

Temple Building, a Task for Gods and Kings

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In his book on Ugaritic mythology in 1948 the late Julian Obermann inquired into the Ugaritic building saga and found that this narrative led him into a study of the saga's basic motifs⁽¹⁾. In his "Summary and out-look" he points to what he calls "the most remarkable analogy" in the O.T., Ex. 25 ff., I Kings 6 ff., II Chron. 2 ff., Ezekiel 40 ff.⁽²⁾.

In a very remarkable way Obermann has here connected mythological temple building with temple building as it was actually recorded in history. That was in good accordance with his idea, that mythological events as they were narrated in the ancient myths, just reflected historical events. There is no doubt a connection between myth and life of man, but it seems more likely that that connection is found in cultic life, more than in direct history.

In the case of the temple building there is also another connection, which may have escaped the scrutinizing eye of Obermann. A too sharp focusing on the O.T. analogy may have hindered him in seeing it. In the ancient Middle eastern world temple building was the task and the privilege of victorious gods and kings. In this case the connection between the worlds of gods and men was as direct as possible, as the king was seen not only as a representative of the gods (or: a certain god), but also as a man of sacral character and, very often, divine origine.

How closely bound together the heavenly and the earthly temples could be, is clearly seen in *Enuma elish*, in tabl. VI, where it is told about the creation of man and the building of the temple *Esa-gila* for the victorious *Marduk*⁽³⁾. The *Anunnaki* said to *Marduk*, their

(1) Julian Obermann, *Ugaritic Mythology*, New Haven 1948, p. XXXII.

(2) Pp. 86-87.

(3) Translation see e.g. E. A. Speiser in *ANET*, ed. Pritchard, Princeton 1950, pp. 68 ff.

lord: Let us build a shrine! (Lines 45 ff.). When Marduk heard this, "his features glowed brightly, like the day", and he said: "Let its brickwork be fashioned like that of lofty Babylon, whose building you have requested" (L. 55 ff.). The great temple Esagila was erected, with a high stagetower, and an abode for Marduk, Enlil and Ea was set up by the gods. At a great banquet Marduk told the gods, "his fathers": "This is Babylon, the place which you love!" (L. 70 ff.). The gods had their banquet and performed their rites in Esagila, then "fixed the norms and all their portents" (L. 75 ff.).

How this temple building among the gods had its counterpart among men, can be seen from the Gudea cylinders A and B ⁽¹⁾. The *ensi* of Lagash (ca. 2000 B.C.) has told in detail what happened to him when he built the new temple for Ningirsu.

It was a lack of the usual inundation which indicated to Gudea that the Lord Ningirsu wanted a temple in Lagash. The *ensi* had a dream at midnight (A:I:27), but the meaning of this dream was not quite clear to him. He had to go to the sanctuary of the goddess Gatumdu to have his dream interpreted (A:II:26 ff.). He was informed that Ningirsu commanded him to build a temple (A:V:17). He was also ordered to build a finely adored chariot for the great god and bring it to him. For two days Gudea was shut in "as a labourer" in the sanctuary of Eninnu, and the visions were repeated (A:VIII:1 ff.). Gudea received detailed instructions about how the temple should be built. The connection between the temple and the heavenly powers behind was announced: "At Eninnu, my royal house, the faithful shepherd Gudea, when he puts his right hand to it, will cry to heaven for wind and water; from heaven an abundance shall come to thee; the abundance shall triple the land" (A:XI:4-9).

The *ensi* purified his city and offered prayers, so he levied taxes in his country for the building. "Into the cedar mountains which no one had entered Gudea, the high priest of Ningirsu made a road. Their cedars with great axes he cut" (A:XV:1 ff.). The *ensi* took part in the building himself, lifted a holy carrying-basket and put clay in a brick-mould, he formed a brick and brought it to the temple (A:XVIII:24 ff.) "The building of the temple of his king, the completion of Eninnu from earth to heaven, — on this he fixed his eye" (A:

⁽¹⁾ Text and translation see e.g. Barton, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sumer and Akkad*, New Haven 1929, pp. 204-255. (Both text and translation need some revision).

XX:9-11). He finished his task and blessed the temple. "On account of the great name which he had made for himself he was received among the gods into their assembly. The faithful shepherd, Gudea, was very wise, he accomplished great things" (A: XXV:20-23).

Gudea was no god himself, but he was received among the gods, in their great assembly, as an indication that, like Gilgamesh, he had part in the heavenly world, i.e. he was a divine king. He was a temple builder of his "king", Ningirsu, and he was his high priest (B:II:12), who offered prayers and brought gifts for "the Lord of Eninnu" (B:I:20, II:12f.).

Ningirsu himself entered the temple (B:V:1ff.), with the goddess Ba-u on his left side (V:10). "Coming to his city, his house of Girsu, he brought a gift; he established there the throne of destiny; he placed the sceptre in his (the *ensi's*) hands unto distant days; he raised Gudea, the shepherd of Ningirsu, to heaven with a beautiful diadem on his head" (B:VI:14-18).

Gudea, the temple builder, was here placed among the gods. A prolonged life was promised him (B:XXIV:8) and he was characterized as a son of the chthonic god Ningizzida, [Gù]-de-a [du]mu 'Nin-giz-zi-da-ka, B:XXIV:7. This designation points him out as one who had a close connection with the world of the gods. Because he was in this position, as a divine king, he was committed to build the temple of the great god Ningirsu. His inscriptions give a vivid picture of the ideology behind the temple building, and they are the best examples which can be found on Sumerian soil.

When we turn our attention to the Ras Shamra texts, we find that the texts so far edited tell less than little about the royal temple builders. The mythological texts give, however, ample information about the temple building of the gods. It is a motif which seems to play a great rôle in the Ugaritic texts.

In the very mutilated fragment III ABC "El at the Sources of the Floods" instructs his master-builder Kothar-wa-khasis "to build a house for Prince Yam, to erect a palace for Judge Nahar". In this case Prince Yam was the young victorious god who had earned himself the right to get a new temple⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Texts: Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Manual* (Analecta Orientalia 35), Rome 1955. Translation see e.g. H. L. Ginsberg in *J.N.E.T.*, ed. Pritchard, 1950, pp. 129 ff. (and later edition). See also G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Mythos and Legends* (Old Testament Studies, No. 3), Edinburgh 1956.

In a mood of audacity he challenged Aliyan Ba'al, the leading young god. El and the assembly of gods were on the point of delivering Ba'al into the hands of Zebul Yam, but Ba'al himself preferred to struggle (III AB B-A). With the help of two clubs made by Kothar-wa-khasis he defeated Yam (III AB A.). Now it was Ba'al's turn to cry to his father El: "Look, no house has Ba'al like the gods" (II AB, lines 5ff.). The long and well preserved text II AB tells how Ba'al asked El's permission to build a temple and how this temple was actually built. With the necessary assistance of El's consort, the goddess Asherah, Ba'al achieved his permission and Kothar-wa-khasis started the building. The house was built on the summit of Zaphon, "the mountains brought much silver, the hills a treasure of gold", and in addition pure lapis lazuli was used (II AB V). Trees from Lebanon, cedars from Sirion, were brought to the place. When the palace was finished Ba'al slaughtered small cattle, bulls, rams, calves and lambs and summoned all the gods to his new house (II AB VI) and a great banquet took place.

In Israel the temple building of king Solomon has a series of interesting features, which may give a clearer picture when we see them in the light of the temple buildings mentioned above. I Kings III-IX.

The story of king Solomon's temple building commences with the King's visit to "the great high place" of Gibeon to offer there, a visit which has obviously caused the last narrator some trouble, but probably was quite natural to the original narrator. Solomon was used to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of Gibeon, and in the night, when he slept at the place, Yahweh appeared to him and spoke to him (III:5). So far the narrative is in full accordance with what is told about Gudea, the *ensi* of Lagash. But on this point the story takes another turn in the case of Solomon, who asked Yahweh to give him an understanding mind to govern his people (III:9). It is the wisdom theme which is here brought in on this important occasion and which has probably driven other themes, originally connected with the dream, aside.

It is told that Solomon awoke from his dream and returned to Jerusalem (III:15). The wisdom theme is developed further in ch. III, in the narrative of the two harlots, and in vv. 29-34 in ch. IV. But when the importance of this theme has been underlined in this way the narrator suddenly turns to the building of a great temple for Yahweh in Jerusalem (V:1ff.). King Solomon announces his decision

to build the temple which his father David had been prevented by circumstances from erecting (V:1-5). Why he made this decision just at this time and who ordered him to begin the enormous task is not told. Here something is lacking in the narrative as it is now found. But as indicated above the building order may lie hidden in the narrative about Solomon's visit to the high place in Gibeon. That narrative contains the feature which we may expect to find. The continuation in ch. V indicates, through its parallels with other narratives mentioned above, that we are entitled to search for a beginning of the narrative. No far-reaching search is necessary in this case. The analogy from Gudea gives a clue at once: the beginning must be found in ch. III:4-15. This passage has got an interpretation which may not be in accordance with the original one. In addition to the wisdom theme, brought in here, ch. IV brings a list of Solomon's household and the provisions which were brought to him. Both the wisdom theme and the list of the household can easily be subtracted as independent passages. This seems to indicate that Solomon's visit to Gibeon and his announcement of his intention were originally connected and have been divided by an author who wanted to bring in the wisdom theme.

Solomon announced that the temple would be built because there was peace in his realm and no threat from foreign adversaries (V:4f.). Expressed in another language this means that the omens for temple building were favourable. In his message to King Hiram of Tyre Solomon ordered "cedars of Lebanon" to be cut for his use, and it was expressly said "That there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians" (V:6). Hiram supplied Solomon with all the timber of cedar and cypress that he desired (V:10). Thousands of men were levied to forced labour, and great stones were quarried out to be foundation stones of the temple (V:13-18). The cedar within the house was carved and Solomon overlaid the inside of it with pure gold (VI:18-22). The gold was brought from the gold mines in Ophir (IX:26-28).

When Solomon had finished the temple he assembled the elders of Israel and the heads of the tribes so that they could bring the ark of the covenant to the new house (VIII:1-11). The king sacrificed and offered a long prayer to Yahweh (VIII:12-53). After more sacrifices the king dedicated the house to Yahweh and held a great feast for the people, that lasted eight days (VIII:62-66).

The narrator tells that the word of Yahweh came to Solomon during the building of the house (VI:11), but more important is the information given in IX:1 f. "When Solomon had finished building the house of Yahweh and the king's house and all that Solomon desired to build, Yahweh appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon". In the following oracle Yahweh gives his final instructions about the house erected in his honour (IX: 3-9). Here we also find the promises to the temple builder which we should be allowed to expect, if we may trust the analogies. King Solomon was not taken up into the rank of gods, but Yahweh promised him "to establish his royal throne over Israel for ever" (IX:5), a declaration which comes very close to that given to Gudea. In accordance with the prevailing view among dominating circles in Judah, especially the Deuteronomists, there are also threats, in case the king and his followers did not adhere to the statutes of Yahweh (IX:6-9). These threats may be of ancient origin.

It is interesting to note that the narrator in ch. IX connects Solomon's visit to Gibeon with the building of the temple and also that the appearances of Yahweh at Gibeon and in the new temple are linked together as the first and second appearance. This indicates that the narrator may have known a connection between I Kings III and V-IX which is no longer obvious in the text, but the existence of which is indicated above. The connection can be easier discerned in II Chron. I-II, where the events in Gibeon and Jerusalem are following each other only with brief passages between.

The temple building of Moses, when he had the Tabernacle erected is also narrated along parallel lines. This is not astonishing, as Moses is "to a great extent depicted in royal categories" (1). The building of the Tabernacle is the dominating motif in Ex XXIV:12-XL. Moses was called up to Yahweh on the mountain (Ex XXIV:12 ff.) and received orders about the building of the Tabernacle. All details were dictated to him and the work accomplished in accordance with the instructions. The people brought gold, silver, bronze, blue, purple and scarlet stuff, acacia wood and other items (Ex XXXV:21-29). In Ex XL:18 ff. Moses is depicted as temple builder personally as was also Gudea. The chapter ends with a description of how Yahweh filled the Tabernacle, vv. 34 ff.

(1) See e.g. Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*, Uppsala 1943, pp. 174 f.

The usual scheme is discernible also in Ezechiel XL-XLVIII. "In the visions of God" *bamar'ot 'lohim*, the prophet was brought into the land of Israel, to a "very high mountain". A man, whose appearance was "like bronze", showed him a structure like a city and explained it to him, XL: 1-4. Instructions about how the temple should be built, were given in details, and also for the service in the temple. There are interesting details in the description, well worth discussing, but that will demand too much space in this connection.

We may make an attempt to sum up some common features indicated above. There are apparently two kinds of temple building narratives: one mythological (as found in *Enuma elish* and *Ras Shamra* texts) and one "historical" (*Gudea*, *Solomon*, *Moses*). But as the examples of *Enuma elish* and *Gudea* show the division between the two kinds is not very sharp. They seem to represent different aspects of the same phenomenon.

With its main weight on the gods a narrative about temple building usually contains the following elements: 1. A victorious god after battle; 2. He wants to have his own temple; 3. Permission asked from the leading god; 4. Master builder set to work; 5. Cedars from Lebanon, building-stones; gold, silver etc. procured for the task; 6. The temple finished according to plan; 7. Offerings and dedication, fixing of norms; 8. A great banquet for the gods.

In the cases where a king is the actual temple builder the following elements are most often found: 1. Some indication that a temple has to be built; 2. The king visits a temple over night; 3. A god tells him what to do, indicates plans; 4. The king announces his intention to build a temple; 5. Master builder is engaged, cedars from Lebanon, building-stones, gold, silver etc. procured for the task; 6. The temple finished according to plan; 7. Offerings and dedication, fixing of norms; 8. Assembly of the people; 9. The god comes to his new house; 10. The king is blessed and promised everlasting domination.

In some cases, as e.g. that of *Gudea*, the king was promoted to the rank of the gods. In Israel that was impossible, but the privileged position of the king was underlined, a position that was dependent on his attitude towards the God of Israel, *Yahweh*. As the chosen one of *Yahweh* he was entrusted with the task of building his temple.
