

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

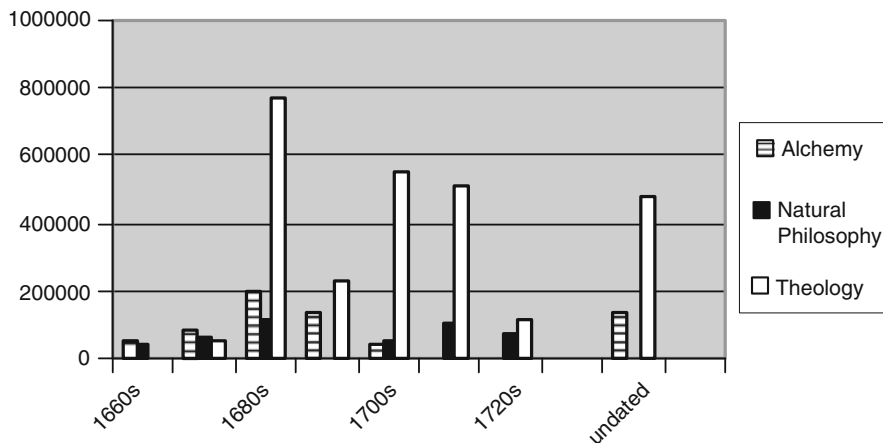
From a twenty-first century perspective, chronology, the interpretation of Biblical prophecy, alchemy and the Temple of Solomon appear to be strange topics for one of the great scientists that history has known to spend his time studying – let alone a great deal of time. Yet these topics were widely studied in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by many of the intellectuals of the day. Newton studied these topics from his early days in Cambridge and clear influences can be seen from, Sanderson, Mede, More, Villalpando, Vossius, Maimonides and many others. Although Newton's work does reveal these influences, he did not follow any one in particular. He studied the sources closely and questioned them, and this can particularly be seen in the critical comments that Newton wrote in the margins of More's books and his comments on Villalpando. Keynes considered that Newton was a "Judaic monotheist of the school of Maimonides"<sup>509</sup>; however, although Newton was influenced by Maimonides those influences are not as clear as Keynes suggested nor does that influence stretch very far. This is demonstrated by Newton and Maimonides' extremely different floor plans of the Temple, among other things. Above all, and throughout his life Newton searched for the truth, and for Newton that truth began and ended with God.

From at least the early 1680s, the Temple of Solomon was a part of his studies. His study of the Temple of Solomon was not just a single manuscript; the Temple was an important element of his studies of chronology and Biblical prophecy; it represented the microcosm of the macrocosm.

The Temple of Solomon as the microcosm of the macrocosm was not unique to Newton. Newton built on a long tradition that stretched from antiquity to his time. Villalpando's *Ezechielem Explanationes* expressed this tradition; in it the floor plan of the Temple was represented as a map of the universe. For Villalpando the Temple represented the perfect vision of God's Creation – a geocentric universe. The measurements and proportions of the Temple were according to the harmonies of music. This was the perfect vision of the macrocosm. Although Newton built on this long tradition, for Newton the floor plan of the Temple held the ancient knowledge of the heliocentric universe. It was more than the vision of the macrocosm; this ancient knowledge held the secrets of the workings of the universe. Understanding the mechanics of the universe through the Temple was to come closer to the understanding of God.

The Prytanæum mapped this frame of the world, nature and the entire universe that was God's Temple. Thus, knowledge of God, and consequently nature, could be gained through the understanding of the plan of the Prytanæum. The Temple of Solomon was one of these Prytanæums. The prophet Ezekiel encoded the plan of Solomon's Temple into his text and with the corruption of the original religion that resulted in the demise of these Temples, his encoded text remained. Ezekiel's description of the Temple held the ancient truth. Within the architecture of the Temple was encoded the heliocentric planetary motions, the esoteric knowledge of the universe. Ezekiel wrote in the encoded language of the prophets. Newton attempted to decode this language by understanding its measurements and architecture.

Babson MS 0434 was written in the 1680s at a time of frenetic activity for Newton and at the height of his powers. At the same time, Newton was writing the *Principia*, he was also working on chronology, alchemy, interpreting the prophets and the Temple of Solomon. However, his writings cannot easily be classified into these topics because they merge into each other and the divide is often very blurred. Figure 8.1 divides Newton works into three main topics: alchemy, natural philosophy and theology. The classification of the papers is taken from The Newton Project,<sup>510</sup> but even in these seemingly distinct categories there are difficulties. For instance is *De Gravitatione et aequipondio Fluidorum*<sup>511</sup> natural history or theology; is *Of Natures obvious Laws & Processes in Vegetation*<sup>512</sup> alchemy or natural philosophy; is "*The Book of Nicholas Flamel containing The explication of the Hieroglyphical Figures w<sup>ch</sup> he caused to be put in the Church of the SS. Innocents at Paris*"<sup>513</sup> alchemy or theology, and so on. Figure 8.1 does represent a simplified division, but in reality that division is blurred. Nevertheless, it is clear from Fig. 8.1 that the 1680s were



**Fig. 8.1** The columns represent the number of words written by Newton from the 1660s when he began his studies at the University of Cambridge. Not represented in this figure are Newton's Mint writings; there are 916 surviving Mint documents,<sup>515</sup> which date from the mid-1690s to the last years of his life. These are receipts, instructions, lists of obligations and general correspondence and as such do not constitute a body of research therefore they have been excluded

Newton's most productive years in all three categories. It is also clear, contrary to popular opinion, that Newton's theological work, including chronology and prophetic interpretation was not the work of an elderly and senile Newton.<sup>514</sup> The bulk of Newton's theological writings was executed in the 1680s and much of the later writings was a reworking of these earlier texts.

Another common perception about Newton is that theology was a diversion from his "real" work – natural philosophy. This is clearly not the case. However, it would be wrong to state the converse that "theology was Newton's 'real' work and that natural philosophy was the diversion". For Newton, they were the two sides, the esoteric and exoteric, of the one thing, God's real Temple – the universe.

Newton's writings on prophetic interpretation, the Temple and chronology become more conservative towards the end of his life. He began to consider chapter structures that suggested that he may have been sanitising these works for publication. If he was, then his posthumous editors clearly did not think that he sanitised enough and they made further cuts to his work; the *Chronology* and *Observations* are a fraction of the work on chronology and prophecy that Newton left.

In these published books, the Temple is incidental. In the *Chronology*, although there are many references to the importance of the Kingdom of the Israelites and the reign of Solomon as the measure of time, the Temple has a small chapter of less than 3,000 words. The description of the Temple is confused and this small chapter is placed after the kingdom that destroyed it. While in *Observations* the Temple is given more importance as the "scene of the vision" of the Prophet John the Divine and the rituals of the apocalypse performed in the Temple, the significance of the Temple as the frame of the world is not explained.

In the unpublished manuscripts, the Temple serves a dominating role. It has a role at the beginning of time and religion. It contains and preserves the ancient knowledge of natural philosophy. It reveals the God-given plan of his Temple – the universe. To understand the plan of the Temple is to understand the plan of the universe. The prophets Ezekiel, Daniel and John recognised the importance of the Temple and encoded it into their texts. Its role extends to the end of time the rituals of the apocalypse that were not only performed in the Temple; the architecture was an important and essential part of these rituals.

Newton was a highly complex man and in writing about one element of his thought there is always a danger of oversimplification. However, the Temple was a part of that complexity, it was not just a study for its own sake as has been suggested<sup>516</sup>; it was part of Newton's philosophy and as such deserves to be considered as central to an understanding of Newton the person and Newton the scholar.