

On the Windows in Solomon's and Ezekiel's Temples and Other Buildings

Tentative notes, PS, 2023

1. Where were the windows? – *A little synopsis*

Regarding Solomon's Temple, we read in 1Kings 6:4 (NRSV):

For the house he made windows with recessed frames.

It is not stated explicitly that *both* the Holy Place *and* the Most Holy Place had windows. But this very fact could speak for the assumption that both did.

About their position, the *UBS Handbook* explains:

The exact location of the windows is not stated. Since the Temple itself was about 15 meters (45 feet) high, and the three-storied annex built around the outside of the Temple was about 7.5 meters (22.5 feet) high, the windows were probably cut into the wall above the annex.

1Kings 7:4-5 says about the "House of the Forest of Lebanon" (NASB):

⁴ *There were artistic window frames in three rows, and window was opposite window at three intervals.* ⁵ *And all the doorways and doorposts had squared artistic frames, and window was opposite window at three intervals.*

This passage is not discussed in detail here.

In Ezekiel 40–48, the word חַלּוֹן *hallôn* 'window' occurs in the description of the eastern gatehouse in 40:16, which is the most complete description.

Then again in vv. 22, 25, 29, 33, 36 – all referring back to what was said before.

E.g. v. 25 NASB: "The gate and its porch[es?] had windows all around"

Further, regarding the Temple's vestibule similarly in 41:16 (somewhat unclear), and v. 26.

40:16 NRSV

The recesses and their pilasters [! – i.e., the dividing walls] had windows, with shutters on the inside of the gateway all around, and the vestibules also had windows on the inside all around; and on the pilasters were palm trees.

NASB (similar ESV) interprets the Heb. לָאֵל *el* 'to' as follows:

And there were shuttered windows looking toward the guardrooms, and toward their side pillars within the gate all around, and likewise for the porches. And there were windows all around inside; and on each side pillar were palm tree decorations.

Perhaps that avoids some question about why they were in the dividing walls. But Zimmerli (BKAT) and Allen (WBC, note 16b) do not take it that way. However, Allen also thinks the "and to the jambs" crept in by error (note 16c).

The *UBS Handbook* interprets the windows as niches, but we said one problem with that is that the word elsewhere means window. I suppose they argue they are "shut" windows ... That way the issue does not arise.

Perhaps there were windows, after all, both to the outside and in the partitioning walls (Block's no. 7 & 8, and perhaps 9). There is also the repeated "all around" ...

2. What did the windows look like?

Regarding the composition of the windows, we find the following phrases:

Solomon's Temple	Eastern gatehouse of Ezekiel's Temple court	Vestibule of Ezekiel's Temple proper (and also in the outer and inner sanctuary?)	
1Kings 6:4	Ezek. 40:16	Ezek. 41:16	Ezek. 41:26
חַלּוֹנֵי שְׁקָפִים אֲשֶׁמֹות	חַלּוֹנוֹת אֲשֶׁמֹות	חַלּוֹנֵים הָאֲשֶׁמֹות ...	חַלּוֹנֵים אֲשֶׁמֹות
= qal pass. ptc. of אָסַם 'stop up / close'.			
		חַלּוֹנוֹת מְכֻסּוֹת	
		= pu. ptc. of כָּסָה 'cover / conceal'	
windows of closed frames	closed windows	closed windows... covered windows	closed windows
Whether שְׁקָפִים really means 'frame' is uncertain; see HALOT.			

The UBS *Handbook* on 1Ki 6:4 explains the issue very well:

There are basically two ways in which the Hebrew rendered **windows with recessed frames** has been interpreted: (1) these windows (or, "openings") were cut into the walls at angles so that they were narrower on the outside of the wall than they were on the inside (CEV, GNT) or vice versa (REB); or (2) these windows had latticework or trellises covering the openings (NJB, NAB, NJPSV; MFT says "windows with gratings"). The trellises may have been of wood (so Maredsous) or of metal. It is possible that both (1) and (2) are included in the meaning, as in NAB and AB ("splayed and latticed").

The fact that Ezek. 40:16 and 41:26 speak of "closed windows" only – without mentioning the frames that are spoken of in 1Kings 6:4 – **suggests that windows with latticework are more likely than windows with narrowing openings.**

(The "covering" of the windows in Ezek. 41:16 could be taken as synonymous with "closed windows" (i.e., windows with latticework), or it could be taken as an additional mechanism (shutters?) or device (hangings?) that would shut up even the latticework. What could speak against such complete shutting is that they might sit up high, above the annex, and thus out of reach for the priests to shut and open them at will. – As to hangings, it is questionable whether they would be worthwhile mentioning.)

However, the UBS *Handbook* on Ezek. 40:16 follows Block (NICOT, 1998). He says:

But the use of a semantic cognate in the Temple Scroll may point in another direction. In the context of the description of the building in which the altar utensils were to be stored, the phrase *hlwnym pnymh 'šwmym*, "blocked windows in their inner faces" (35:11), identifies niches (viz., blocked windows) in which vessels were placed.⁴³ This interpretation is confirmed in 30:12, according to which the niches were to be two cubits wide by four cubits high by two cubits deep (cf. Ezek. 35:12). If one

assumes that [p 523] the walls of the building were three cubits thick like the building housing the laver (33:11), this would leave a one-foot wall behind the niche. Since these niches all had doors, they functioned as cupboards for storing the utensils.⁴⁴ Accordingly, Ezekiel's *hallônôt* 'āṭumôt must also have been niches that broke up the flat surfaces of the walls. Concerning their function one may only speculate. Perhaps they held the instruments used by the temple guards to maintain order in the sacred area.

⁴³ Yadin (*Temple Scroll*, 2:142) translates “niches in their inner faces.”

⁴⁴ For a full discussion of the “house of utensils” see Yadin, *Temple Scroll*, 1:224–27. This interpretation is accepted by J. Maier, “Die Hofanlagen im Tempel-Entwurf des Ezechiel im Licht der ‘Tempelrolle’ von Qumran,” in *Prophecy*, Fest. G. Fohrer, ed. J. A. Emerton, BZAW 150 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), p. 62; and Fuhs, *Ezechiel 25–48*, p. 229.

Going by the references Block gives for the Temple scroll, I was not able to verify the text. They do not seem to correspond to the two editions that I could consult. But granted the texts are represented correctly, there remain questions about his hypothesis.

One is, if the word חַלּוֹן *hallôn* is taken to denote niches, and this is applied to all occurrences, then Ezekiel's description of the gatehouses and the Temple contain **no real windows** at all. Admittedly, even Ezekiel's elaborate report lacks a lot of details. Nevertheless, following the account of Solomon's Temple, we would expect the mention of windows.

The question could be put differently as well: **If “niches” is the right interpretation, one would have to apply this to Solomon's Temple as well. But in 1Kings 6:4, everybody takes חַלּוֹן *hallôn* as referring to windows, and niches would be a surprising element at that point of the report.**

Also, while Block's reasoning for the purpose of “niches” makes sense for the guard-chambers, their purpose is a little less obvious when they are found in the Temple's vestibule (41:26; cf. Block p. 560).

Translation:

חַלּוֹנִים אֲשֶׁמֹת (and its variations) should be translated as **“latticed windows”**.

הַחֲלֹנוֹת מְכֻסּוֹת, if taken as a synonymous expression to the above, it can be translated with a synonymous phrase, like **“windows with trellises”**, or the former word could be repeated, or the phrase could be dropped as redundant. – If it is taken to refer to shutters or hangings (less likely), that needs translating as “shuttered windows” or **“windows with shutters”**, or something like “cover-able windows / windows with coverings”.