



*The Fight Between Carnival
and Lent*, 1567
Oil on oak, with a figure on left in light
Tübingen, Kunsthistorisches Museum,
Königsplatz



Hansmann Cook
*View of Jerusalem, the
 Temple, 1634-35 (see fig. 10, 11, 12)*
 Foundation, Edification,
 Disempowerment

David Ross
*The Tower of Babel (Roman version,
 see "The Tower of Babel," 1988,
 see fig. 22, 23)*

own delusions of grandeur. The building – obviously inspired by the Colosseum in Rome – was also associated with the papacy. If we agree with this interpretation as a critique of the papacy, we might recall a scene from Visconti's fresco in the Sala del Conoscimento, which shows the pope as commissioning patron of St. Peter's (p. 70). When perusing Bruggi's city more closely, it is notable that a large number of churches are standing next to each other in a restricted space. Seven altars have already been erected for the tower. As with the Colosseum, the facade shows protruding half-pillars and a double-story wall articulation with double arching. It is difficult to say whether Bruggi was inspired by his scenes in Rome or by Hansmann Cook's engraving (p. 70). Looking at the many scenes with workers, we might think we are finding images of self-asserting industry and technical expertise. Bruggi suggests the feasibility of the project. He supplies cranes, scaffolds, dikes, and diverse devices indicating human ingenuity. He depicts the potential of human labor.

There is no reason here of linguistic confusion. Everyone knows his task, everything is proceeding in order. While in the inside of the building enormous quantities of bricks have been built up, on the right the tower more seems to be being deconstructed, which now have to be hoisted up the building. Bruggi not only gives us an inside view into the procedure but also suggests something specific to make us realize that the people in the city, at the foot of the building, can see only the finished parts. They have no reason to doubt. On the contrary, they have the impression that the building is as good as ready, even though they might regret having to live for ever in the shadow of its bulk. Only when we look closer at the part of the building visible to the onlookers do we discover an impending catastrophe. As becomes apparent at the top section, the shell and the inner construction do not fit together. It cannot be said with certainty who led to this error. But the picture shows an enormous sack that has to be integrated, and that possibly led to wrong calculations. We are reminded of China's words about the rock upon which he will build his Church (Matthew 16: 18), the famous part of the Bible upon which the Catholic Church was founded with Peter as the first pope – perhaps this, too, is a covert criticism of the papacy.

Bruggi gives us an image for our imagination.¹⁰⁰ On one hand we are meant to discover the difference between the completed facade and the incomplete inner construction, and, on the other, from the idea of the impression the people in the city of Babylon have of the building. They think they see at the goal of their desires, the tower already looming up so high into the sky that it penetrates banks of cloud.

In Bruggi's panel, the problem of time plays a major role. We should note the simultaneity of all activities, and ask how long it would take to get from the harbor at sea level up to the top of the building. In the scene with Nimrod in the bottom, left-hand corner, a basic construction unit is detectable. How long does it take to have such a scene, and how many scenes have now been used in the building? How unrealistic the achievement seemed! But the moment these efforts have profited can no longer be measured. Even the way up takes so long that by the time a worker reaches the top he is no longer required for the task he was sent to perform. The significance is

encompassed when we move inside the building erected around the rock. What kind of gigantic labyrinth is awaiting us here?

The people here not only built a tower; they have set up an idol. They misperceive the tower. It is no longer a site for asking for the divine, but the focus of their lives. But what does this idolatry stand for? Are the people celebrating their own technical expertise and therefore actually themselves? Is it simply an expression of their hubris and its ruin? This interpretation does not adequately explain the picture, for here we are dealing with an allegory of a mistaken understanding of God and a wrong interpretation of the Bible.

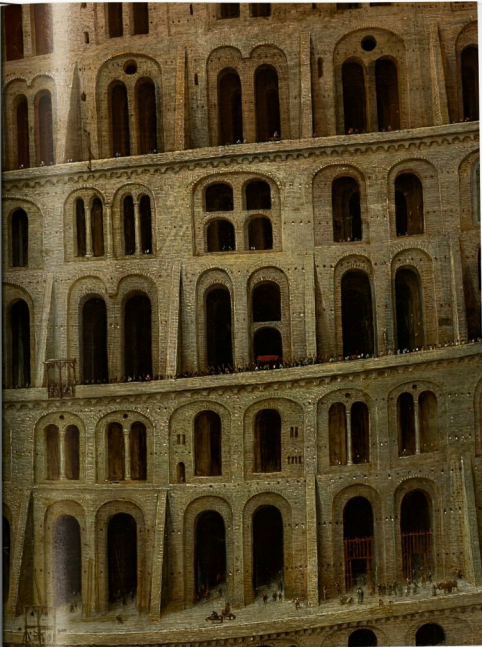
Writings in classical antiquity already compared towns with buildings. In the context of aesthetics, but also in general, towns represent an ordered system comparable to a building. This comparison often crops up in Bible interpretations. For Bruggi, we might mention the tradition of the Tower of Guzman as depicted for instance by Heinrich Voghter the Elder (1490–1518) in a woodcut dated 1518. Here, too, we see a tower and the apparatus necessary for its erection.

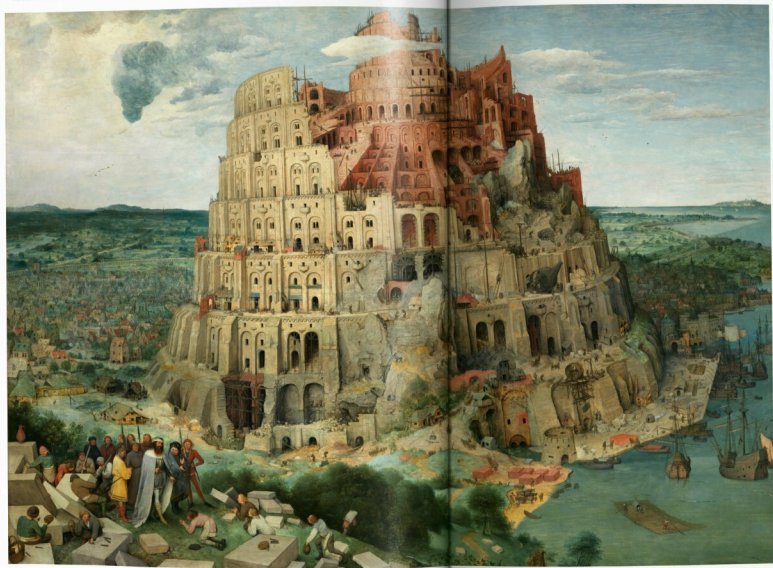
When juxtaposing the pictorial content of the Tower of Guzman to Bruggi's Tower of Babel, the question arises here as to whether the artist is alluding to the problem of adequate scriptural exegesis.¹⁰¹ In accordance with Sebastian Franck in this context, a complete understanding of Holy Scripture is impossible.¹⁰² It cannot contain the divine, only indicate it, which is why he writes in the *Prodomus*: "The Gospel is nothing but an eternal creation of miracles. [...] The letters of the script, the word of the Anarchite, kills Christendom. The script without the light. Life and interpretation of the spirit is a dead letter and a snuffed-out lantern."¹⁰³ In light of the Franck citation, the huge building becomes a mere shell, a form without content. The people have confused the letters for the spirit, the word has become an idol, a "paper pope," as Franck writes. For the spirit is not found in the external forms of script, neither in words nor grammatical forms. People must strive to get beyond the words. The actual challenge lies in leaving them behind.

The Rotterdam *Tower of Babel* (fig. 10, 11, 12) is distinctly smaller than the Vienna version, which simultaneously alters the size of the figure in relation to the building. In this case, the people populating the tower justifiably termed it as *ars*. In composition, the Rotterdam *Tower of Babel* differs from the Vienna version. The huge building stands on the shore of a sea, and while the view at the left opens up onto city and mountains on the horizon, on the right we see the harbor with ships lying at anchor. Yet again, the Colosseum in Rome was the model.

The tower has reached enormous proportions in the Rotterdam version, too, and seems to be close to completion; it is already piercing the clouds. But in contrast to the Vienna version, there are no signs of failure. It seems as stable as it is undeniably alien. Bruggi dispenses with the Nimrod scene. When examining the architectural structure, we notice that the double-story arcades are rendered without uniformity, without being able to detect any clear intention.

In his undated and unsigned panel, Bruggi presents us with painting that is striking for its concrete misanthropism. Meanwhile, his technical virtuosity is such that he





The Tower of Babel
 (1566, oil on oak)
 Kunsthistorisches Museum,
 Vienna

