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Wisdom Motifs in the Legal Images of Near Eastern Kings and their Rejection in Biblical Tradition

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Scholars have long been fascinated by the intersections of law and wisdom in the ancient Near East, though usually they are maintained as separate intellectual domains. Yet, kings who wished to project an image of themselves as arbiters of justice and lawgivers occasionally relied on wisdom motifs to construct their political images. In such contexts, these kings and their scribes compared or equated the judicial activities of Mesopotamian and biblical monarchs to those of the god(s) through their unique access to divine wisdom or secret knowledge. I argue that these ideas were promoted by Mesopotamian and Israelite/Judahite kings alike, though the biblical evidence attests to a gradual rejection of this ideology. Divine judicial wisdom became associated only with the hubris of foreign kings who claimed that they were gods. The institution of kingship itself became foreign to Israel, an emulation of the nations that surrounded it. Judicial wisdom ceased to be a feature of the king's mandate to ensure justice in his realm and became a characteristic of the people of Israel that made them distinct from all the other nations.

Generally speaking, wisdom was viewed as the practical, speculative, and even metaphysical capacities that enabled the performance of specific activities.¹ Given that wisdom was understood largely in terms of action, it could designate a wide range of practical and speculative skills—from the technical know-how of a bronzesmith to the judiciousness of great kings. The elasticity of the concept of wisdom is reflected in the many terms and phrases used to describe it.² Though there were probably subtle differences between various “types” of wisdom, these nuances are hardly consistent in the extant documentation. In royal inscriptions, for example, the same terms for wisdom may be used to describe the king's identity as a builder, a scholar, a warrior, and a lawgiver—to name but a few roles. Although the latter capacity is of primary interest for this study, it is necessary to gain a broader view of wisdom in other domains of the king's responsibilities because of the highly integrated nature of this motif in royal ideology.

Royal claims to divine knowledge stretch back to the very earliest Sumerian inscriptions from Lagaš (ca. 2500 BCE), where it is routinely described as a divine gift from Enki, the Sumerian god of wisdom.³ In their royal titulary, Sumerian rulers claimed divine

¹ H. D. Galter, *Die Wörter für 'Weisheit' im Akkadischen.* FS Georg Molin, Graz 1983, (89–105), 91.

² The most common terms include Sumerian *geštug* (= “ear”), *igi-(ga)l₂* (= “[to cast one's] eye”), *nam-ku-zu* (= “wisdom”), various nominal forms of the Akkadian roots *√mq* (= “to be deep”), *√hss* (= “to understand”), *√wd* (= “to know”) *√(h)rš* (= “to be wise”), *√mlk* (= “to deliberate”), as well as words like *tašīmtu* (= “discernment”) and *tēmu* (= “reason/intelligence”). Both C. Wilcke (*Göttliche und menschliche Weisheit im Alten Orient: Magie und Wissenschaft, Mythos und Geschichte, Weisheit: Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation III*, München 1991, [259–270], 259) and H. D. Galter (*Die Wörter [op. cit. n. 1] 91*) enumerated these terms and many more that approximated the meaning of *wisdom*, with H. D. Galter trying to track their use in different intellectual domains and across different literary genres. In biblical tradition, “wisdom” (*√hkm*), “knowledge” (*√yd*), and “understanding” (*√byn*) function as *topoi* of legitimation for a number of activities, including those connected to law.

³ RIME 1 E.1.9.3.1 rev. v: 51–52; RIME 1 E1.9.5.1 v: 24–25; RIME 1 E1.14.20.1 i: 17–18; RIME 3/1 E3/1.1.6.4 i: 12. In one of his cylinder inscriptions, Gudea's scribes equated their patron's knowledge in

election through various tutelary deities: they were chosen by Nanše, weaned by Ĥendursanga, named by Inanna, given strength by Ningirsu, given sovereignty by Enlil, and bestowed wisdom by Enki. But what was the nature of this divine wisdom wielded by human kings?

For much of the late-third and early-second millennium, divine wisdom was almost exclusively associated with royal building activities, especially canals, walls, temples, and sacred precincts. In these early texts, royal wisdom routinely designated the technical know-how of temple construction. The motif of the wise king as an architect is perhaps most vividly illustrated in the ideology of the late-third millennium Lagašite ruler, Gudea. One of his crowning achievements was the reconstruction of Lagaš's patron god Ningirsu's temple, known as the Eninnu. This undertaking is recalled in one of Gudea's cylinder inscriptions, where it is explicitly connected to his intellect and wisdom:

The master (Ningirsu) said concerning his house: "I will render Eninnu the most influential in heaven and on earth. Wise as he is, the ruler (*ensi*₂ = Gudea) will use his intellect (*geštug*), he will rouse himself to achieve great deeds ... He (Ningirsu) will disclose to you in all detail the ground-plan of his House (*giš-ĥur-e₂-a-na*), the warrior—whose powers are the greatest—will rouse himself on your behalf. The good shepherd Gudea is wise (*gal-mu-zu*) and capable (*gal i₃-ga-tum₂-mu*), too, to realize things."⁴

The architectural blueprint (*giš-ĥur*) that Ningirsu gives to Gudea, who through his specialized intellect is able to realize it in the terrestrial world, is represented pictorially on one of Gudea's famous diorite statues, now on display at the Louvre Museum.

Outside of the king's intelligence as a draftsman and architect, however, royal claims to wisdom are rather vague.⁵ In his comprehensive survey of royal epithets in Mesopotamia, M.-J. Seux identified the "wise and just ruler" as one of the "grands thèmes de la titulature akkadienne."⁶ Yet, most of the titular evidence connecting wisdom and lawgiving is indirect and largely confined to the motif of the "wise shepherd" (*sipa igi-gal₂/rē'ū eršu*).⁷ Although M.-J. Seux cites judicial wisdom as a core component of the diverse titles born by Mesopotamian kings, they are actually quite rare and there is extremely little by way of reflection on the relationship between wisdom and the king's performance of his judicial activities.

An important exception to this trend is the non-legal sections of Hammurabi's law collection. In the prologue, Hammurabi bears a variety of epithets that evoke different aspects of his wisdom: "capable king" (*šarrum lē'ūm*), "king of discernment" (*šar tašīmtim*), "knower of wisdom" (*mudē igigallim*), "wise one" (*emqum*), and "he who acquired all knowledge" (*šū ikšudu nagab uršim*).⁸ Yet, these titles all refer to Hammurabi's pious maintenance of various cultic centers around his new regional kingdom—probably deriving from the centuries-old

architecture with the Sumerian god of the scribal arts: "He laid the brick and went around in the temple. As if he himself were Nisaba knowing the innermost secrets of numbers (^d*nisaba šag₄ šid zu-am₃*), he set down the ground plan of the temple" (RIME 3/1 01.07, CylA xix: 19–21).

⁴ RIME 3/2 3/1.1.7.CylA i: 10–13; vii: 6–10. Later in the same inscription (xvii: 17), it is noted that Enki "straightened out" (*si mu-na-sa₂*) Gudea's ground-plan.

⁵ E. Frahm, *Keeping Company with Men of Learning: The King as Scholar*, OHCC (508–532), 509; H. D. Galter, *Die Wörter*, *op. cit.* n. 1; W. Röllig, *Die Weisheit der Könige in Assyrien und Babylonien*, *Weisheit in Israel*, Münster 37–52; C. Wilcke, *Göttliche und menschliche Weisheit*, *op. cit.* n. 2.

⁶ M.-J. Seux, *Épithètes royales akkadiennes et sumériennes*, Paris 1967, 22, 81 n. 38.

⁷ M.-J. Seux, *Épithètes* (*op. cit.* n. 6) 244, 412. Although the epithet "shepherd" (*sipa/rē'ū*) is frequently associated with the sun god and the king in his judicial capacity, it is also commonly used to describe more generic aspects of royal and divine stewardship over humanity with no reference to law or lawgiving.

⁸ LH Prologue i: 63; ii: 22; iii: 17; iv: 7.

Sumerian motif of the wise king as an architect. In the epilogue, however, the king’s wisdom is more closely associated with his judicial responsibilities and ascribed to particular deities. Thus, Hammurabi claims that Ea (= Enki) “destined him with wisdom” (*igigallim ša^dEa išīmam*) and that Marduk “gave him ability” (*lē’ūtum ša^dMarduk iddinam*).⁹ There was nothing new with a Mesopotamian king claiming that Enki/Ea had bestowed them with wisdom; Hammurabi’s scribes were emulating the prestige tropes of earlier Sumerian and Akkadian royal inscriptions. However, the idea that Marduk simultaneously gave Hammurabi “ability” or “capacity” (*lē’ūtum*) is somewhat more intriguing, pointing to nuanced ideas about wisdom in Hammurabi’s political theology.

Since V. A. Hurowitz’s seminal study on the non-legal sections of the Laws of Hammurabi, most scholars understand the meaning behind Marduk’s divine gift of “capacity” (*lē’ūtum*) in light of Hammurabi’s epithet, “capable king” (*šarrum lē’um*),¹⁰ which he bears in both the prologue and the epilogue. In both cases, the immediate context points to Hammurabi’s military prowess. However, there is another parallel to royal capacity in the epilogue, where Hammurabi addresses future kings:

May any king who will appear in the land in the future, at any time, observe the words of justice that I inscribed upon my stele ... If that man has discernment (*ta-ši-im-tam i-šu-ma*) and is capable of establishing justice in his land (*ma-sú šu-te-šu-ra-am i-le-i*), may he heed the words that I have inscribed upon my stele, may this stele reveal for him the customs, traditions, and judgments of the land that I rendered.¹¹

Hammurabi’s idealized future king would possess two essential qualities that would compel him to heed his laws and establish justice in the land.¹² The first was “discernment” (*tašīmtum*) and the second is this recurrent motif of “ability” or “capacity” (*le’um*). Hammurabi lays claim to both attributes in the stele’s prologue, where he is called the “king of discernment” (*šar tašīmtim*) as well as a “capable king” (*šarrum lē’um*).¹³ Just as Hammurabi’s scribes attribute his intelligence (*igigallum*) and ability (*lē’ūtum*) to the gods Ea and Marduk earlier in the epilogue, it seems like they are again trying to articulate slight nuances to an important ideological concept.

By using the terms “ability” (*le’um*), “wisdom” (*igigallum*), and “discernment” (*tašīmtum*), and attributing their sources to different gods, Hammurabi’s scribes allude to two dynamics of royal judicial wisdom. The first dynamic was official ability (*lē’ūtum*), that is, the wisdom inherent to the office of kingship that enabled kings to execute their functions. In contrast to Ea’s many associations with wisdom in the stele, Marduk is primarily defined by

⁹ LH Epilogue xlvi: 27–29: *i-na IGI.GAL₂ ša^dEN.KI i-ši-ma-am i-na le-ú-tim ša^dAMAR.UTU id-di-nam*. About a thousand years later, the Neo-Assyrian King Sennacherib would claim to have built the *akītu* house with “the skilful understanding (*uzni nikiltim*) that Ea bestowed upon me, and with the wisdom (*igigallūti*) that Aššur, king of the gods, had given unto me” (SAA 12 86 obv. 12–13).

¹⁰ LH Prologue i: 63; Epilogue xlvi: 4.

¹¹ LH Epilogue xlvi: 75–77. Galter (Die Wörter, *op. cit.* n. 1, 97, 100) observed that references to *tašīmtu*-wisdom most often occurred in legal or administrative contexts.

¹² Thanks to a recently published Neo-Babylonian tablet, we now know that at least one Babylonian king felt that he fit the description and claimed to have promulgated a law collection of his own (M. Frazer and S. F. Adalı. ‘The Just Judgments that Ḥammu-rāpi, a Former King, Rendered’: A New Royal Inscription in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum, ZA 111, 2021, 231–62).

¹³ LH Prologue i: 63; ii: 22. In the prologue, however, the context is royal building activities and not lawgiving. Thus, Hammurabi is a “capable king” (*šarrum lē’um*) in his restoration of Eridu and a “king of discernment” (*šar tašīmtim*) in restoring the temples of Sippar. V. A. Hurowitz showed that these two epithets are related in the so-called “Piety Register,” an expression of Hammurabi’s political theology that includes four characteristics: divine selection, wisdom, military prowess, and dominion (*Inu Anum šīrum*: Literary Structures in the Non-Judicial Sections of Codex Hammurabi, OPKF 15, Philadelphia 1994, 77).

his “supreme power over all humanity” (*illilūt kiššat ništ*) and his “eternal kingship” (*šarrūtum dārītum*) over the city of Babylon.¹⁴ The ability that Hammurabi receives from Marduk, which is unrivaled among other kings,¹⁵ relates to the power manifested in the office of Babylonian kingship—shared by Hammurabi and Marduk. The second dynamic of Hammurabi’s royal wisdom (*igigallum* and *tašīmtum*) is more difficult to decipher; it seems to relate to a more personal characteristic of the ideal future king: his character as a man (*awīlum*). Hammurabi does not receive these types of wisdom as a component of his kingship, at least not explicitly. Instead, it is determined (*šīāmum*) for him by the god of wisdom.¹⁶ Indeed, all kings have the capacity to render justice, but only some men who occupy this role are wise enough to see it realized. Thus, there is a distinction between the man and the office in this ideology, a latent conception of kingship as an institution extending beyond that of an individual—even one as great as Hammurabi.¹⁷

Intellectualizing the King’s Political Image

After Hammurabi’s reign, the evidence for any kind of extensive reflection on the nature of royal judicial wisdom goes silent for several centuries. When it does reemerge in the first millennium, it takes on a very different form than it had in these earlier periods, though with some clear signs of intellectual continuity. In the political theology of the Sargonids (722–606 BCE), the generic allusions to royal wisdom seen in Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian royal inscriptions were replaced by the image of the king as a scholar (*ummānu*).¹⁸ Neo-Assyrian kings like Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Assurbanipal claimed to know the scribal arts (*tupšarrūti*), related themselves to the antediluvian sages known as the *apkallū*, and most prominently compared themselves to the figure Adapa, the semi-divine sage of mythic tradition.¹⁹ A royal physician even attributed this kind of wisdom to Assurbanipal’s mother.²⁰

These innovations represent an “intellectualization” of the king’s political image, most clearly on display in one of Assurbanipal’s royal inscriptions:

¹⁴ LH Prologue i: 11–12, 21.

¹⁵ LH Epilogue xlvi 79–83: “I am the king preeminent among kings ... my ability (*lē’ūtī*) is without rival.”

¹⁶ Whereas both wisdom terms are attributed to kings and gods, the word *tašīmtu* as “practical intelligence,” “common sense,” or “prudence” seems to have had a much more general usage as a characteristic of any person, king or commoner, man or woman (*CAD T*: 287b–289a). Even if it is somewhat speculative, the use of the term *tašīmtum* may have been a way to toy with the concept of fate (*šīmtu*) as an allotted characteristic of the king, with the LH recalling how Ea “destined” (*šīāmu*) Hammurabi with *igigallum*-wisdom. The etymological root meaning of *tašīmtu* was probably always remembered, as it could denote “destiny” in Standard Babylonian (*CAD T*: 289b).

¹⁷ Of course, the ability to separate the man from the office was a prerequisite for the substitute king ritual (*šar pūhi*) (S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, Part IIA: Introduction and Appendixes, Kevelaer/Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1971, 54–65; idem, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, Part II: Commentary and Appendixes, AOAT5/2, Kevelaer/Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1983: xxii–xxxii) and the “humiliation of the king” episode in the *akītu* festival (C. Debonse, *Of Priests and Kings: The Babylonian New Year Festival in the Last Age of Cuneiform Culture*, CHANE 127, Leiden/Boston 2022, 277–85).

¹⁸ E. Frahm, *Keeping Company* (*op. cit.* n. 5) 514.

¹⁹ RINAP 2 43: 38 (Sargon II); RINAP 3 43: 3// 49: 4//50: 4 (Sennacherib); RINAP 4 77: 46 (Esarhaddon); RINAP 5 15 i: 1; RINAP 5 220 i: 13 (Ashurbanipal); SAA 10 174: 7; SAA 10 380: 2; SAA 16 169 rev. 9. See E. Frahm, *Keeping Company* (*op. cit.* n. 5) 514; S. Sanders, *From Adapa to Enoch: Scribal Culture and Religious Vision in Judea and Babylon*, TSAJ 167, Tübingen, 2017, 44–49.

²⁰ In a letter concerning the health of the queen, a scholar named Marduk-šakin-šumi ends his missive by declaring, “the mother of the king is as capable (¹*ta¹-la-’i-i*) as Adapa!” (SAA 10 244 rev. 7–9).

I learned [the c]raft of the sage Adapa, the hidden knowledge (*ni-šir-tú ka-tim-tú*), all of the scribal arts (*kul-lat tup-šar-ru-tú*). I can recognize celestial and terrestrial [om]ens (and) can discuss (them) in an assembly of scholars. I am capable of deliberating with skilled diviners about (the omen series) *If the Liver is an Image of the Heavens*. I can resolve complex (mathematical) divisions (and) multiplications that do not have a[n easy] solution. I have read cunningly written text(s) in obscure Sumerian (and) Akkadian that are difficult to interpret. I have carefully examined inscriptions on stone from before the Flood (*la-am a-bu-bi*) who[se meanings are] sealed, stopped up, (and) confusing.²¹

In the Old Babylonian and Amarna versions of the myth *Adapa and the South Wind*, the titular figure was less a semi-divine sage and more of a clever exorcist. This would not have been a very suitable analogue for how these scribes wanted to depict their royal patrons, so he had to be made into one. In the later Neo-Assyrian version of the myth from Assurbanipal's library, Adapa is the man of "broad wisdom" (*uzna rapašta*), the antediluvian sage (*apkallu*) counted among the Anunnaki gods, who was granted "wisdom but not eternal life" (*ana šuātu nēmeqa iddišu napišta darīta ul iddiššu*).²² Adapa was more than a man, but less than a god—exactly what these scribes depicted their king as. Thus, the image of the Neo-Assyrian king was made to fit the archetype of Adapa, but so too was the character of Adapa reimagined to suit the ideological needs of these Assyrian scholars. This was just one part of the complex dialectical relationship between literature and politics during the reign of Assurbanipal.²³ The critical connection between the king and the gods was therefore their shared wisdom.

In addition to Adapa, Assurbanipal's scribes also relied on Gilgamesh traditions to construct the political image of the king, by relating how their royal patron read antediluvian inscriptions just like that semi-divine king of myth.²⁴ Using the archetypes of Adapa and Gilgamesh, Sargonid kings and their scholars promoted the notion of the king's functional divinity. He embodied the identities of the gods or the *apkallū* in the performance of particular tasks (like the scribal arts) and in his access to secret knowledge (*niširtu*). These innovations in royal ideology reflected the great interest that Sargonid kings paid to predictive signs and their unprecedented correspondence with astrologers, diviners, and prophets on matters of statecraft.²⁵

Knowledge of the law was a part of the royal image of Sargonid kings too, though it was far more subdued than their images as scholars. In fidelity to a treaty with Urartu, Esarhaddon claimed, "because of the justice and equity the great gods gave to me (*ki-tú u mi-*

²¹ RINAP 5/1 Assurbanipal 220 i: 13–18.

²² Fragment A: 4' (S. Izre'el, *Adapa and the South Wind: Language has the Power of Life and Death*, MC 12, Winona Lake, 2001, 9).

²³ S. J. Milstein demonstrated how the Neo-Assyrian prologue was a secondary addition to the old myth, reflecting how those scribes (re)interpreted the story through a new introduction. Before the Neo-Assyrian period, Adapa was the archetypal exorcist (*āšipu*) and the themes of life (*balātu*) and death (*mūtu*) related to the professional context of these healers, rather than the ontological boundaries between mortal and divine as the Neo-Assyrian version suggests (S. J. Milstein, *The Origins of Adapa*, ZA 105, 2015, (30–41), 39–40; eadem, *The Magic of Adapa*, SANER 9, Berlin 2016, 197–200).

²⁴ B. Pongratz-Leisten, *Herrschaftswissen in Mesopotamien: Formen der Kommunikation zwischen Gott und König im 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, SAAS 10, Helsinki, 1999, 312. In the opening of the Standard Babylonian version of the *Epic of Gilgameš* (Gilg. I: 6–8;), the titular king was similarly said to have "learned the totality of wisdom of everything (*nēmeqi ša kalāmi*), he saw the secret (*niširta*) and uncovered the hidden (*katimti*), he brought back a message from the time before the Flood (*lām abūbi*)" (A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgameš Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts*, Oxford 2003, 1: 539).

²⁵ F. M. Fales and G. B. Lanfranchi, *The Impact of Oracular Material on the Political Utterances and Political Action in the Royal Inscriptions of the Sargonid Dynasty*, in *Oracles et prophéties dans l'antiquité : Actes du colloque de Strasbourg 15–17 1995*, Strasbourg, 1997, (99–114), 99, 113.

ša-ri iš-ruk-in-ni DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ), I inquired, questioned, investigated, (and) denounced those people. I did not hold back a single Urartian fugitive (and) not one escaped. I returned them to their land.”²⁶ In his *Coronation Hymn*, Assurbanipal asked the gods for the same judicial acumen that his father received: “May eloquence, understanding, justice, and equity be given to him as a gift!”²⁷ This hymn ends with an intertextual allusion to a first-millennium creation myth that recounts how Ea and the mother goddess Bēlet-ilī create a clay figurine to assume the gods’ burden of labour (*tupšarikku*) and named him *lullû-man*—all themes known from the Standard Babylonian version of Atrahasis.²⁸ But after creating *lullû-man* for his intended function, Ea enjoins Bēlet-ilī to continue the process and create another being for another function:

Bēlet-ilī, you are the mistress of the great gods. You have made the *lullû-man*, now form the king, the *ma-li-ku* man. Envelop his whole form with goodness. shape his features harmoniously, make his body already! Then Bēlet-ilī formed the king, the *ma-li-ku* man.²⁹

The myth enumerates the various functions and ornaments that the gods give to this new being: the battle, the crown, the throne, and awesome radiance, which are repeated verbatim at the end of *Assurbanipal’s Coronation Hymn*.³⁰ Although these features emphasize various dimensions of the king’s role and persona, his name (*ma-li-ku* man) reveals that the purpose of his existence was to “advise,” “deliberate,” or “decide”—to judge from the lexical meanings of the verb *malāku*.³¹ Whether or not this myth was composed during the reign of the Sargonids, it was clearly known to their scribes who incorporated it into the political identities of their royal patrons.

Although law and justice still figure in the royal inscriptions of this period, wisdom is more often associated with other epistemic pursuits of interest to the Sargonids and their scholars. In a series of tablets known as *Aššur-Babylon A*, the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon cites various types of “wisdom” (*uznu*, *ḥasissu*, *igigallūtu*) that the great gods gave him as the means and motivation to refurbish the images of Babylon’s tutelary deities:

At that time, I, Esarhaddon, king of the world, king of Assyria, the one selected (and) chosen by the god Aššur, the one required by the great gods, with the broad wisdom (GEŠTU.II DAGAL-*tim*) (and) vast comprehension (*ḥa-sis-si pal-ke-e*) that the sage of the gods, the prince, the god Nudimmud (= Ea), gave to me, (and) through the great wisdom (*igi-gál-lu-ti*) that the gods Aššur and Marduk imparted to me (lit. “opened my ears”) for refurbishing the great gods.³²

²⁶ RINAP 4 33 rev. iii: 32–33.

²⁷ SAA 3 obv. 8: *qa-bu-ú še-mu-ú ket-ṛti¹ me-ša-ru [a-na ši]-rik-ti lu šar-ku-šú*.

²⁸ VAT 17019 (W. R. Mayer, Ein Mythos von der Erschaffung des Menschen und des Königs, *OrientaliaNS* 56, 1987, 55–68). See also George, *Gilgamesh* (*op. cit.* n. 24) 1: 866–67.

²⁹ VAT 17019: 31–37. A parallel to this myth can be found in the Old Babylonian *Tamarisk and the Date Palm*, where the king is created separately from the rest of humanity “to bring justice to the people” (*[a-n]a šu-te-ši-ir ma-tim*) (A. R. George, *The Tamarisk, the Date-Palm and the King: A Study of the Prologues of the Oldest Akkadian Disputation*, SANER 25, Berlin, 2020, 75–91; W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Winona Lake, 1996, 155–57).

³⁰ SAA 3 11 rev. 5–10.

³¹ *CAD M 1*: 154a. Mayer (Ein Mythos [*op. cit.* n. 28], 65) took *ma-li-ku* as an active participle and translates *māliku-amēlu* as “the superior deciding person” (der überlegend-entscheidende Mensch). He argued that *māliku* refers to a specific leadership quality of the king, who must be a man capable of wise deliberation and intelligent decision-making.

³² RINAP 4 48 rev. 61–64.

Perpetuating an ideological tradition that had begun in the Early Dynastic period, Esarhaddon locates his wisdom in the divine realm (i.e., bestowed by Ea). Interestingly, this wisdom was not the exclusive domain of kings; Esarhaddon's inscription adds that this wisdom was a quality that he shared with the craftsmen he employed to refurbish the temple.

(O great gods) bestow the skilled craftsmen ([DUMU.MEŠ] *um-ma-a-ni en-qu-ti*) whom you ordered to perform this work, sublime knowledge (*uz-nu šir-tu*) like the god Ea, their creator, and teach them the ability (A₂.GAL₂-*u-tú šu-ḫi-za*) ...⁽⁷⁹⁾ In a favorable month, on a propitious day, in Šabātu, the favorite month of the god Enlil, (exactly) as they (the gods) wished, I entered the workshop where the renovations (would be done) and I brought carpenters, jewelers, copper smiths, seal cutters, capable craftsmen (DUMU.<MEŠ> *um-ma-a-ni le-'u-u-ti*), and those who know the secrets (*mu-de-e pi-riš-ti*) into the temple that the gods Šamaš and Adad had selected by divination, (and) I installed them (there).³³

The technical knowledge of kings—whether it be in the realms of temple building, lawgiving, divination, or astrology—consisted of divinely bestowed (*šerēku*) or destined (*šīāmu*) wisdom as well as a capacity (*le'û*) that individual kings may learn to perform a particular task.³⁴ S. Zamazalová characterized this dichotomy as the “received wisdom” and “acquired knowledge” of the idealized Neo-Assyrian king.³⁵ According to this schema, the gods endowed the king with an inherent capacity to perform the functions for which he was destined (e.g., temple building or lawgiving) by virtue of holding the office of kingship. The king's “acquired knowledge,” by contrast, was an attribute he gained (or did not gain) as an individual over the course of his life. Although the intellectualizing scribes of the Sargonids certainly innovated a received tradition, they did not invent this conceptual framework. Mesopotamian writers had articulated various dimensions of royal wisdom in the contexts of building projects and lawgiving for centuries, as seen in the Laws of Hammurabi. What was unique about the reign of the Sargonids, was the expansion of royal ideology to praise not only the king, but also his scholars.

The Divine Wisdom of Biblical Lawgivers

Much like their Mesopotamian counterparts, biblical scribes also associated wisdom (*ḥokmâ, da'at, tēbûnâ*) with two activities traditionally tied to the office of kingship: temple building and rendering justice. The former appears in the Priestly account of the construction of the wilderness sanctuary (Exod 25–31, 35–40), where the two architects, Oholiab and Bezalel, are said to possess divinely endowed wisdom that enables them to construct Yahweh's moveable tent shrine (the *miškān* or the *'ōhel-mō'ēd*):

Exodus 31

² See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³ and I have filled him with the spirit (*rû'ah*) of God, with wisdom (*ḥokmâ*), with

³³ RINAP 4 48 rev. 70–71, 79–82.

³⁴ This is not so much a rigid tenet of Mesopotamian ideas about royal knowledge, but rather more of a distinguishable trend in the descriptions of wisdom in royal inscriptions.

³⁵ S. Zamazalová, *The Education of Neo-Assyrian Princes*, OHCC, Oxford 2011, (313–330), 316. This dichotomy seems to have persisted into the Neo-Babylonian period, as Nebuchadnezzar II claimed to be both “the capable one” (*lē'a'um*) and “he who understands wisdom” (*ḥāsisu nēmeqi*) in one of his inscriptions (RIBo/Babylon 7 Nebuchadnezzar II 26 i: 5).

understanding (*tēbûnâ*), with knowledge (*da'at*), and with all craftsmanship. (Exod 31: 2-3)

Scholars observe that this narrative and the depiction of the sanctuary builders most closely reflects the temple building projects described in the royal inscriptions of Mesopotamian kings.³⁶ In the construction of his temple, Solomon is surprisingly not attributed the characteristics of wisdom (*ḥokmâ*, *tēbûnâ*, *da'at*), which are instead bestowed upon a Tyrian bronzesmith named Hiram (1 Kgs 7:13–47). Though one may expect Solomon, the paragon of the wise king in biblical tradition, to possess these attributes in the construction of his temple, their ascription to Hiram recalls the similar depiction of Esarhaddon's "skilled artisans" (the *mārû ummânî enqūti* and the *mārû ummânî lē'ûti*) in the refurbishment of Babylon's temples. But in that inscription Esarhaddon and his craftsmen are both wise, making the biblical omission of Solomon here all the more perplexing.

Whereas divine wisdom (*ḥokmâ*, *tēbûnâ*, *da'at*) in the context of temple building is only attributed to artisans (Oholiab, Bezalel, and Hiram of Tyre), it nonetheless remains a fixture of royal lawgiving in biblical tradition.³⁷ Kings like David and Solomon relied on divine wisdom to decide between right and wrong and render just decisions. In his poetic description of a future Davidic king, for example, the author of Isaiah 11 presents this royal ideology in relatively straightforward terms:

Isaiah 11

- ¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
- ² And the spirit (*rû'ah*) of Yahweh shall rest upon him,
the spirit of wisdom (*ḥokmâ*) and understanding (*tēbûnâ*),
the spirit of counsel (*'ēṣâ*) and might,
the spirit of knowledge (*da'at*) and the reverence of Yahweh.
- ³ And his delight shall be in the reverence of Yahweh.
He shall not judge (*yišpōt*) by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes (*yôkî'ah*) by what his ears hear,
- ⁴ but with righteousness (*šedeq*) he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity (*mîšôr*) for the weak of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips, he shall kill the wicked.³⁸

The same royal ideology appears in legal narratives in Samuel-Kings, which report the judicial activities of David and Solomon. In the parable of the Wise Woman from Tekoa (2 Sam 14),

³⁶ V. A. Hurowitz, The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle, JAOS 105, 1985, 21–30; J. Rhyder, The Tent of Meeting as Monumental Space: The Construction of the Priestly Sanctuary in Exodus 25–31, 35–40, HBAI 10, 2021, 301–313.

³⁷ God's *rû'ah* and other parts of the divine body often function as a symbolic system, a kind of corporeal code that enabled ancient minds to think about the relations between mortals and the gods (D. R. Johnson, The 'Spirit of Yhwh' and Samson's Martial Rage: A *Leitmotif* of the Biblical Warrior Tradition, VT 72, 2022, [214–236], 222).

³⁸ The author(s) of First Isaiah appear to have been close to the royal court of Judah and most in tune with the ideology of its Davidic kings (F. Landy, Poetry, Catastrophe, and Hope in the Vision of Isaiah, Oxford, 2023, 235; H. G. M. Williamson, Davidic Kingship in Isaiah, OHI, Oxford 2020, [280–292], 280). The ideal future king, identified as the child who will be born (Isa 9:5–6), not only establishes and maintains justice (*mišpāt*) and equity (*šedāqā*) for his kingdom, but will himself be called "mighty god" (*'ēl gibbôr*). On the question of this title as an allusion to divine kingship, see F. Landy, Catastrophe, 2023, 241–42.

Mephibosheth's petition to David (2 Sam 19), and Solomon's Judgment (1 Kgs 3), the legal acumen of Israel's early kings is described as divine or semi-divine wisdom.

2 Samuel 14:17, 20

¹⁷ Your servant said: “the word of my lord the king will (set me) to rest, because like a messenger of God (*kēmal'ak hā'ēlōhīm*), so is my lord the king understanding (*lišmo^a*) the good (*haṭ-ṭob*) and the bad (*hārā^o*) ... ²⁰ In order to change (lit. ‘go around’) the face of the matter, your servant Joab did this thing. But my lord is wise, like the wisdom of a messenger of God (*kēḥokmat mal'ak hā'ēlōhīm*) to know everything that is on the earth.

2 Samuel 19:28

He slandered your servant, O my lord king, but my lord the king is like a messenger of God (*kēmal'ak hā'ēlōhīm*), do what is good (*haṭ-ṭob*) in your eyes.

1 Kings 3:9, 28

⁽⁹⁾ “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind (*lēb šōmē^a*) to judge (*lišpōṭ*) your people, that I may discern (*lēhābīn*) between good (*ṭob*) and evil (*rā^o*), for who is able to judge this your great people?” ... ⁽²⁸⁾ All of Israel heard the judgement (*ham-mišpāt*) that the king had rendered, and they were afraid/reverent in the presence of the king because they saw that the wisdom of God (*ḥokmat 'ēlōhīm*) was within him to execute justice (*la'asōt mišpāt*).”

In these stories describing petitions to royal justice, perception (\sqrt{byn}), understanding ($\sqrt{šm}$),³⁹ knowledge (\sqrt{yd}), and wisdom (\sqrt{hkm}) are key characteristics of the king, which bring him into proximity with the divine. But what does it mean to say that Solomon has the wisdom of God (*ḥokmat 'ēlōhīm*) in him to execute justice, and that David is as wise as a “messenger of God” (*mal'ak hā'ēlōhīm*)? These may be two creative ways to accentuate the king's exceptional, divine-like wisdom while avoiding a straightforward comparison between the two.⁴⁰ In these texts, the boundaries between human and divine become blurred, not in the very nature of the individual king, but rather in the execution of his judicial obligations.⁴¹

Divine wisdom was a central motif in royal ideology that conceptually enabled kings like David and Solomon to perform their judicial functions and “execute justice” (*la'asōt mišpāt*). This wisdom seems to be beyond that of normal human perception, if David's ability “to know everything that is on the earth” is to be read literally (2 Sam 14:20). Even more provocative, however, is the fact that this wisdom gives both David and Solomon the ability

³⁹ The verb *šāma'* literally refers to “hearing” as a form of auditory perception. In these texts, the verb carries a connotation associated with the intellectual processes associated with “hearing” legal cases (1 Kgs 3:9).

⁴⁰ This hesitation to compare the king or even the dynastic house with God seems to have been unresolved as late as the postexilic period, as shown by what seems like a redactional gloss in the prophecy of Zechariah (ca. 5th cent. BCE): “On that day, Yahweh will protect the inhabitant[s] of Jerusalem, so that the feeble among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God (*bêt-dāwīd kē'lōhīm*)—[gloss:] like a messenger of Yahweh (*kēmal'ak yhw*)—before them” (Zech 12:8). Some scholars do not see evidence for a redactional gloss here and prefer to read “like God” in apposition with “like a messenger of Yahweh” (E. Hamori, *When Gods were Men: The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature*, BZAW 384, Berlin 2008, 108, 123). But reading “God” and “messenger of Yahweh” in apposition creates a new problem: do these two terms really designate the same entity? Given that the only other text that places them in parallel (Hos. 12:4–5) is probably also a gloss (E. Hamori, 2008, 111), a synchronic reading for Zech. 12.8b seems unlikely.

⁴¹ The blurring identities of God and king can also be found in Psalm 45: 6–7, where the king is addressed as “god” (*ēlōhīm*), anointed to a rank “above his (lit. ‘your’) companions” (*mēḥābēreykā*).

“to perceive (the difference between) good and evil” (*lišmo^a/lēhābîn ṭōb wāra*). This expression is extremely similar to one that recurs several times in the Eden narrative (Gen 2:8–3:24),⁴² a story that is similarly engaged with the motifs of knowledge and divinity.

Genesis 3

² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall surely die.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God (*kē’lōhîm*), knowing good and evil (*yō’dē ṭob wārā*).”

²² Then Yhwh God said, “See, the man (*hā’-’ādām*) has become like one of us (*kē’ahad mimmenû*), knowing good and evil (*lada’at ṭōb wārā*); and now, lest he extend his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and (gain) immortality (*ḥay lē’ōlām*).”

Humanity’s knowledge of good and evil belongs to the divine sphere, which they gain by eating from the tree of knowledge. Resultantly, God becomes fearful that humanity will become “like one of us”—namely a divine being—should they eat of the tree of life and gain immortality. This author depicts the two essential characteristics of divinity as wisdom and immortality, of which the former is an attribute that God (or the gods) must share with humanity. Thus, the author of the Eden narrative has a more “democratized” ontological vision for the orders of creation, in which divine knowledge was not an attribute unique to the king or any individual, but rather a defining characteristic of humanity. This type of intellectual discourse can be found in other post-exilic texts (e.g., Deut 4: 5–8; Pr 30:2–4), which grapple with a new conception of the Torah (rather than the king) as the critical link between the divine and human worlds.⁴³

Accounts like those describing David’s and Solomon’s judicial activities and divine wisdom are extremely rare in the Hebrew Bible. They stand in opposition to many more texts that deny any special status for the king in relation to the divine sphere (Deut 17:14–20; 1 Sam 8), and some that actively polemicize against it.⁴⁴ A clear example of the latter can be found in Ezekiel’s oracle against the ruler of Tyre:

Ezekiel 28

¹ The word of the Lord came to me: ² Mortal (*ben-’ādām*), say to the ruler of Tyre: Thus says the God Yahweh: Because your heart is proud and you have said, “I am a god (*’el ’ānî*); I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,” yet you are but a mortal and no god (*wēlō’-’ēl*), though you compare your mind with the mind of a god (*kēlēb-’ēlōhîm*). ³ You are indeed wiser (*hākām*) than Danēl; no secret is hidden from you; ⁴ by your wisdom (*ḥōkmā*) and your understanding (*tēbūnā*) you have amassed wealth

⁴² M. Bauks, Erkenntnis und Leben in Gen 2–3 – Zum Wandel eines ursprünglich weisheitlich geprägten Lebensbegriffs, ZAW 127, 2015, 20–42; E. Otto, Die Paradieserzählung Genesis 2–3: Eine nachpriesterliche Lehrerzählung in ihrem religionshistorischen context, FS Diethelm Michel, Berlin, 1996, 167–192; K. Schmid, Die Unteilbarkeit der Weisheit: Überlegungen zur sogenannten Paradieserzählung Gen 2f. und ihrer theologischen Tendenz, ZAW 114, 2002, 21–39; A. Schüle, Made in the ‘Image of God’: The Concepts of Divine Images in Gen 1–3, ZAW 117, 2005, 1–20.

⁴³ B. U. Schipper, When Wisdom Is Not Enough! The Discourse on Wisdom and Torah and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs, JSJSup 163, Leiden 2013, 55–80.

⁴⁴ In Isaiah’s Oracle Against Assyria (Isa 1:1–19), for example, the prophet mocks Assyrian royal ideology that attributes imperial conquest to the strength (*kōh*), wisdom (*ḥōkmā*), and knowledge (*nēbūnā*) of the Assyrian king (v. 13). A rare exception seems to be Ps 45, which may represent a coronation hymn of sorts for the Judahite monarchy. In this text, which frequently invokes the king’s legal responsibilities, there are places where the king’s identity and that of God become interwoven and wholly unclear (esp. vv. 7–8).

for yourself and have gathered gold and silver into your treasuries. ⁵ By your great wisdom (*rōb ḥokmâ*) in trade you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth.

⁶ Therefore, thus says the Lord God: Because you compare your mind with the mind of a god, ⁷ therefore, I will bring strangers against you, the most terrible of the nations; they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your radiance. ⁸ They shall thrust you down to the Pit, and you shall die a violent death in the heart of the seas. ⁹ Will you still say, “I am a god (*’ēlohîm ’ānî*),” in the presence of those who kill you, though you are but a mortal and no god, in the hands of those who pierce you? ¹⁰ You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of foreigners, for I have spoken, says the God Yahweh.

Ezekiel’s critique focusses on this ruler’s claims to wisdom, greater even than that of the mythical Danēl.⁴⁵ The author of this text makes clear that royal pretensions to this kind of wisdom (*ḥokmâ* and *těbûnâ*) was also a claim to divine status. The author is trying to disabuse this ruler, and one gets the sense all rulers, to any such idea.⁴⁶

Though it is a minority opinion, Psalm 82 may represent yet another critique against such royal judicial ideology:

- ¹ God (*’ēlohîm*) takes his stand in the assembly of *’ēl*;
he renders judgment among the “gods” (*’ēlohîm*):
- ² “How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah*
- ³ Judge the weak (*dal*) and the fatherless (*yātôm*);
vindicate the poor (*’ānî*) and the oppressed (*raš*).
- ⁴ Rescue the weak and the needy (*’ēbyôn*);
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.
- ⁵ They do not know (*lō’ yādē’û*), they don’t understand (*wēlō’ yābînû*).
They walk about in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
- ⁶ I myself said that ‘you are all gods (*’ēlohîm ’attem*);
you are all sons of Elyon.’
- ⁷ But like a mortal you will die (*kě’ādām těmûtûn*);
and like one of the officials (*śārîm*), you will fall.”
- ⁸ Rise up, O God, judge the earth,
for all the nations are your inheritance.

God’s indictment of these *’ēlohîm* concerns the legal obligations normally ascribed to human kings: rendering justice for the weak, the fatherless, the poor, the oppressed, and the needy.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ KTU³ 1.17–19. Elsewhere, Ezekiel includes Danēl among the two paragons of righteousness (*ṣēdāqâ*) in biblical memory: Noah and Job (Ezek 14:14).

⁴⁶ M. Nevader has convincingly demonstrated that Ezekiel’s authors were quite purposefully “dismantling the semantic base of royal power,” and that they specifically targeted ideological rhetoric comparing the king with the gods (M. Nevader, *Picking Up the Pieces of the Little Prince: Refractions of Neo-Babylonian Kingship Ideology in Ezekiel 40–48?*, in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, Berlin 2015, 268–291; eadem, *Yhwh and the Kings of Middle Earth: Royal Polemic in Ezekiel’s Oracles Against the Nations*, in *Concerning the Nations: Essays on the Oracles against the Nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel*, London 2014, 161–178; eadem, *Ezekiel and Politics*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Ezekiel*, Oxford 2022, C28.S1–C28.N1).

⁴⁷ Without wishing to recite the extensive history of scholarship on this psalm, scholars are divided on the identity of the plural *’ēlohîm* (v. 1b, 6a) as gods or humans. Those who favour the view that these are gods

God berates them for lacking knowledge (\sqrt{ydl}) or understanding (\sqrt{byn})—again, *topoi* of royal legitimation. And when God assumes the role of the entire world’s judge, these $\text{’}ēlohīm$ are “demoted” to mortals, doomed to die as “officials” (*šārīm*). Although dying gods are not unheard of in ancient Near Eastern literature,⁴⁸ the psalm does not actually concern that. It concerns a change of status that these beings undergo;⁴⁹ they are no longer divine, or as the author of Ezek 28 would call them, they are “non-gods” (*lō’-’ēl*). Kings could become gods—or at least something more than human beings—but this status was ephemeral and always connected to the performance of particular functions (like lawgiving). Perhaps, therefore, Psalm 82 is not the rejection of the Canaanite divine council, but rather the rejection of royal pretensions to divine status through the king’s legal responsibilities towards the *personae miserabile*. The psalmist undercuts the traditional *topoi* of royal legitimation, reminds these individuals of their mortality, and denies them their title: they are “officials” (*šārīm*) but not “kings” (*mēlākīm*). I am certainly not the first scholar to propose that the psalm’s plural $\text{’}ēlohīm$ may refer to the divinized kings, or at least the idea of divinized kingship, though usually this psalm is understood as a critique against *the kings of foreign nations*.⁵⁰ But perhaps this psalm is just one part of a larger innerbiblical debate. This debate grappled with traditional aspects of Israelite/Judahite royal ideology, which had once been celebrated, but had become unacceptable after the monarchy ceased to exist and Judah was no longer ruled by autochthonous kings but by foreign imperial officials.

In the place of the human king as the central intermediary connecting a divine system of justice and the terrestrial world, biblical authors devised new schemas that defined the legal relationship between Israel and their God. In the Pentateuchal law collections, the traditional attributes of wisdom and understanding (\sqrt{hkm} and \sqrt{byn}), which had defined judicial image-building of biblical kings, were ascribed not to Moses or even to Yahweh as one may expect. Instead, these characteristics are ascribed to the people of Israel. In the introduction to the Deuteronomic Decalogue (Deut 4:5–8), probably a postmonarchic text,⁵¹ the statutes and laws of Yahweh reflect Israel’s distinctiveness to the peoples who hear of them, marking Israel as both a “great nation” (*goy gādōl*) as well as a “wise and understanding people” (*‘amm-ḥākām wēnābōn*). According to this view, judicial wisdom no longer reflects the intellect of the lawgiver (human or divine) but the intellect of *those who obey the law*. In the face of this new legal ideology centered on Yahweh and his Torah, Israel’s desire for the justice delivered by a human king becomes tantamount to the rejection of its uniqueness (Deut 17:14–20; 1 Sam 8). The divine law of God, unmediated by any human king, becomes a cultural marker of Israel’s distinctiveness from the nations that surround it.

and the psalm alludes to the divine council as known from Canaanite mythology are certainly the majority opinion today. See the bibliography in D. McClellan, *The Gods-Complaint: Psalm 82 as a Psalm of Complaint*, *JBL* 137 2018, (833–851), 833 n. 1. The position that the psalm’s $\text{’}ēlohīm$ were human judges was popular before the 1950s, though many of those scholars were motivated by theological sensitivity against any such polytheistic notions in the biblical texts (W. S. Prinsloo, *Psalm 82: Once Again, Gods or Men?* *Biblica* 76, 1995, [219–228], 219 n. 5).

⁴⁸ P. Machinist, *How Gods Die, Biblically and Otherwise: A Problem of Cosmic Restructuring*, in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, Winona Lake 2011, 187–239.

⁴⁹ M. Arneith, *Erkenntnis Gottes und des Menschen nach Psalm 82 und Genesis 3*, *ZAR* 13, 2007, 304–318

⁵⁰ E. Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 2 and Lamentations*, *FOTL* 15, Grand Rapids 2001, 114; H. Niehr, *Götter oder Menschen—eine falsche Alternative: Bemerkungen zu Ps 82*, *ZAW* 99, 1987, 94–98; M. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, *WBC* 20, Dallas 1990, 341; J. M. Trotter, *Death of the אלהים in Psalm 82*, *JBL* 131, 2012, 221–239.

⁵¹ T. Krüger, *Law and Wisdom According to Deut 4,5-8*, *JSJSupp* 149, Leiden 2013, 35–54: 49; E. Otto, *Deuteronomium 1,1–4,43: Erster Teilband*, HTKAT, Stuttgart 2012, 588–89.

Conclusion

At one point in their history, the kings of Israel and Judah promoted images of themselves as lawgivers with access to divine wisdom. It distinguished them from their peers and may have even set them apart in the ontological hierarchy separating humanity and the divine: they were equal to the gods except for their mortality. In the Assyro-Babylonian worldview, the king emerged through an entirely separate act of creation, designed for a different function than the rest of humanity. The king's predestined role assumed many forms, though it seems like justice and deliberation was of fundamental importance. In contrast to the centrality of wisdom motifs in the legal image of biblical kingship, it was actually quite rare in Mesopotamian tradition. Wisdom was far more frequently associated with the image of the king as a temple builder and his image as a scholar, as it developed during the Sargonid period. For this reason, the literary *topoi* of wisdom, law, kingship, and divinity really do seem to be a distinctively Israelite/Judahite intellectual complex and not something borrowed from another culture. The biblical authors nonetheless presented these notions—and the institution of kingship itself—as external influences on the pure form of Israel's normative order that had no need for kings and made Israel an exceptional (and wise) people. The king was not created separately from the rest of humanity, nor did he possess special (legal) wisdom—all of humanity could lay claim to the wisdom of God/the gods (Gen 2-3). But for as much as the king as a semi-divine lawgiver was written out of biblical memory, there remain traces of this ideology in recollections of the judicial activities of David and Solomon, in the optimistic hopes for a new Davidic king in First Isaiah, and in polemics against these ideas in Ezekiel and the Psalms. Such potential for biblical memory is only possible if the presentation of Israel's normative order in the Pentateuch is viewed as one of several visions contained within the biblical text.