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Imperial Propaganda in the Habsburg Monarchy

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Figure 4: The Karlskirche of Vienna

The Karlskirche of Vienna, one of the most eminent sacral baroque buildings in Europe, was built between 1716 and 1737 in fulfilment of a solemn vow taken by Emperor Charles VI in 1713, when the plague had visited Vienna for the second time within two decades and roughly 10,000 people had died. The magnificent church was constructed in honour of Charles' name saint and the patron saint of the plague, St. Charles Borromeo, by the architect Bernhard Fischer von Erlach and later by his son Joseph Emanuel. The significance of the Vienna Karlskirche as a Baroque votive offering is clearly overshadowed by the obvious spirit of imperial propaganda expressed by manifold architectural allusions devised in Carl Gustav Heraeus' iconographical program of the church. The exterior of this most spectacular baroque cathedral north of the Alps is an eclectic jumble, with an oval dome perched on top of a classical colonnade reminiscent of St. Peter's in Rome and a main portal resembling a Greek temple flanked by two replicas of Trajan's column in Rome alluding to Boaz and Jachin, two columns which stood in the porch of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, and the ancient Pillars of Hercules in the Strait of Gibraltar.



Figure 5: Reconstruction of the Temple of Salomon with the pillars Jaquin and Boaz