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Cuneiform Monographs 23; Leiden, 2003), pp. 29-34; Waerzeggers, *Ezida*, p. 11.

40 Lists of shrines within temples include George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, Nos. 21 (pp. 185-191) and 25 (pp. 198-201). Texts with measurements of these shrines include George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, Nos. 13 (pp. 114-118); 14 (pp. 126-129); and 37 (pp. 220-221).

41 Waerzeggers, *Ezida*, pp. 11-13. For references to similar locations in other temples, see CAD *šutummu* ($Š_3$, pp. 413-414). For discussion of archeological remains, see Heinrich, *Die Tempel und Heiligtümer*, pp. 287 (Esagil), 291 (Ezida) and 297 (Ur temple complex).

many Neo-Babylonian temple complexes.[42] One particularly well documented feature of this outer wall was the brick abutted reinforcement, known as the *kisû*.[43] Babylonian kings, including the Neo-Babylonian kings Nebuchadnezzar II, Neriglissar and Nabonidus, specifically mention this feature as part of their temple building projects.[44] One topographical text begins with the measurements of no less than nine "thicknesses of wall" (*kuburrê*) demarcating eight distinct spaces that one passes through from one end of the temple that this text describes to the other.[45] According to this text, at least, walls are a (if not the) primary aspect of the temple; proper description of the temple begins with them.[46]

Neo-Babylonian evidence also complements Ezekiel's description of the gates that provide access to and within the temple complex. Archeological reconstructions of Neo-Babylonian temples show monumental gates marking the entrances.[47] Topographical texts indicate that these gates were themselves significant loci: several specifically list and explain the names of the gates as a group, rather than as components subordinate to broader descriptions of the temple.[48] One text from Sippar details the measurements of various gates of the Ebabbar,[49] and furnishes a particularly close point of comparison with Ezekiel's description of the gates with their measurements. A second specific point of comparison pertains to Ezekiel's mention of a vestibule

42 For the wall as a general feature of Neo-Babylonian temples, see Heinrich, *Die Tempel und Heiligtümer*, p. 294; Castel, "Temples à l'époque néo-babylonienne," p. 174; and Allinger-Csollich, "Birs Nimrud II," pp. 146-153. For specific examples, see discussions in Heinrich, *Die Tempel und Heiligtümer*, pp. 284 (Babylon), 291 (Borsippa), 296 (Ur) and references to the plans.

43 Castel, "Temples à l'époque néo-babylonienne," p. 174; Allinger-Csollich, "Birs Nimrud II," pp. 146-153.

44 See references in CAD *kisû* (K, pp. 429-430).

45 George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, No. 14, lines 1-26 (pp. 126-127), with comments on pp. 120-125 and pp. 435-438. Relating this text to archeological facts on the ground poses significant difficulties, even regarding which temple the text describes. See George's comments and the discussion in Allinger-Csollich, "Birs Nimrud II," pp. 235-252.

46 We also observe that this text (George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, No. 14) describes the temple in two dimensions, without any mention of height. Here, then, is a Babylonian contextual parallel to the overwhelming (though not total) flatness of Ezekiel's description.

47 See Heinrich, *Die Tempel und Heiligtümer*, plates 387, 392, 399, 402, 407, 408, and 422a-b.

48 George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, p. 91. The gate lists include: George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, Nos. 6-8 (pp. 92-98; of Esagil) and the reverse of No. 31 (pp. 210-211; of Eanna). For other fragmentary gate lists, see George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, p. 91.

49 George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, No. 36 (pp. 215-217).

(*ʾulām haššaʿar*) within the gate complexes. Several Babylonian texts refer to *ašrukkatu*-chambers associated with gates.[50] For example, two of the nine "thicknesses of wall" measured in the text mentioned above (with reference to the walls) belong to the *ašrukkatu*-chambers of the gates called Ka-ude-babbara and Ka-Lamma-rabi.[51]

Thus far, we have pointed out several specific similarities between Ezekiel's temple, and how he describes it, and Babylonian temples, and the texts that describe them. These structural similarities, however, do not shed much light on parallel ideas about the temple. For the purposes of interpretation, we must, instead, consider the temples' overall plans. When we turn from the structural specifics to the general layout, we observe that Ezekiel's temple and Babylonian temples share a similar arrangement of space. We have already noted the graduated approach through a series of gates. In addition, in both Ezekiel's temple and its Babylonian analogues, the various courtyards are arranged to reflect an increase in sanctity as one approaches the sacred core. Gates mark the passage between these different levels.[52] In other words, the specific structural parallels we have observed between the temples—the walls, the gates, the courtyards—are significant because, in both cultures, these structures meaningfully contribute to the general organization of the temple precincts. All of them define and delimit increasing zones of sanctity.

III Hierarchy of Personnel

While architecture provides a physical marker of the different levels of sanctity, this zonal organization is mainly manifest in the distinctions between which humans could enter the different zones. In Ezekiel's vision, the general population has access only to the outer court (44:19). They remain confined to this space even when, on festivals, they must traverse the entire outer courtyard (46:9) in order to bow at the entrance to the eastern gatehouse of the inner courtyard (46:3).[53] All they are allowed is this passing glimpse into the more sacred realm of the inner courtyard. Levites may perform certain functions,

50 George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, p. 436.

51 George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, No. 14: 5-6, 13 (pp. 14-15).

52 For the Babylonian material, see C. Waerzeggers, "The Pious King: Royal Patronage of Temples," in E. Robson and K. Radner (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Cultures* (Oxford, 2011), p. 735.

53 As opposed to Odell ("The Wall is No More," p. 343), we stress the restrictions upon the people in these verses.

but are excluded from the most sacred temple precincts (44:10-14). Only the Zadokite priests can enter the inner courtyard (44:15-17); their privileged access allows them to perform the cultic actions that lead to God's acceptance of the populace at large (43:19-27).[54] In Babylonian temples, the prebendary system of owning "shares" (*iṣqū*) in the cult created a similar division of priestly labor, with the highest ranking priests holding the most prestigious prebends and having the closest contact with the deities themselves.[55]

Terminology underscores the conceptual proximity between the priestly systems in Ezekiel and the Babylonian sources. Terms for entering or approaching reflect the central focus on space, specifically who may enter which spaces. The language of Ezekiel's innovative distinction between the Levites and the Zadokite priests (44:11-16) emphasizes this point:

> [The Levites] shall be servitors in My Sanctuary, appointed over the Temple gates, and performing the chores of My Temple; they shall slaughter the burnt offerings and the sacrifices for the people . . . They shall not approach (*lō yiggĕšû*) Me to serve Me as priests, to come near (*lāgešet*) any of My sacred offerings, the most holy things . . . I will make them watchmen of the Temple, to perform all its chores, everything that need to be done in it. But the levitical priests descended from Zadok . . . they shall approach Me (*yiggĕšû*) to minister to Me; they shall stand before Me to offer Me fat and blood—declares the Lord God. They alone may enter (*yābōʿû*) My Sanctuary and they alone shall approach (*yiqrĕbû*) My table to minister to Me; and they shall keep my charge.

Babylonian prebendary nomenclature preserves a similar distinction between cultic functionaries who may approach the deity and enter the sanctuary and those who may not. The highest ranks of priests, who owned the most prestigious prebends, were known as "temple enterers" (*ērib bīti*). This group fulfilled central functions, and by dint of its rank could enter the innermost parts of

54 Neither these verses nor 20:12 indicate that the general population could perform sacrificial actions in the temple (compare Odell, "The Wall is No More, p. 343). Even the prince, who has somewhat more access, relies on them to offer sacrifices (46:2). On the role of the priests in Ezekiel's vision, see T. Ganzel, "The Status of Functionaries in the Future Temple of Ezekiel," *Shnaton* 19 (2009), pp. 21-23 (Hebrew).

55 Waerzeggers, "The Pious King," pp. 735-737; Jursa, *Neo-Babylonian Legal and Administrative Documents*, pp. 31-35.

the temple.[56] Those who prepared the gods' foods, mainly the brewers, bakers and butchers, occupied a separate, slightly lower rank of functionaries.[57] In this second group we see an analogue to Ezekiel's Levites, whose activities are limited to slaughtering, but not actually presenting, the burnt offerings.

As is the case with the temple's basic structure, Ezekiel's distinguishing between categories of people who may or may not approach the deity, and even basing this distinction on a particular lineage, is hardly unique.[58] Nevertheless, Ezekiel's elevation of the Zadokites stands out as one of his greatest innovations, so it invites consideration against Ezekiel's particular context. Moreover, this specific innovation serves as one of the correctives to previous cultic wrongdoings. According to Ezekiel, God has selected the Zadokites precisely because they "maintained the service of My sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from Me" (44:15). The Zadokites' reward is also God's own way of ensuring that proper personnel will run His temple in the future. Babylonian sources show similar motivations for proper standards within the priesthood, particularly in the thorough investigations carried out as part of the ritual induction of higher priestly ranks. This process included investigation of purity of body, descent and behavior, in which we may see further analogues to Ezekiel's insistence on Zadokite lineage (descent) and his basing of this insistence on the Zadokites' upstanding behavior, i.e., their fidelity to proper service (44:15).[59]

IV Conclusions: Similarities of Purpose

Ezekiel's choice of the Zadokites for their fidelity to proper cultic practices illustrates a broader motive of concern for preserving the temple's sanctity.

56 Waerzeggers, "The Pious King," p. 735 and eadem, *Ezida*, p. 46, with additional references in n. 247.

57 See Waerzeggers, *Ezida*, pp. 47-48 with references to the same ranking in other temples in n. 252. Note that both groups underwent the same ritual induction by shaving, and were thus separate from other groups, like the minor craftsmen, who did not (Waerzeggers, *Ezida*, pp. 49-56).

58 Compare legislation regarding the Tabernacle's priesthood, for example, in Num 17:5; 18:4-7.

59 Waerzeggers, *Ezida*, pp. 52-53. For more in-depth study of the initiation process see C. Waerzeggers and M. Jursa, "On the Initiation of Babylonian Priests," *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 14 (2008), pp. 1-36. Waerzeggers and Jursa make passing comparisons with the biblical materials without specifically referring to Ezekiel.

This same motive explains his emphases on walls, gates and courtyards. The explicit purpose of the perimeter wall is "to separate the consecrated from the unconsecrated" (42:20). Beyond this wall, Ezekiel's temple plan "introduces rigor into the separation and gradation of areas in the sanctuary precincts."[60] The people are confined to the outer courtyard, designed to be large enough to accommodate them, but, at the same time, seal their access to the interior, more sacred spaces. God's seat is effectively isolated, in order to properly preserve its sanctity.

The architectural arrangement of Neo-Babylonian temples and the hierarchy of access within the temples achieve the same end. Interpreters of the archeological remains observe the architectural isolation of the deities' cellas, the most sacred areas, from the larger temple precinct.[61] Study of archival records fleshes out this interpretation of the built space beyond what can be seen archeologically or architecturally. Waerzeggers shows that in the Ezida at Borsippa, the main courtyard (*kisallu*)

> established an invisible line of division in the organization of space . . . as this was the area where the distinction between the initiated and uninitiated crystallized. Only those who were deemed qualified were allowed to enter the courtyard to participate in its busy ritual program.[62]

These observable arrangements express the same concern for separating the sacred from the profane, which Ezekiel 42:20 makes explicit. Both the biblical and the Babylonian temples are designed to maintain that separation.

We arrive, then, at one of the main benefits of bringing information about Neo-Babylonian temples to bear on Ezekiel's vision. The prophet describes a temple whose architecture and organization resemble those of temples contemporary with and geographically most proximate to the prophet's stated time and place. The very description in the Book of Ezekiel, with its emphasis on gates, walls and courtyards, shows a perception of the temple quite similar to that observed in Babylonian topographical texts. Still more significant than the surface similarities, however, are the demonstrable ideological commonalities, reflected in the arrangement of space and the deployment of personnel within that space. Ezekiel explicitly expresses a concern with erecting barriers between humans and deities in order to preserve sanctity. Studies of

60 Greenberg, "Design and Themes," p. 203.

61 Castel, "Temples à l'époque néo-babylonienne," p. 171; Heinrich, *Die Tempel und Heiligtümer*, pp. 294-295.

62 Waerzeggers, *Ezida*, p. 11. Also see Waerzeggers and Jursa, "Initiation," pp. 15-17.

the full range of available records show that Neo-Babylonian temples shared this concern.

We cannot say with any certainty that Ezekiel borrowed these features from his environment. We may say, however, that Ezekiel and his audience might have understood the plan for the rebuilt temple by looking to their surroundings. They had, in short, a working model not too far from their homes in exile.